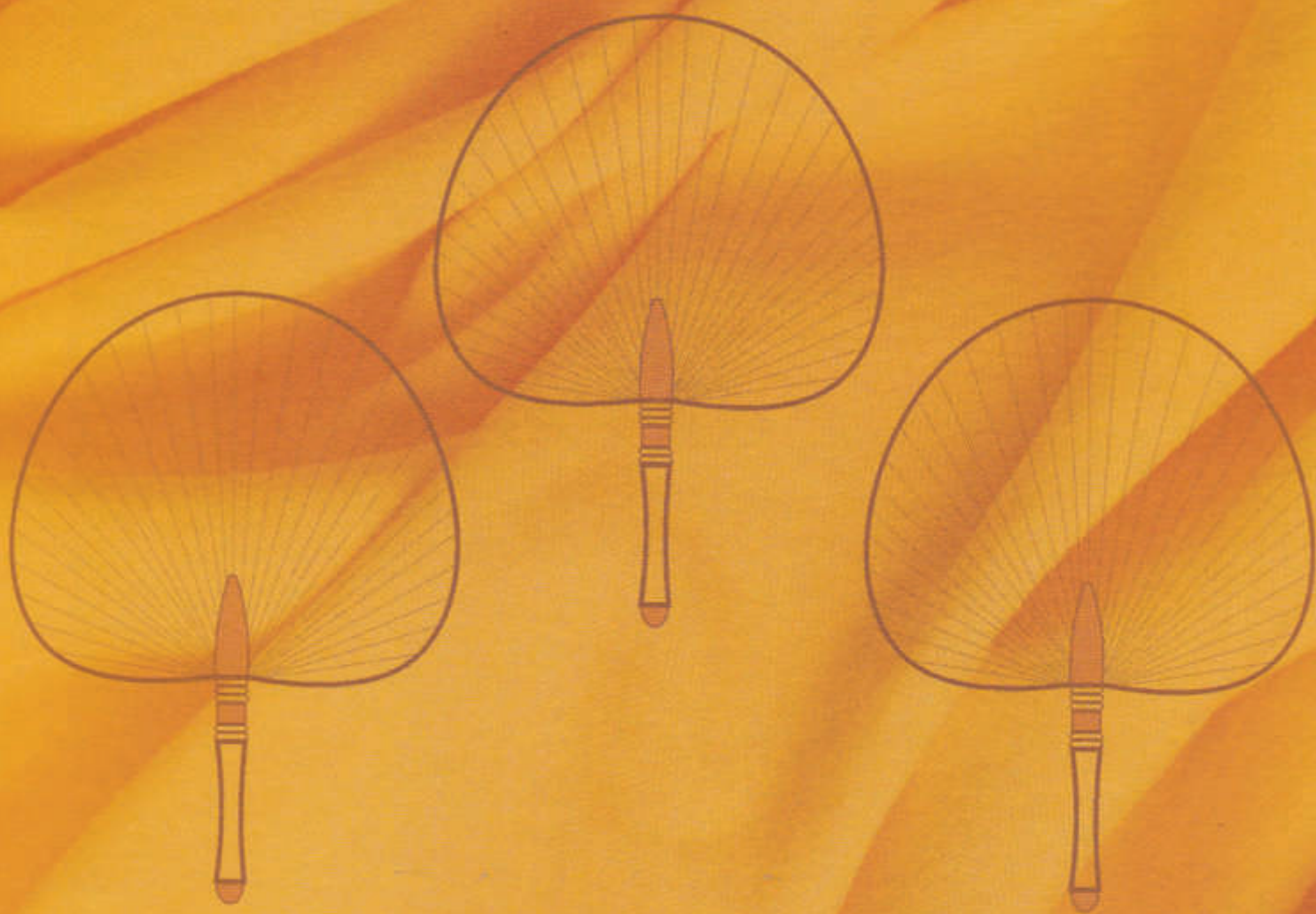
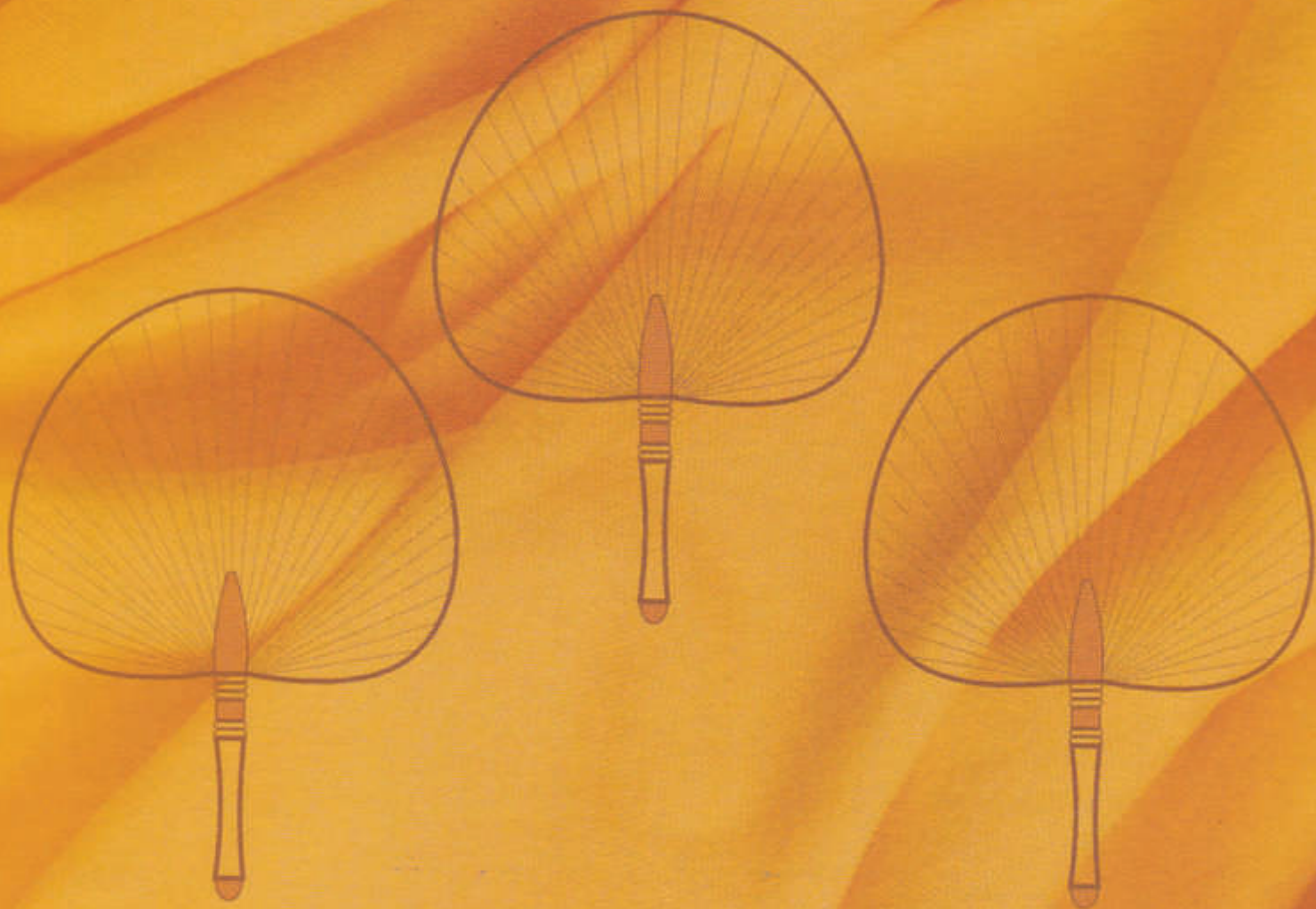


MONKS & MONKEYS

Travails of a
flying Dutch monk
over 40+ years
in Sri Lanka

BHANTE OLANDE ANANDA - with D C Ranatunga





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MONKS & MONKEYS

Travails of a
flying Dutch monk
over 40+ years
in Sri Lanka

O. Ananda
28th March 2018

A Note

I have known Bhante Olande Ananda for many years. He had come to our home for 'danas', my wife and I attended his meditation classes at Pagoda Meditation Centre, and listened to his Dhamma talks in numerous places.

A word about Bhante's name. We know of foreign monks who have got ordained in Sri Lanka but only use the 'adopted' name. In the case of Bhante Ananda, following tradition he uses his birthplace in front of the name. Unlike most names of foreign countries which do not suit for usage in Sinhala, 'Olande' – the Sinhala version of Holland – fits in beautifully.

One day when our common friend (Bhante Ananda's & mine) Deepal called me in Perth (where I am domiciled now) and having a chat, he told me how Ven Ananda had gone through coincidences during his life. I was intrigued. When Deepal suggested whether we shouldn't record them for everyone's reading pleasure, I said 'why not?'

After Deepal discussed the project with Bhante, I spoke to him and he agreed. This was somewhere in 2015 and it happened to be his 40th year in robes. From the little he told me it was obvious his life story will be interesting reading. "Let's chat on skype. You can record our conversations and do the copy," he said. I agreed.

I thought it would be best to 'ghost write', as we say in journalistic jargon, and make it his story related by him.

We progressed well except that there were delays in between due to his regular trips abroad to conduct meditation programmes, attend conferences and seminars, or visit his home country.

I was amazed at how he remembered details of his progress in life right up to his present commitments. I couldn't ask for anything better.

Much merit, Bhante for having faith in me to record your life story over six decades.

DCR

August 2017





That monk who while young
devotes himself to the
Teaching of the Buddha
illuminates this world
like the moon freed from clouds

The Monk - DHAMMAPADA

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AMSTERDAM - the city of canals

A Taste of India

It was 4 December 1972. It happened to be my father's birthday. I was leaving for India in search of a path which I felt would be suitable for my future.

I was already out of home for six years – from the time I entered university in Amsterdam. It was a normal thing for a young man of that age to move out and be on your own. So I moved to a houseboat in Amsterdam.

Having done my degree which included a section on Economics and Sociology in developing countries, I had naturally developed an interest in those countries. I started reading for my MA but towards the end I felt bored doing subjects like Statistics.

I thought of joining the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) in order to help reducing the gap between the rich and the poor and help the world. I felt the world was unfair and going in the wrong direction. The UNDP rejected me saying they had too many Dutch people in the UN already and the quota was full. I was then at a loss as to what I should do.

Being anxious about the world and very interested in politics, I travelled to the US in 1968 to do a Summer Course at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York and participated in the Democratic Convention in Chicago, famous for its violence and the Poor People's Campaign by Jessy Jackson etc. When Nixon won as US President, I dropped out of politics.

Increasingly I began to feel unhappy about myself and the world, and felt the need to do something about my own unhappiness. Coincidentally, the Beatles started practicing Transcendental Meditation (TM) with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and I took up the practice of TM and dropped the psycho analysis which I had just started. Then an American friend of mine who studied Musicology in Holland and came to my houseboat in Amsterdam, presented me with a copy of the 'Autobiography of a Yogi' by Swami Paramahansa Yogananda. I was attracted towards India after reading the book.

I was planning to go to India when one day quite accidentally an Indian walked in to my houseboat. He had been hitch-hiking and an American couple who were friends of mine had given him a lift from Denmark to Holland. The friends were coming to see me and this stranger also dropped in with them. Being in the printing business he had come for the International Book Fair in Frankfurt. He was an educated Brahmin, Prabhu Narayan Sharma from Ranchi, Bihar and was the first ever Indian that I met.

Seeing Yogananda's book on the table, the Indian asked me of my interest in Yoga and I said I was planning to go to India. I had the air ticket to travel to Delhi in my pocket. He told me his family lived close to Yogananda ashram and invited me to come and stay with him when I come to India.

It was a pure coincidence but turned out to be the best initiation into Indian society, culture and religion. I couldn't ask for anything better than staying with a wealthy, educated, Brahmin joint family for months on end. I stayed there the first two months, till I started my search for a Guru from the Himalayas in the North to Kanya Kumari in the South.



With father, mother and brother

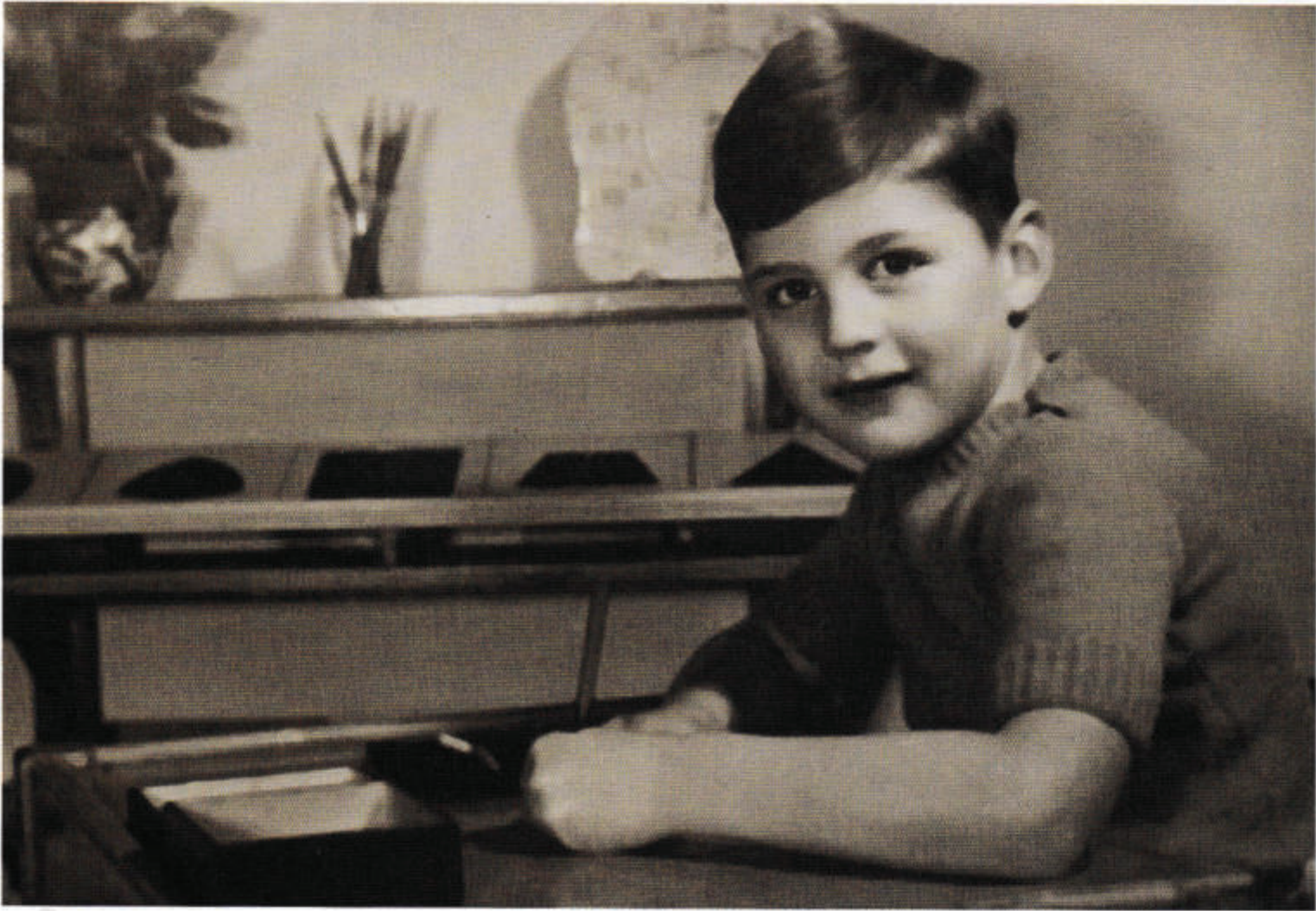
Early days in Holland



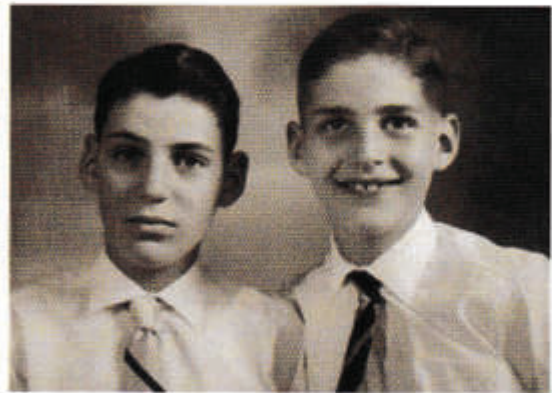
I was born in Amsterdam, near the Vondelpark on 2 January 1948, just 3 years after World War II, from a Jewish father and an ex-Christian mother. As a couple they did not join any religious organization, but were Humanists and joined the Ancient Order of Foresters, a free speech movement and social organization. My elder brother Hans was born on 27 April 1945, just one week before liberation from the German occupation. We lived near the Vondelpark and Concertgebouw and the famous Rijksmuseum.

Typical outdoor life style in VONDLEPARK





1st Grade - Hilversum



With my elder brother

My grandfather Nico Hammelburg had lost his flourishing Optical Shop on Dam Square to a Dutch collaborator with the Germans, just because he was Jewish. My father's brother Ab had been abducted by the Germans and he saved his life by having to take pictures of German officers. His wife to be, Sonja, was taken to Auschwitz, the most terrible of the concentration camps and was one of the last 125 survivors at the end of the war.

My father started as a goldsmith in Amsterdam, but soon switched to importing and whole selling silver and crystal from Germany, France and other countries.



Silver and crystal articles in my father's show room at Utrecht's Trade Fare



In primary school
(First row with book in hand)

We moved to a small town near Leiden, where we spent five years and I went to Primary school Grade 1, took piano lessons, got into a terrible car accident on my small bike and felt unhappy among the cows and meadows and narrow-minded people.

In 1955 we moved to Hilversum, the Garden City and home to all the radio and TV stations in Holland, where we lived in a spacious house. It was called 'Hamaharu'. It was a relief and a window to a brighter future. The business flourished and I thought of joining my father. My brother became a 1st Officer in the Merchant Marine and started a family.

I continued my piano lessons and also joined the School Band as trumpet player. During winter holidays we used to go skiing in the Alps and summers we would drive to Italy, Spain and France, Switzerland and Austria for holidays. Playing tennis and sailing on the nearby lakes and hiking in the forests nearby and mini golf were some of my hobbies. Not to forget the three years of ballroom dancing lessons from Van Kralingen, the famous dance teacher where the Dutch Royal Family used to send their daughters. I was also involved with School Radio and Youth broadcast in the years in Hilversum.



After finishing High School in Hilversum at the age of 17, I went to the USA as an Exchange student, with YFU (Youth for Understanding) based in Michigan. I enjoyed the year with many extra-curricular activities including the Chorus, the Band and the Press Club and being the School Photographer for the Edwardsburg Argus.

My English teacher Ms Kantovski encouraged me to go to the university. I followed her advice and spent six years studying Economics and Economic Sociology with famous professors such as Wim Duisenberg (later IMF Director).

Looking for an "Ashram"

The chance meeting with Prabhu Narayana Sharma turned out to be a good start to my sojourn in his mother country. I lived with that Brahmin joint family and started visiting the Yogoda Sat Sangha, the Ashram of Swami Yogananda. By a strange coincidence I met Daya Maatha, the international President of the Self Realization Fellowship from California, who happened to be there. She was a direct disciple of Yogananda and had succeeded Swami as head following his death.

When Daya Maatha made her rounds and saw me at the Ashram – in my flowery shirt and air conditioned blue jeans and with a bearded face and long hair, she asked: "Where are you from?" 'From Amsterdam'. "Oh, how interesting!" she said. The second day she came on her round to me and asked: "Where are you from?" – 'From Amsterdam' – "Oh, how interesting!" she said.

I asked her if I could stay at the Ashram and she said that the Ashram was only for Indians. She said there was a branch in Holland and I would have to follow a correspondence course and then get initiated in six stages into the 'Kriya Yoga'. "After initiation you will be able to go step by step," she said. Thus Daya Maatha rejected me politely from joining the Ashram. This made me start my search up and down the length and breadth of India for an ashram. I started in Rishikesh, at the Shivananda Ashram, where Swami Chidananda was the President at that time and I could learn some Yoga and listen to talks on the Bhagavad Gita.



At Varanasi

For some reason, the Sharma family told me Buddhism may be better for me and suggested I should visit some Buddhist places of worship. They told me of a relative who lived in Varanasi near Sarnath with whom I could stay. I went there and I was cordially welcomed by him. He was the District Medical Officer (*DMO*) for the whole of Varanasi and happened to be quite an influential person. I recall how soon after my arrival there, on a very cold morning before sunrise he took me for a bath in the river Ganges 'to purify myself'. It was freezing.

He jumped and had a bath and a sip of the Holy Water. The next day there happened to be an article about all the diseases floating around in the Ganges. As *DMO* he should be aware of all this, but as the saying goes: 'Mind over Matter!' I also remember how he taught me how one could meditate while cycling!

I visited Buddhist shrines in and around Sarnath and was quite impressed. They were clean and peaceful. I particularly enjoyed the serene environment.

When in Varanasi, while seated on the steps of one of the Ghats along the river Ganga, I was reading the cheapest edition of the Bhagavad Gita by the Gita Press from Ghorakpur, when a Brahmin boy bent over to me and said: "Thank you for reading our Holy Scriptures". This made such an impression on me I thought I would not mind dying at the banks of the Ganges!

Having got a taste of Buddhist places of worship, I continued my adventurous trip looking for an ashram, virtually covering the length and breadth of India from Rishikesh in the Himalayas to Kanya Kumari (Cape Comarin) in the South.

I visited Acharya Vinoba Bhave (1895-1982) at the Seva Ashram in Wardha near Nagpur, Central India. He was a contemporary of Mahatma Gandhi and lived a simple life with high thinking. 'Think globally, act locally' was Gandhi's saying.

As Vinoba was not well and he was keeping *maunam* (silence), I could only communicate by message on paper. I asked him whether he thought it a good idea for me to attend the Maha Kumbha Mela, the greatest spiritual market in the world where 12 million people would be meeting at Prayag, where the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati Rivers meet. This was the super large meeting after 144 years. Otherwise, there is a Kumbha Mela every 3 years. As I had a bad cough and a wound on my foot I doubted if it was a good idea, so I asked Vinoba. He just wrote: 'If you want to go, go !!!'



Maha Kumba Mela
the greatest spiritual
market in the world



The search continues

While searching for a guru, I also spent a month in Goa, on Canhanghat Beach. There, a young ex-Brahmachari of the Shivananda Ashram, Krishna Santani, was teaching Hatha Yoga to the foreigners, for free, while collecting their addresses for future reference.

I also visited Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondichery and the Auroville experimental spiritual community.

On 21 February 1973 the French Mother gave her last '*darshan*' from the balcony and I was, in my white yogi clothes, among the thousands watching from the square below while she was on the balcony.

She had such penetrating eyes, it was as if they were floating towards me and I felt totally fixated on her eyes and in a different dimension.

However, I found the Aurobindo philosophy too complicated unnecessarily. It put me off forever. I do remember the beautiful roses and other flowers covering the marble Samadhi of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and how I touched my bowed head and felt the peace.

The Ashram of Ramana Maharshi in Thiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu had a different feel to it.

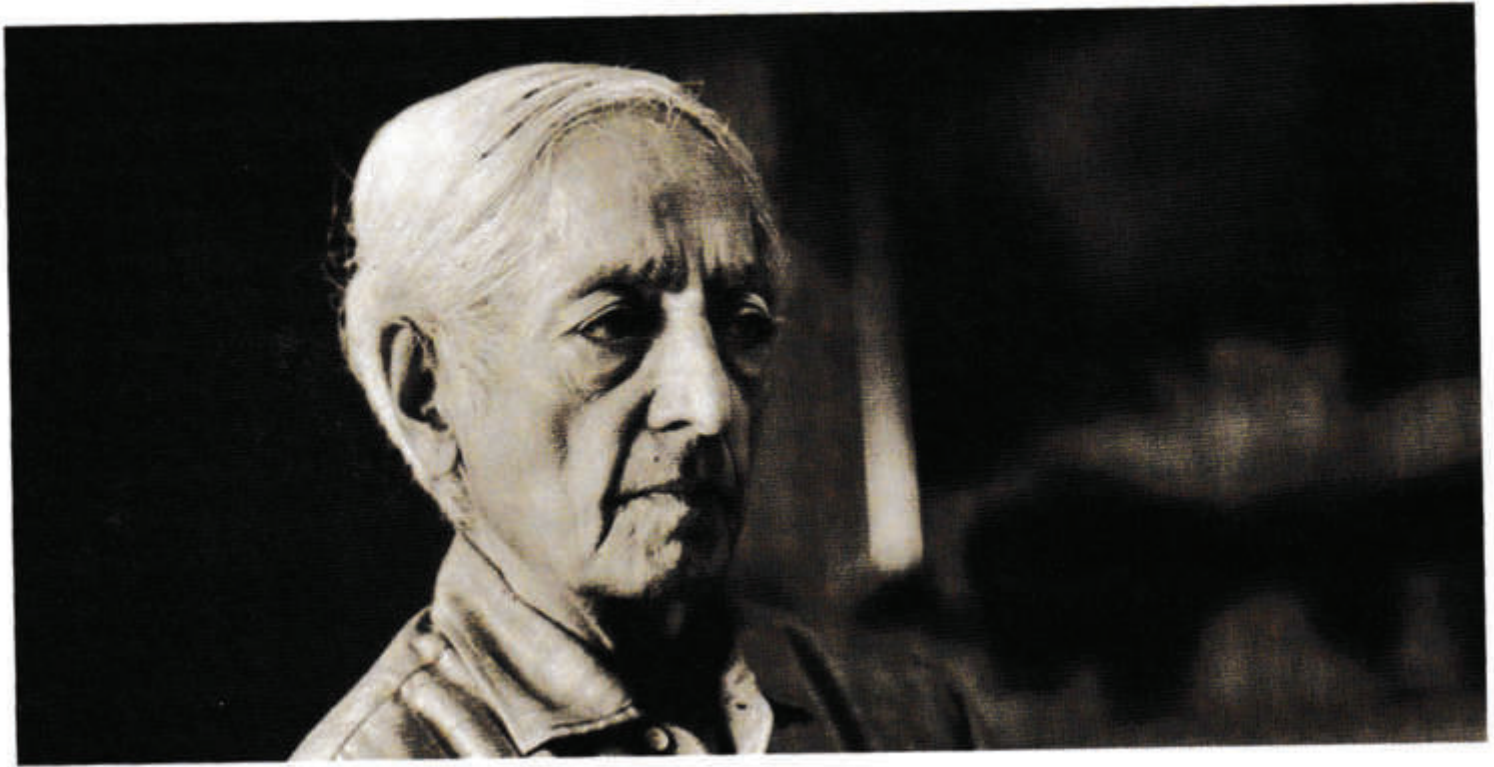
The greatest exponent of Advaita Vedanta, Ramana would ask you to just put one question: "Who am I". He meditated in a cave on the hill behind the ashram, and inside the ashram was the room where he used to lie half naked, just with a loin cloth, smiling at the people who came in droves to get his blessings.



In Mahabalipuram, south of Madras, I met the son of the famous Tamil movie music composer K.V. Mahadevan and also the nephew of the Maharaja of Vengatagiri, both staunch devotees of Sathya Sai Baba. Keith Jaffray from Queensland chummed up with me and we went along with our new friends to see Sai Baba on the Maha Shivarathri, the night of the new moon in February. It was early morning and when we went around Puttaparthi for the *Nagara Sankirtan*, my friends urged me to have '*Pada Namaskaram*' of Baba, i.e. to touch his feet. As I was crawling forward, in my white Indian clothes, I heard his voice above me: 'No no no !!!'

During my fifth visit to Sai Baba in 1991, Baba probably referred to this incident, when he said: 'You have been here before, but you were not a monk yet!'

Then I was Brahmachari Kriyananda.



Meeting Krishnamurti

In 1971 I had listened to philosopher J. Krishnamurti (1895-1986) in Amsterdam for the first time. If I remember right, in 1973 I attended his talks in the VasanthaVihar, Greenways Road, Adyar, Madras. In 1974 I attended his talks in Saanen Switzerland.

From 1976 onwards, as a monk, I used to travel to Madras yearly to attend the Krishnamurti Talks in Adyar, usually accompanied by a few Sri Lankans including Dr E.W. Adikaram and S.M. Jayatillaka. Once, the Sri Lankan friends asked me to take a picture of Krishnamurti with them, as he was coming towards us along the Adyar beach on the Theosophical Society beach front, where C.W. Leadbeater (1854-1934 Theosophist who came to Sri Lanka with Colonel Henry Steele Olcott in 1885 and was first principal of Ananda College) had discovered the young boy around 19. I did not want to just jump and take a picture, so I asked Krishnaji, whether I could take a picture of him with those two gents. He said: "Take their picture!"

"I already did", I said. "Take another one!" Then Krishnaji embraced me, and quickly strode on with giant steps, leaving us no photo op.....!!!

While staying at the Theosophical Society I travelled to Kanchipuram, to see the Shankarachariya of Kanchipuram (one of the four Shankarachariyas of India). I went along with a young Tamil friend who could translate the many questions I had. When we reached the kutiya in the ashram of the Shankarachariya, we noticed him sitting inside, on a table, with his long matted hair and body fully smeared with 'vibhuti', holy ash, He was observing 'maunam', silence, so we could not talk with him. But just staring at him and feeling the strong vibrations coming from him inside the room, through the window, all the questions melted away like snow in the sun!

I also went to see the Shankarachariya of Puri, near Bhubaneshwar in Orissa on the east coast. He was approachable and advised me that the best way to God in this era was to chant the name of Rama. *(That happened to be the 'mantra', which my mother got from the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi people in Amsterdam during her initiation in 1972.)*

While in Puri I also visited the Dwaraka Ashram of Swami Hariharananada, direct disciple of Yogananda. However, the Swami was abroad at the time.

On another visit to India, in Kaladi, Kerala, I visited the Stamba of the Adi Shankara, the first Shankarachariya, who has given the 10 titles of Swami Orders in Hinduism. He is also responsible for the disappearance of Buddhism in India, as he was convinced that there was nothing new in Buddhism and that Hinduism had everything on board and there was no need for anyone to become a Buddhist.

Later visits

In 1991, I went around with Michael Moebius, our German Interreligious Dialogue partner and visited various holy places and people in South India, including a visit to Puttaparthi and an interview with Sathya Sai Baba.

In 1993, the World Parliament of Religions took place in Chicago, exactly 100 years after Swami Vivekananda had given his famous speech there. Anagarika Dharmapala from Sri Lanka also attended that assembly. This time Swami Chinmayananda had attended, but returned as a dead body, which I was lucky to see sitting cross-legged, in Delhi. The Sikh who took me there said: 'Look, how Swami is smiling at us and saying: 'I beat you all guys, didn't I?'

At the Cochin airport our Dialogue Group with Govind Bharathan and other delegates, including the founder of the Dialogue Rev. Reinhard von Kirchbach, went to meet Amrithananda Mayi Ma, or The Mother, from Quilon, who was returning from Chicago's World Parliament of Religions. Once at her ashram I had missed the chance to get her famous 'hug' (Al Hag), but this time I had the privilege of garlanding her. There were at least five huge flower garlands around her neck, so when she hugged me, there was a wall of flowers between us and I could not feel the 'Universal Love' vibrations which her disciples say emanate from her. Neither was the small airport at Cochin the most spiritual setting.

Back in my houseboat

Having come on a visa valid for six months, by May 1973 it was time to leave India, get a new visa and come back. I decided to go back to Holland overland by bus and train. Yet another adventurous trip!

I was running out of money and got an American Express cheque for 200 US dollars from my parents. Unfortunately, when I went to get the cash the American Express office in India saw a difference in the signature and refused to give me cash. I sold my camera to the Brahmin family and got some money and with whatever money I had with me, started off.

I travelled by train from Amritsar through Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey to Europe. I tried to cash the cheque on the way but failed.

When I was standing in the queue at the post office in Kabul to check mail from my parents, I met a lady with whom I started chatting. She was an American living in Amsterdam. I managed to coax her to give me 50 dollars which I promised to return once I got to Amsterdam. She trusted me and gave me the money. (I did return the money in Amsterdam!)

In Holland I was back in my houseboat. I did a small job in a bank and started collecting money to get back to India. My keenness to get back to India was because of an assurance given by a Swami whom I had met while in the queue at a post office in India (post offices seem to have brought me luck wherever I went!) just before I left India. He – Swami Omkarananda Giri - was a direct disciple of Swami Yogananda having known him from 1935. He wrote to me when I got back to Holland that he was prepared to take me in as a pupil if I came back. I could stay in his ashram as well.

I came back to India in September 1974 on a one-month visa because the Indian Embassy in Holland told me I can get it extended in India. As the visa was expiring I was told it was a 'landing permit' and could not be extended. I had to go and get a visa from another country. I decided to go to Nepal.

On my way to Kathmandu by train I met a Buddhist monk from Sri Lanka travelling in the same compartment. We became friends and he even shared his chapati and dhal meal with me. He advised me to go to Sri Lanka the next time I had to get the visa extended. When I indicated that I was interested in Buddhism, he gave me the addresses of Vajiraramaya, Kanduboda Vipassana Centre and two other temples – one at Pitipana and the other at Ethul Kotte.



Thuparamaya - the first stupa in Sri Lanka

By boat to Sri Lanka

Taking the advice of the monk I met in the train to Nepal I decided to come to Sri Lanka which I did on 1 May 1975. I came by boat from Rameshwaram to Talaimannar and from there to Anuradhapura by train.

A World Heritage site, Anuradhapura is Sri Lanka's first capital dating back to the 4th Century BC. Centre of the earliest civilisation it is the foremost of the island's ancient cities with extensive Buddhist monuments, Buddhism having been introduced in the 3rd C BC.

The world's oldest documented tree, the Sri Maha Bodhi, grown from a sapling from the bo tree under which the Buddha attained Buddhahood at Bodh Gaya is sited here. Anuradhapura is the most popular place of Buddhist worship with pilgrims regularly visiting the *Atamasthana* – eight places believed to have been hallowed by the Buddha's visits.

Having seen a few places of worship I decided to stay at the Dutugemunu rest-hall at the premises of a Buddhist monastery meant for lay pilgrims. As I was going there I met a person selling lunch packets (Buddhadasa was his name), who suggested I should come over and stay at his house. I decided to stay there and spent a week with that Sinhalese family. The curator of the Anuradhapura folk museum (one Gunasekera) was also boarded there and I got to know a lot about the early times from him. When I told him that I was going to Colombo and would like to stay in a temple, he promptly gave me the address of a temple at Pagoda, a few miles away from Colombo. He gave me a letter to be given to his mother who was a member of the *Kantha Samitiya*, the women's society in the temple. Her house was just opposite the temple.



Sri Maha Bodhi - Anuradhapura

I took train to Colombo, the commercial capital and having got down at the Fort station I started looking around to see how I could get to Pagoda in the suburban town of Nugegoda, where the temple was situated. I chose to ask from a young man who looked well educated and told him I wanted to go to "Pagoda" mispronouncing the name. He said he knew the place. He put me on a bus bearing the route number 114 and without a problem I reached the house of Mrs. Clara Gunasekera, the mother of the museum curator, who lived in the Dhammaduta Lane. She took me to the temple near her house.

The chief prelate offered me a room and told me I could stay as long as I wanted to. When I told him I was interested in going to Kanduboda meditation centre he said I could do that any time and always come back to the temple and make it my home base as long as he breathes!

In the evening, a young man came to the temple to take a few monks to chant 'pirith' (where monks recite protective stanzas) to bless his father who was in hospital. He saw me and asked me whether I could remember him. I thought for a while and when he said "I was the one who put you on the bus", I straight away remembered. What a coincidence, I thought! The young man happened to be Hema Kumara Nanayakkara, brother of a well-known leftist leader Vasudeva Nanayakkara. Hema Kumara himself got into politics, got elected as a Member of Parliament (2001), served as a UNP minister and later formed his own party. He is currently (2015) the Governor of the Southern Province.



I stayed put at the Sri Vidya Vijayaramaya where the chief prelate, Davuldena Gnanissara Nayaka Thera was a learned monk who knew at least seven languages.

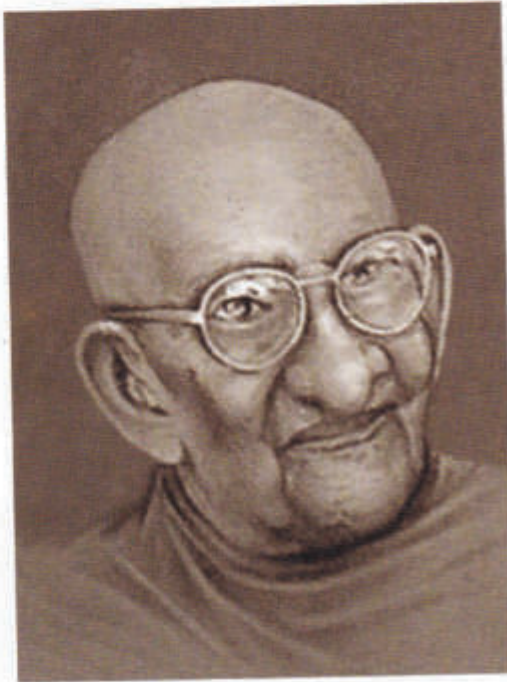
It so happened that to this day I live in the temple where he later moved in to, also at Pagoda. He passed away on 3rd April 2017 at the age of 101+. He was the titular head – *Uttaritara Mahanayaka*– Supreme Patriarch - of the Samastha Lanka Amarapura Maha Sangha Sabha –the Supreme Council of the Sri Lanka Amarapura Nikaya (Sect), comprising 21 sub-sects. Theravada monks in Sri Lanka basically belong to three Nikayas – Siyam, Amarapura & Ramanna. He succeeded the highly respected Most Venerable Madihe Pannasiha Mahanayaka Thera.

Keen on my meditation, I went to Kanduboda meditation centre and spent three weeks. I was fortunate in meeting Venerable Katukelle Seevali, the only English speaking Sinhalese monk at the time. The well-known Vipassana meditation centre had been established in 1956 – the year that Sambuddha Jayanthi – completion of 2500 years from the Buddha's Parinibbana (passing away) was commemorated. Being around 30 kilometres away from Colombo, it was quite convenient to get there from where I stayed. The chief monk at the centre was Kahatapitiye Sumathipala Nayaka Thera.

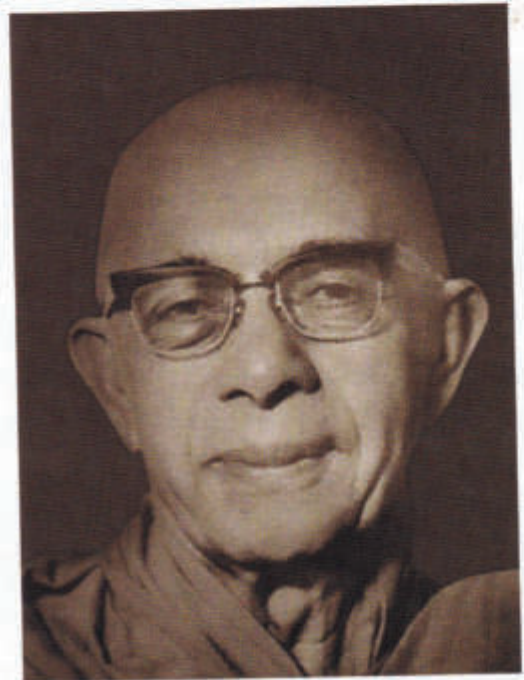
I was quite impressed by the serene atmosphere at the Centre and was inspired by being able to meditate undisturbed. It was interesting to find that Seevali Thera could read my mind from a distance.

I came back to Pagoda and after a while I did a second stint of three weeks of intense meditation in total silence which turned out to be a very good experience. By the end of it I had more or less decided on which path I should take. By then I found the Indian approach through yoga or meditation would lead to the position where one day you will be united with god. It was different in Vipassana meditation when suffering could be overcome here and now.

Meanwhile, I started meeting erudite monks residing in and around Colombo.



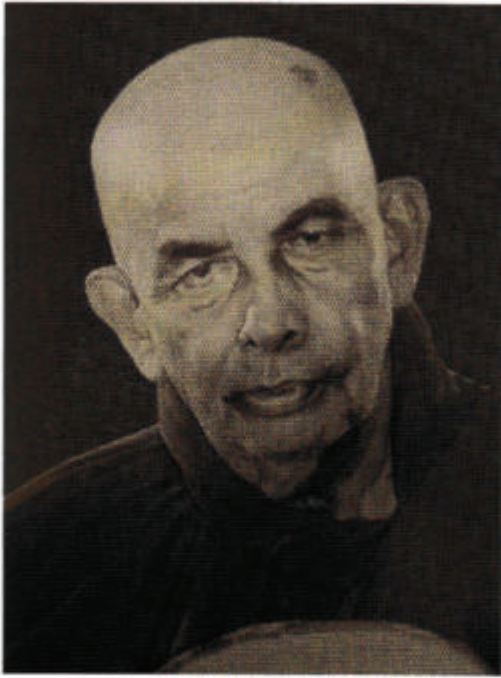
Ven. Balangoda Ananda Maitriya Mahanayaka Thera



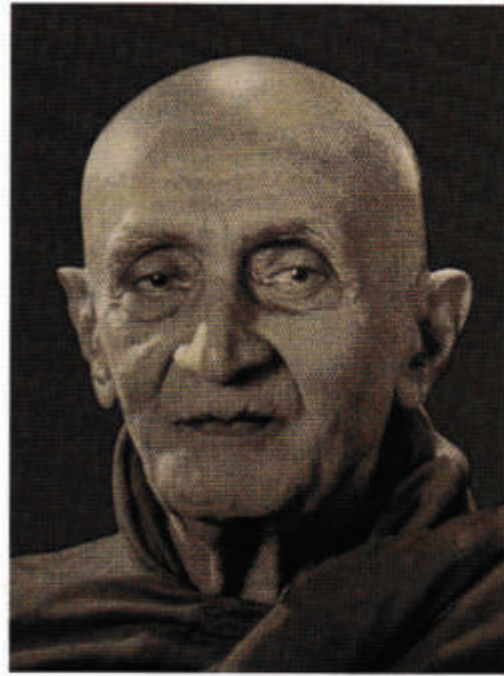
Venerable Narada Maha Thera



Venerable Piyadassi Maha Thera



Ven. Madihe Pannyaseeha Mahanayaka Thera



Ven. Ampitiye Rahula Maha Thera



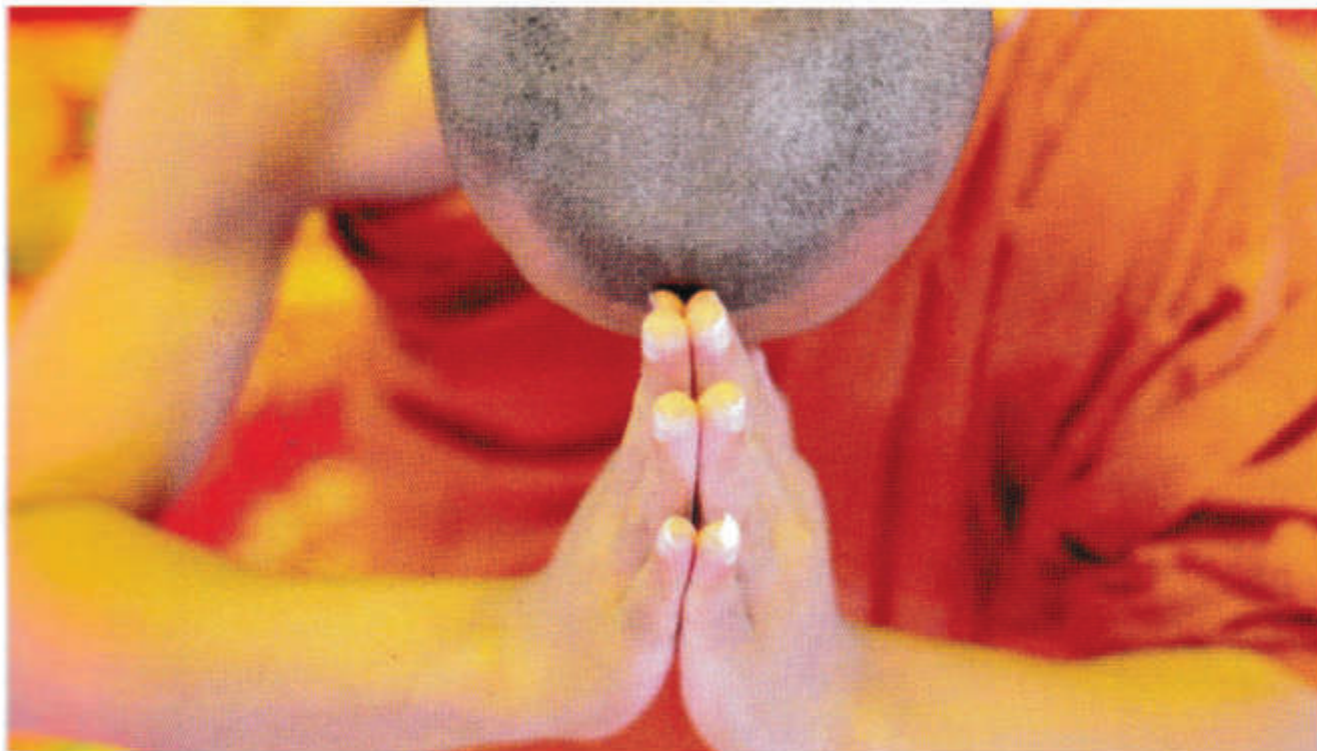
Venerable Nyanaponika Maha Thera

I met the Most Ven. Balangoda Ananda Maitriya Mahanayaka Thera at his temple at Pannipitiya, the world renowned missionaries Venerable Narada and Venerable Piyadassi Maha Thera sat the Vajiraramaya in Bambalapitiya, and the Most Venerable Madihe Pannasiha Mahanayaka Thera and Venerable Ampitiye Rahula Maha Theras at the Bhikkhu Training Centre at Maharagama. I sometimes accompanied my guru, Venerable Davuldena Ghanissaeara Nayaka Thera who was teaching the student monks at the Bhikkhu Training Centre, referred to as the Mahargama Dharmayatanaya.

In Kandy I met Venerable Nyanaponika Maha Thera, the German-born Sri Lanka-ordained Theravada monk, the scholarly monk who founded the Buddhist Publication Society, the internationally reputed institution publishing Buddhist books.

I had by now cut my hair short and used to wear white clothes.





In robes as a monk

I had a visitor's visa to spend six months in Sri Lanka. When I had spent five months, I realised I had to decide either to get back to India or don the robes and continue to stay in Sri Lanka. When I told my teacher, Davuldena Nayaka Thera about my intention to become a monk, he told me I should get the permission from my parents. Here I am a 27 year-old young man having to get permission from the parents to do something I was keen to do. "That's the Buddhist tradition," the Nayaka Thera told me.

Our family being free thinkers with a humanistic balanced attitude towards life, I was confident my parents would give me permission. In an era when there was no email or mobile phones (the temple did not have a land phone either) I wrote them a letter. Promptly I got a reply indicating that they had no objection so long as it was my independent decision with no one forcing me to become a monk.

My ordination was fixed for 21 September 1975 at the temple I was staying in. A couple of days earlier, a few persons from Jehovah's Witnesses came to see me with the Bible in their hands and asked me why I was getting converted to Buddhism. They started telling me about God and after listening to them for a while I told them I didn't know who God was. If one day I discover him, I would come back, I said.

For my ordination, in addition to the traditional customs which had to be followed, Dr W S Karunaratne, Professor of Buddhist Philosophy was invited to give a talk at the ceremony. Two days before the ordination Dr Karunaratne told me there was a lady professor of Buddhism and Pali from Holland in Sri Lanka, who was keen to come for the ordination and whether I had any objection. I was quite excited that someone from Holland was going to be present at a landmark event in my life. Ria Kloppenborg had read in the newspapers about the ordination. She came and found the ceremony a new experience.

A senior monk in the Sect presiding over the ceremony ordains the novice monk who is then called a '*samanera*'. I received my ordination from Ven. Kosgoda Dhammawangsa Mahanayaka Thera then (1975) the Chief Prelate of Amarapura Nikaya. One by one I repeated the Ten Precepts that a '*samanera*' has to observe, after the senior monk recited each. The symbolic gesture of tying the '*silpantiya*' round the neck of the monk to be ordained was done by him. Davuldena Nayaka Thera was declared to be my '*Upadyaya*' - teacher/mentor.

The guest speaker at the ordination, the very amiable academic, 'W S' was a brilliant student both in school and university. After graduation he was appointed an assistant lecturer at the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya. He obtained his doctorate from the University of London for his thesis on 'The Theory of Causality in Early Buddhism' at the comparatively young age of twenty-eight. He was selected as the head of the newly formed Department of Buddhist Philosophy at the Peradeniya University. He had a break when he was appointed as Sri Lanka's Ambassador in the United States and returned to the university after his stint there.

My parents, who could not make it for my ordination, came in December 1975. They toured the country and enjoyed their visits to numerous places.

Being keen to continue with my meditation and unaware of a restriction that a novice monk should be under his teacher for five years after ordination, I left the temple and spent three months at Kanduboda centre. I also started looking for a place in a cooler climatic environment that would suit me better. I was also keen to get to a place where I could meditate peacefully.

I decided to go on a pilgrimage in the neighbouring Buddhist countries prior to my higher ordination - 'Upasampada' when I could move over from a novice monk to being a fully-fledged bhikkhu. Meanwhile, I was able to get a visa in a new category - as a 'Buddhist worker' - which was valid for one year.



Bodh Gaya

Off on a pilgrimage

In late 1976, I set off on pilgrimage to India, Nepal, Burma (Mynamar) and Thailand – all countries where Theravada Buddhism is followed. It was not a really auspicious start when the Tri Star plane we travelled in developed engine trouble just after take-off. One engine was on fire and we noticed the plane nose diving towards the sea. The pilot managed to steer the plane and get back to Katunayake airport. We left after a two-hour delay

My first stop was India. I went to Bodh Gaya, the place where Prince Siddhartha attained Enlightenment. Bodh Gaya is administered by the Archaeological Survey of India after Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933), the charismatic leader of the Buddhist resurgence wrested it from the control of the Hindus. The courageous Sri Lankan patriot fought hard to get back the Buddhist places of worship in India and formed the Mahabodhi Society which, to this day, manages the Buddhist activities in India.

I decided to go to Ranchi to see the Brahmin family with whom I stayed when I first came to India. The ride in the Indian-built Hindustan Ambassador car took many hours more than what the driver said it would take to cover the 275 km distance. The road was full of potholes and it was a very slow trip. I conveyed to the family how grateful I was for their advice that I should follow Buddhism.

I also met Swami Omkarananda who wanted me to continue as a Hindu Yogi. Naturally he was disappointed that I had chosen a different path.

To Burma via Nepal

When I went to a temple in Kathmandu and told the monk that I was from Holland, he told me he was expecting a lady professor from Holland who was doing a research on Theravada Buddhism in Nepal. I knew at once whom he was referring to: Professor Ria Kloppenborg who attended my ordination and thought to myself 'what a coincidence'!

My visit to Burma was eventful. Though I would have preferred to stay longer, the Burmese authorities issued visas only for seven days. I met a Chinese monk in the plane who was not proficient in English and sought my help to fill in the disembarkation form. He invited me to stay in his temple at Rangoon which I did. It gave me an opportunity to observe their style of living. One thing I noticed was the difference in murals on the walls of Sri Lankan and Chinese temples. In Sri Lanka the paintings of all Arahants are of the same pattern. It's different in the Chinese temples. They are divided into two sections each portraying nine Arahants. The facial expressions are different from one another ranging from pleasant to harsh looks.

I had a letter of introduction from a Sri Lankan devotee, Ayoma Wickremasinghe who had helped to build a temple in Shwebu near Mandalay where a well-known monk Webu Sayadaw (Maha Thera) was residing. The monk who was believed to be an Arahant warmly received me and was quite willing to talk to me. I found him to be a symbol of Loving Kindness, a key element in Buddhism. I also met another leading monk, Mahasi Sayadaw, who was also said to be an Arahant. His was a very cold reception. When I asked for a clarification from him on a matter related to the Dhamma, he showed a book rack and told an assistant to let me refer the books. Incidentally, on the day Webu Sayadaw passed away there was a total blackout in Sri Lanka and some said it was because of his death. They had so much of faith and respect for him.

In the countries I visited I observed the different customs and traditions they observed. It was a fine learning experience.

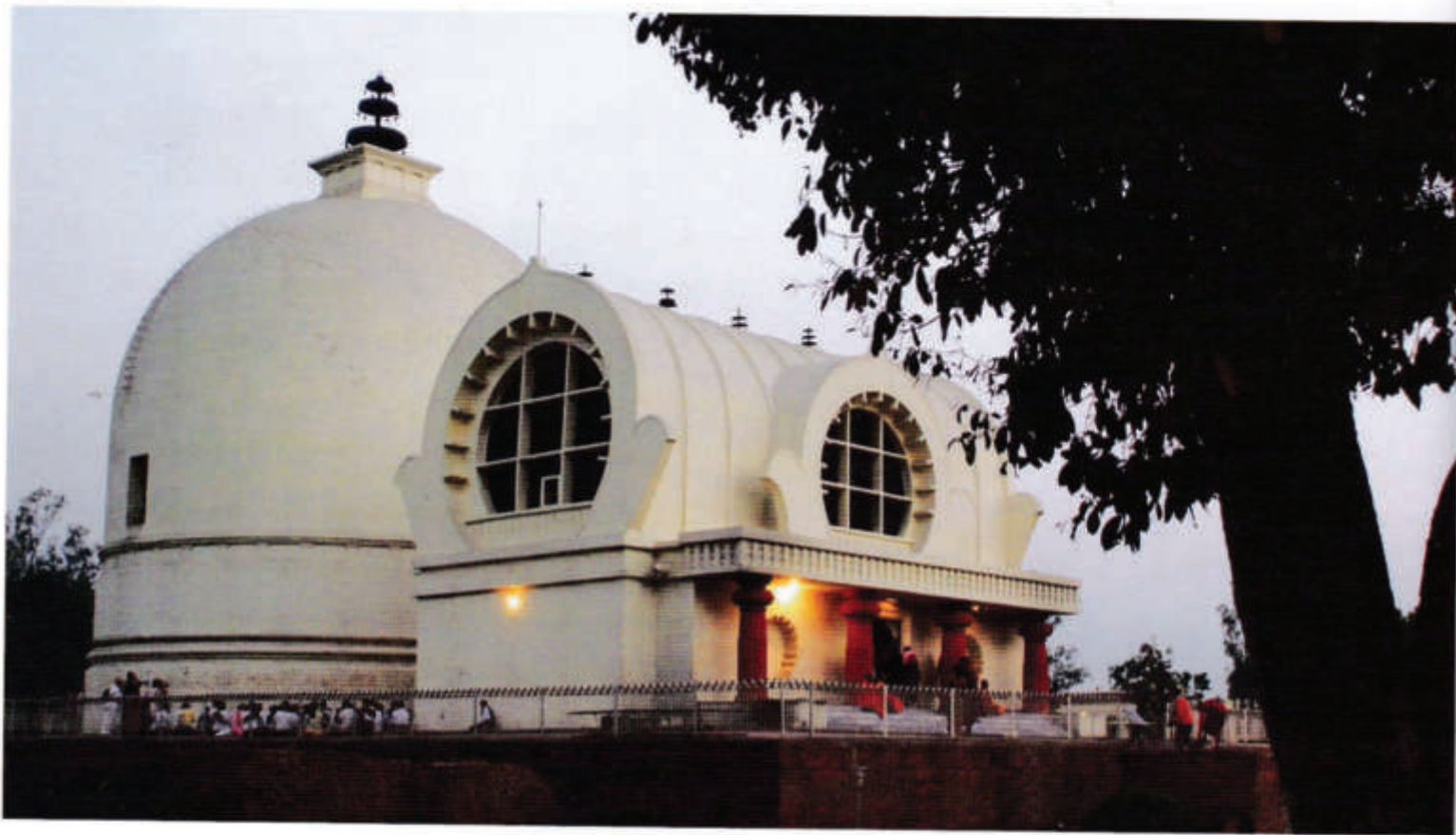


Saranath

Back to India

I travelled extensively in India studying the many changes that Buddhism had undergone over centuries.

I was particularly impressed with the serenity at Sarnath where the Buddha delivered the first sermon after Enlightenment and Shravasti, where the Buddha frequently visited.



Kusinara

Kusinara, the place where the Buddha passed away had a solemn and peaceful atmosphere making one feel sad of his '*Parinibbana*'. One can picture how the Buddha's main disciples would have felt at the moment he passed away.



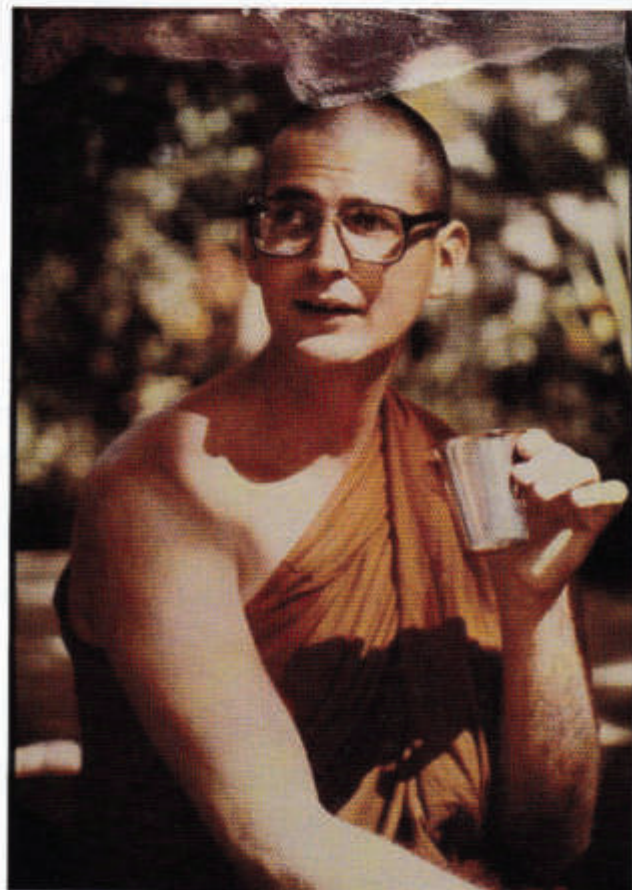
Ajanta & Ellora

My visit covered Ajanta and Ellora caves which are huge tourist attractions in India. The UNESCO World Heritage sites are in Aurangabad district of Maharashtra state.

There are about 30 rock-cut Buddhist monuments in the Ajanta caves which date back to 2nd century BCE and include paintings and sculptures described by the Archaeological Survey India as "the finest surviving examples of Indian art, particularly paintings which are masterpieces of Buddhist religious art with figures of the Buddha and depictions of Jataka tales.

Ellora represents the epitome of Indian rock-cut architecture. The 34 'caves' are actually structures excavated out of the vertical face of the Chananandri hills. They are Hindu, Buddhist and Jain rock-cut temples built between the 5th C and 10th C. The 17 Hindu, 12 Buddhist and five Jain caves have been built in close proximity demonstrating the religious harmony at the time.

I visited the Deekshabhoomi in Nagpur which has become the centre of modern Buddhism in India after Dr B R Ambedkar observed the Five Precepts and became a Buddhist on 14 October 1956, the Buddha Jayanthi year, along with over 500,000 Hindus who were considered 'untouchables'. There I met Dr. Ananda Kaushalyayana, the great follower of Baba Sahib B.R. Ambedkar. I was back in Sri Lanka for my upasampada ceremony on 13 August 1977.



Receiving higher ordination

Having donned the robes and learnt the Dhamma under his preceptor, a novice monk would appear before an assembly of senior monks to receive higher ordination (*Upasampada*). First the monk visits the senior monks individually to inform his intention to receive higher ordination. Although he had been in robes for several years as a novice monk, prior to obtaining higher ordination, in keeping with tradition, the monk gets into a layman's clothing and reverts to the robe just before the ceremony. He then observes the Ten Precepts.

At the assembly of monks, he is asked a number of basic questions to make sure that he is fit enough to enter the Order. He is advised not to feel shy but to speak out honestly and tell the truth. Among the questions asked is whether the monk is over twenty years of age, whether he is in debt or in the king's service, whether he has got permission from his parents, and whether he is afflicted with any serious illnesses. He is asked whether he possesses an alms bowl and robes. His knowledge of the Dhamma is also tested.

Once the senior monks are satisfied that the monk is suitable to receive higher ordination, he is requested to ask that he be granted higher ordination. Once he is granted the higher ordination he is advised on how he should conduct himself thereafter.

That is a brief introduction on '*Upasampada*'.

My guru, Davuldena Gnanissara Mahanayaka Thera became Prelate of the Udarata Amarapura Samagri Sangha Sabha, one of the 21 sub-orders of the Sri Lanka Amarapura Nikaya, my '*Upasamapada*' ceremony had to be held at the headquarters of that Nikaya at the Sapugolla temple at Uva Paranagama in the Badulla district.

My parents were present at the ceremony and found the entire proceedings quite interesting and often amusing. My father filmed the whole process using an 8mm camera.

It was a totally new experience to them – for that matter even for me.



With my mother - Kandy



The '*Upasamapda Pinkama*' is a rare happening and there is always a lot of excitement and preparation. The monk is brought in a '*perahera*' – a procession with traditional drums, dancers performing and people in the area gathering along the route to see it.

As I had to get into a layman's clothing. I was dressed up in a costume which I was totally unfamiliar with. It was a fancy red and golden '*Nilame*' suit – the dress worn by up-country (Kandyan) chiefs from the days of the ancient Sinhalese kings who ruled from Kandy the hill capital of Sri Lanka. It's quite a cumbersome dress but I had no choice. Yet another experience, I thought!

On top of it I had to get on the back of an elephant for the three kilometre ride to the temple. The procession went through paddy fields and village by-roads and the surface of the main road itself, including the crossing of the irrigation canals, was quite bumpy. I wasn't in the best of health either having got fever after my hectic trip in Asia.

A friend of mine whom I knew from the age of five was among those who were present at the ceremony. Peter Flik by name, he was visiting Pakistan for work in NOVIB, a Dutch development aid organisation. He made it a point to come for the ceremony because of our longstanding friendship. In fact, he was so fond of Sri Lanka that he came back to serve in the Netherlands funded Integral Rural Development Programme (IRDP) in Nuwara Eliya and was here until 1985.

Once the ceremony was over, we came to Colombo and stayed in Mount Lavinia Hotel for the night. I was to go to the Pagoda temple the following day and once again a procession had been arranged to take me from the nearby Nugegoda town to the temple. However, curfew was declared that day due to unrest in the country. I spent another night at the hotel and returned to the temple without any pomp and ceremony. I was spared of another tamasha!

Up-country hermitage

As I was on the lookout for a quieter monastery where I could peacefully meditate, a Finnish monk whom I met at the Kanduboda meditation centre told me about Wegirikanda in the outskirts of Kandy off Gampola. Also known as 'Rockhill Hermitage' because of the rocky terrain, I visited the place and found it to be the type of place I was looking for. It had been founded by a monk named Venerable Kassapa, a disciple of the erudite monk, the Most Venerable Balangoda Ananda Maitriya Mahanayaka Thera. During a visit there before my '*Upasampada*' I found an American monk staying there and conducting meditation retreats.

Having liked the quiet and peace of the place during my first visit, I went there after my '*Upasampada*' and found that the American monk had gone back. I thought I could now stay there but Ven. Kassapa was not around to discuss about it. I wrote a note to him hoping to post it in Kandy on my way back to Colombo.

As I was walking down a main street in Kandy, someone tapped on my shoulder. When I stopped and looked back the person (a German looking like Shiva!) pointed out a monk in a car parked by the roadside and said he wanted to talk to me. I looked at the monk and realised he was the one to whom I had written the letter. How strange! Here was the monk I was keen to make contact with - quite unexpectedly I meet him!

I had no problem in staying at Rockhill Hermitage and moved there in June 1979.

It was yet another experience. My dwelling place was a small hut with a thatched roof. Nearby was a rock cave which was being used as an office/storeroom. It was dark inside. It was an old cave and I was told it belonged to the 14th century – the era when Gampola was the capital from where the kings ruled. The cave which had a drip ledge – a '*kattarama*' for the rain water falling on top to be diverted - had been the abode of monks. That was an era when the kings shifted the capital from one place to another due to the unsettled state of affairs in the country. In fact, I was told that close to the cave there was a secret underground passage for the king to escape in an emergency.

I soon started to improve the facilities in order to hold regular meditation retreats for foreigners. The cave was cleaned up and another floor was built for me to sleep. There were several '*kutis*' and a spacious meditation hall already. Plans had been drawn up to build a nunnery and we managed to build that too.



Rockhill Hermitage



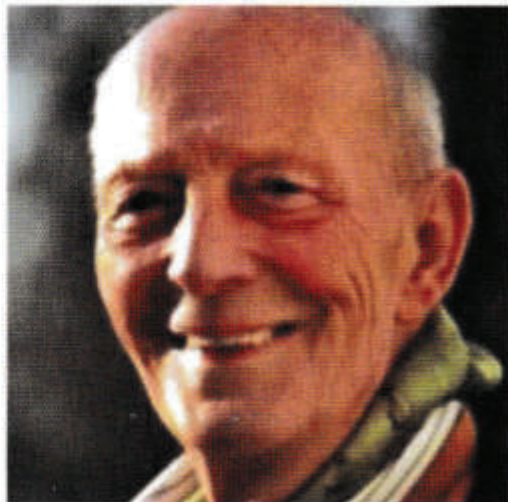
D B Wijetunga

The Member of Parliament for the electorate where the hermitage was situated, was Dingiri Banda Wijetunga who held several portfolios before becoming Prime Minister and ultimately President of Sri Lanka following the assassination of President Ranasinghe Premadasa. When he was Minister of Posts & Telecommunications he set up a post box at the hermitage premises which helped foreign meditators to post letters home with ease. (Laptops, mobile phones and Wi-fi were unheard of then.) He also gave telephone facilities to the hermitage. When he became the Minister of Highways he built a proper road to come to the hermitage and when he was in charge of Power & Energy, we got electricity. He certainly acquired merit by helping a remote hermitage which was in need of basic facilities.

I arranged for a ten-day meditation retreat every month and 15-20 persons participated each time. They were mainly foreigners who had got to know about the place by word of mouth through those who had participated earlier. Most of them were from Germany. A brochure left at the Buddhist Publication Centre (BPS) in Kandy also created awareness of the Rockhill Hermitage.

Inducted to 'Inter-Religious Dialogue'

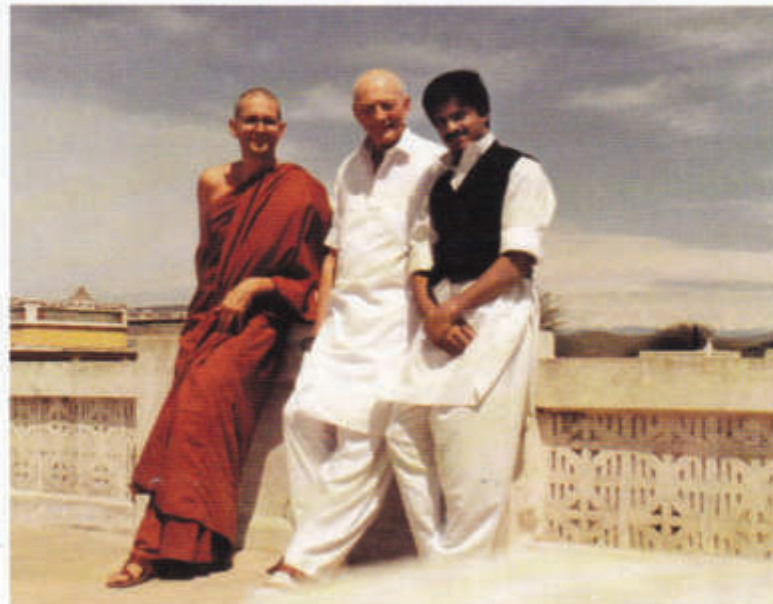
In 1980, the Abbot at Rockhill Hermitage, Ven. Polpitiye Kassapa attended a gathering of persons of different faiths organised by a retired German Lutheran priest, Reinhard von Kirchbach. Keen in forming a group of like-minded individuals from different faiths Reinhard had been looking for founder partners while journeying in Europe and South Asia. He then invited the handpicked persons to the inaugural 'Inter-religious Dialogue', a two months session in his house in Altenhof near Eckernfoerde in Germany.



Ven Kassapa attended the second Dialogue sessions the following year too and in 1982 I got the opportunity to go. Sri Lanka was chosen for the sessions in 1984. Rockhill Hermitage was the venue. In the years which followed the same fairly constant group of Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and Muslims (occasionally Jews, too) met at gatherings in Germany, France, Sri Lanka, Kerala, Japan, Pakistani Kashmir, Bali, etc.. They lived together, meditated and took part in the religious life of the faiths of others; they talked, studied, celebrated, worked, cooked, walked and relaxed. In so doing, these partners in Dialogue, men and women, exposed themselves to painful, as well as encouraging, proceedings. Slowly we perceived the shift from intellectual exchange to being together in silent prayer and meditation.



1994 Interreligious Dialogue at Wulfshagen Castle near Hamburg, Germany. Owner Count Friedrich von Reventlow was a good friend of our Dialogue founder Reinhard von Kirchbach



Dialogue 1987 at Bathroi, Azad Kashmir, Pakistan
at Sheikh Mahmood Rasheed's ancestral home



1992 Dialogue at the Brahmavihara Arama, Bali, Indonesia. I had good connections with the founder monk Ven. Banthe Girakkhito Maha Thera.



Dialogue group in front of the La Gracie in France



1995 Interreligious Dialogue at the Tibetan Buddhist Centre at Pisselberg, near Hamburg, Germany. Halima Krausen's connections with Hamburg Tibetan Centre

Meanwhile, in 1984 I got an invitation from London to come over and spend the '*vas*' – three months rains retreat. The invitation came when I was in any case planning to leave Sri Lanka. I was debating in my mind whether it was time to leave for good and thought I should meet and say 'good-bye' to Hema Kumara Nanayakkara, the first person I met when I reached Colombo who paved the way for me to come thus far. I met him at Unawatuna near the Southern Province capital Galle and during the conversation he spoke about a forest hermitage at a place called Kottawa Nagarannya near Yakkalamulla on the Galle-Udugama road. He told me the resident monk there was quite old and not in the best of health, and it would be a good place for me to spend a quiet life.

We went and saw the hermitage and found it to be a solitary place where I could hardly see a human being but there were monkeys aplenty! The 90-years old monk had been there since 1936. I was invited to stay on and I liked the environment. It was a part of the Sinharaja rain forest, a UNESCO World Heritage site. There was the village temple a little far away. I met the '*dayakas*' in the area and arranged for them to provide us with alms. A roster was drawn up and we were assured of '*daana*' right through the year.





A visit by cousin Annemarieke and husband- at the Kottawa Naga Arannya

While at the forest hermitage at Kottawa I had my anxious moments particularly in encounters with reptiles. I distinctly remember one incident when I met a huge python – at least 15 feet long – on the way to my *'kuti'*. I immediately meditated on *'metta'* and watched the python moving away without doing any harm.

I took time off to go to London and as arranged, spent the *'vas'* season there. The following year I planned to go and spend several months in Holland. I was gradually getting known in Europe and there were regular invitations to come and hold meditation retreats. Because of these constant visits I arranged to get a monk from a monastery at Waturuvila, not so far from Galle.

I regularly attended the Inter-Religious Dialogue sessions and my list of contacts continuously increased. I was more out than in from my base - Sri Lanka. I toured United States and Canada on invitations from Sri Lankan temples and spent *'vas'* in Bonn, the Buddhist Vihara in Berlin in 1988. In early 1989 I was in Singapore in the temple of Ven. Bellanwila Dhammaratana. I returned to Sri Lanka when my visa expired.

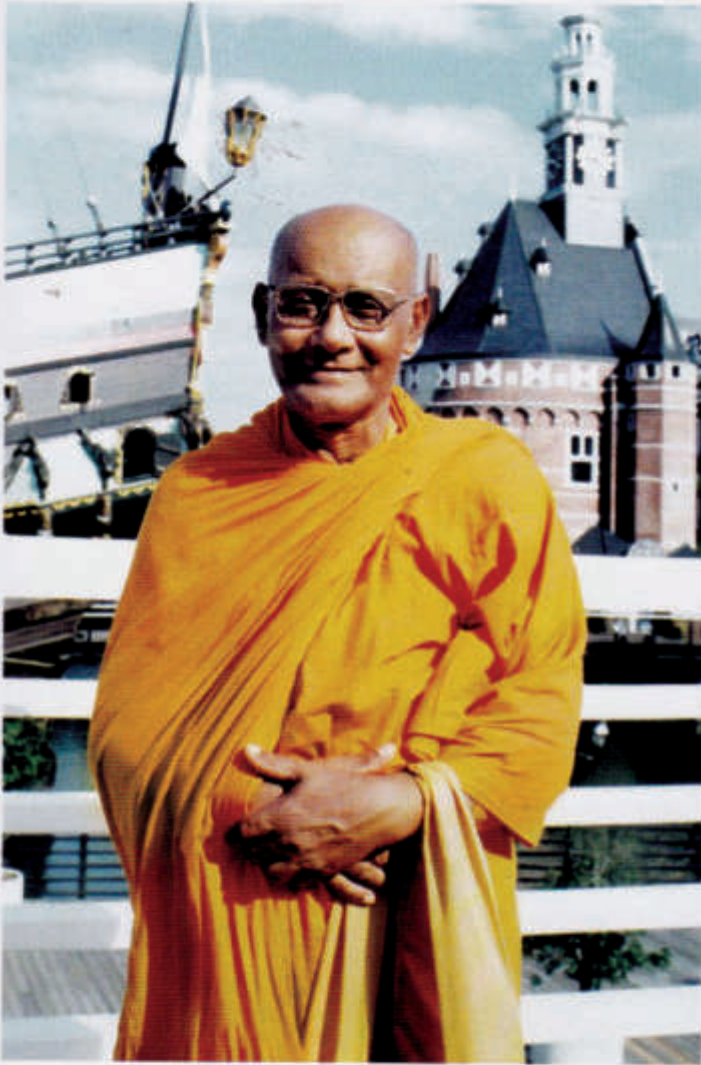
With my 'guru' in Holland

Once when I was in Holland, I got an opportunity to play host to my 'guru' Davuldena Gnanissara Nayaka Thera. I deliberately avoided having a shaven head at that time because it was dangerous to get about in my home country with a shaven head. You were then identified as a 'Skinhead' – a group of violent people who always had shaven hair. In order to avoid being mistaken as one of them I had about an inch of hair on the head. This made a mile of a difference!

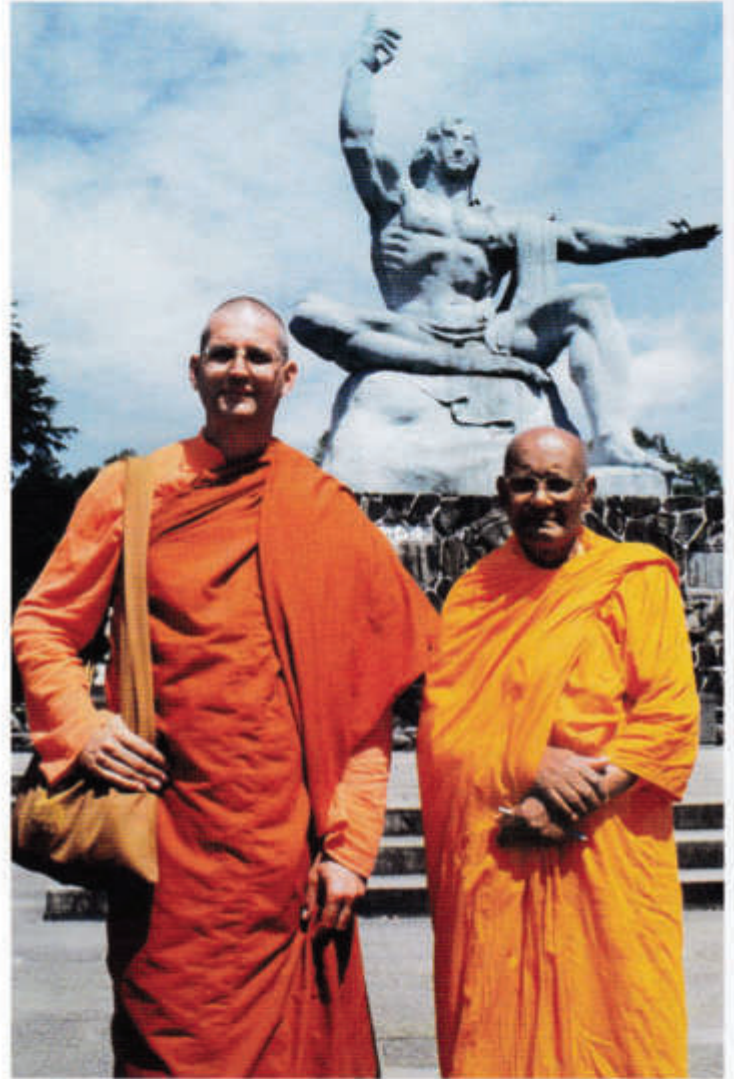
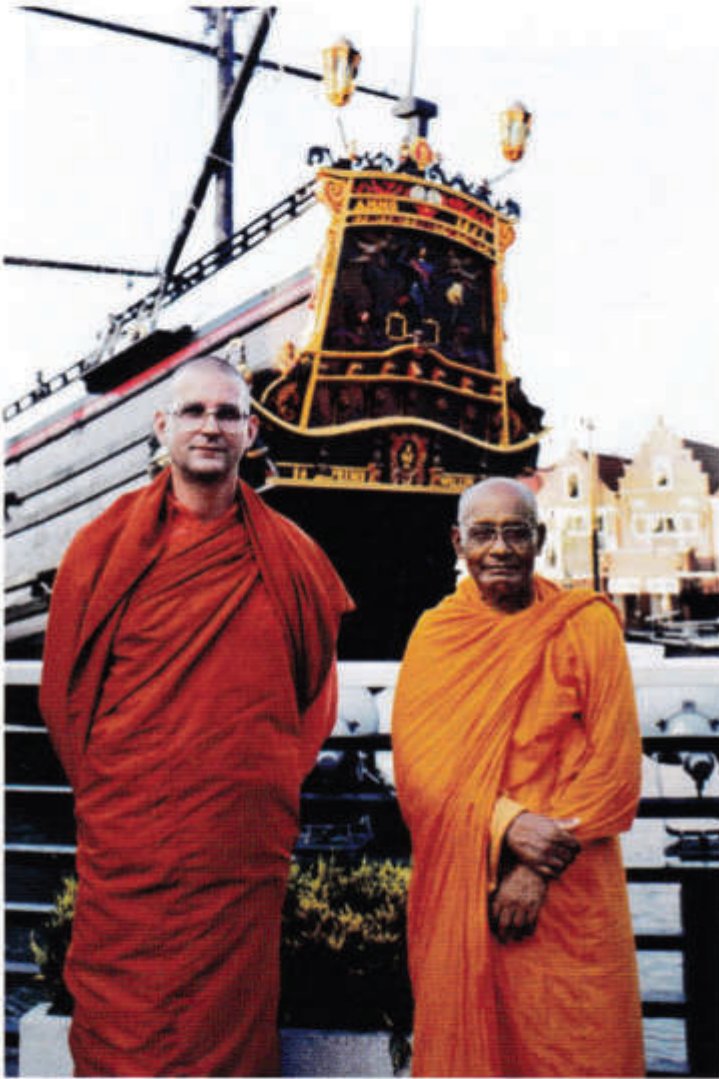
The Nayaka Thera used to attend sessions of the Asian Buddhist Conference of Peace (ABCP) held in Moscow and Buriyat. During one of those trips I arranged him to get across to Amsterdam and stay with my parents.

He has been travelling far and wide on missionary work and spent several years in Taiwan. He taught Pali and Buddhist Studies there. In the process he himself learnt many languages.





With Guru Ven, Davuldena Gnanissara Maha Thera
visiting a typical Dutch town - 1978

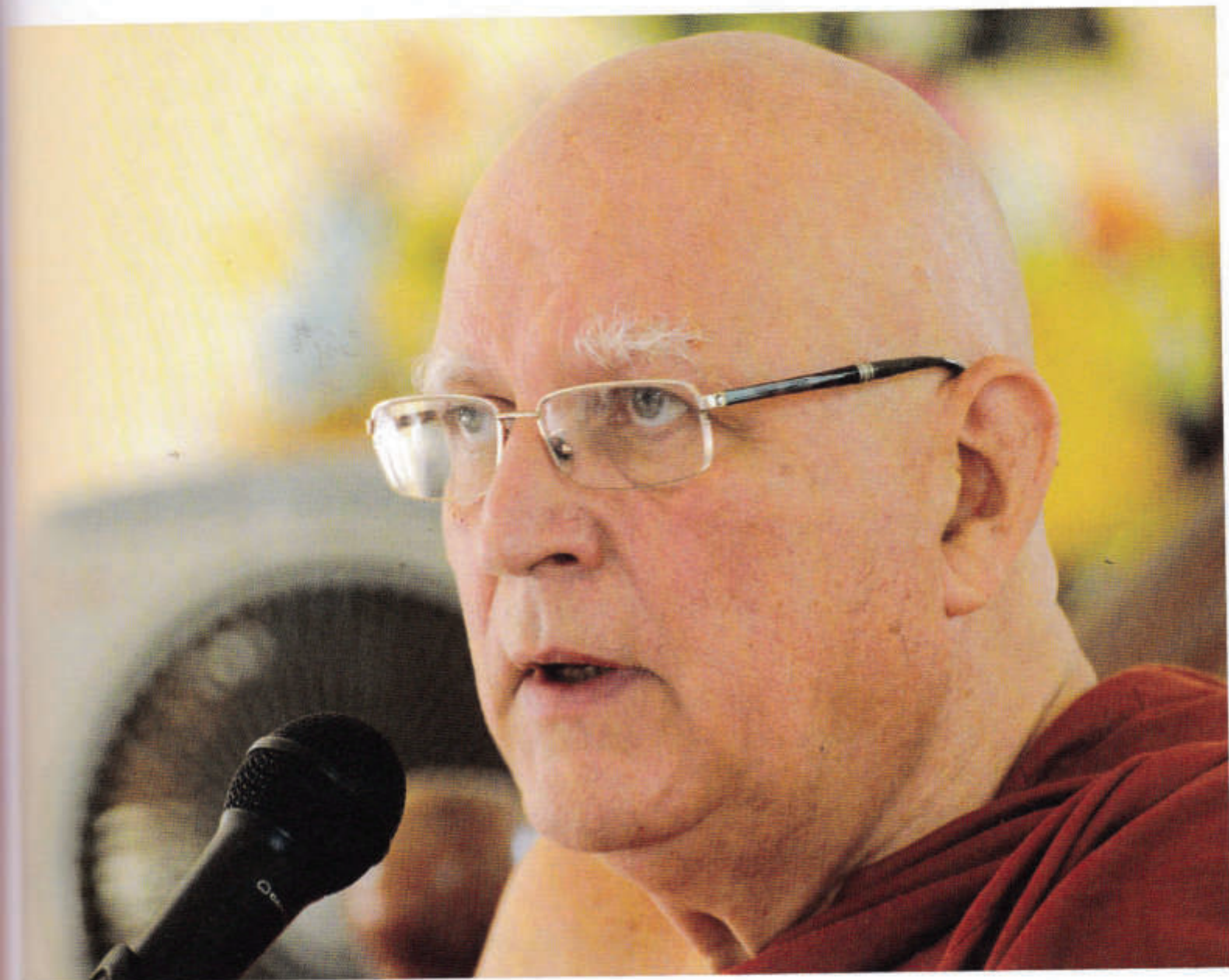


With Guru Ven, Davuldena Gnanissara Maha Thera
- Amsterdam, the VOC Ship

My routine trips took me to different parts of the world at least eight times a year. The monk at Kottawa, in the meantime, established himself and was able to manage the affairs by himself. Sometimes I found his ways of doing things were different to mine and rather than come into conflict I thought it was best to leave which I did in 1997.







When the robe was a fashion !

Although there is a tremendous interest in Buddhism in the West today, at the time I left Holland in the early 1970s it was a different story. There wasn't a single Buddhist centre in Holland at that time. A few had got together and formed a group called the 'Foundation of Friends of Buddhism' meeting twice a year – one day in Spring and another day in Autumn. About twenty five from all over the country met and discussed about Buddhism. They were 'Buddhologists' - scholars in Buddhism.

Today there are around 250 Buddhist Centres in Holland and nearly ten Chinese, Tibetan and Thai temples. 'Mahamevunava' - Ven Kiribathgoda Nananadna's outfit -has acquired the former Vietnamese temple and now targeting the Sri Lankan Buddhists in Holland. A Vesak celebration organised by 'Mahamevunava' in 2016 in a provincial town called Nederhorst den Berg created lot of interest and hit the headlines in the local newspaper.

Going back to the 1970's I recall two incidents in Paris. When I was with another monk at the railway station someone commented we were 'Hari Krishna people'. We said: "We are not Hari Krishna, we are Buddhist monks like Hari Lama". "All the same" was his response. Again, in 1978, a female looked at us and commented, "Is that the latest fashion?" referring to the robes we were wearing.

I had a rather amusing incident when I returned to Sri Lanka from an overseas visit and was staying in the queue at the immigration counter at the Bandaranaike International Airport. An officer noticed me and as is the normal protocol for monks, called me up. A foreigner who was behind me in the queue - who happened to be from Holland - was heard saying "I am also going to buy an orange curtain", again referring to the colour of my robe.

I also remember a visit to the Tropical Museum in Amsterdam when I was in Holland in 1978 where an exhibition was being held. In the Thai pavilion was a replica of a Buddhist shrine. Some students were visiting the stall. Pointing at the Buddha statue, a young boy asked the teacher, "Who is that"? The teacher answered, "He is the Buddha". The next obvious question by the boy was who Buddha was. The reply came, "Oh, he is one of those Indian gods". That was the knowledge on Buddhism at that time!

The progress over the decades is quite remarkable. Today there are Buddhist programmes being broadcast over the national radio and television in Holland. Rights to broadcast Buddhist programmes have been obtained and these are subsidised by the state. In fact, when permission was first sought for the broadcasts, the Media Commission asked for the statistics as to how many Buddhists there were in Holland. A survey was done and it was revealed that while there were around 30,000, another 100-200,000 were interested in Buddhism. When the Commission indicated that was not enough and refused permission, it was pointed out that the Humanistic Society had only 15,000 and given permission. Leading the campaign to obtain permission for a Buddhist Broadcasting Foundation was Professor Ria Kloppenborg who was present at my ordination.

Now Buddhist books are published in Holland. While books from other languages have been translated, there are books written in Dutch language too.

Looking at the overall view the interest is more or less equally divided between Zen, Tibetan and Theravada Buddhism.

Meanwhile, I have been involved in several international organisations with a Buddhist flavour. One is the Conference of Western Buddhist Teachers where the representatives are mostly from America. Laymen, monks and nuns attend meetings and I remember the meeting held at Dharamasala, the city in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh where the Dalai Lama resides, in 1993. Presenting a book with addresses of Buddhist centres in North America to the Dalai Lama, Jack Kornfield pointed out that it contained six hundred addresses. A new issue was being printed and the number had gone upto one thousand.



Vietnamese temple - my abode in Holland

In 1988, I attended a meeting of the European Buddhist Union (EBU) held at the UNESCO in Paris facilitated by the renowned Buddhist scholar, Dr Ananda Guruge who was Sri Lanka's Ambassador and Patron of the EBU. It is the umbrella organization of Buddhist communities and national Buddhist unions in Europe. The EBU is open to all schools and traditions of Buddhism in Europe wishing to unite on the basis of Buddhist teachings and work together in spiritual friendship and respect for diversity. Its aims are to facilitate international exchange and promote spiritual friendship amongst European Buddhists, to support social action and ideas motivated by Buddhist values, and to amplify the voice of Buddhism in Europe and worldwide.

I am also a member of the Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA) with its headquarters in Taiwan and Los Angeles. An organisation of monastic and lay Buddhists it was founded by Master Hsing Yun, who had moved from China to Taiwan in 1949. BLIA promotes Humanistic Buddhism that entails the participation in services and activities that are beneficial to society at large and maintains friendly ties with devotees of other sects and religions. Among their projects was a programme to convert African boys mostly from the Congo as Buddhist monks and they were brought from Johannesburg to Taiwan, taught Chinese and given a training in Buddhism. Later a huge temple was built in Bronkhorstspruyt near Johannesburg for the purpose. The project was altogether a success though most of them gave up the robes and did good business with China and Taiwan!

'All over Ananda!'

The regular invitations to deliver lectures, to hold guided meditation sessions and often to participate at international conferences made me really 'a wandering monk' and I got the epithet the Flying Dutch Monk. I remember how Sri Lanka's Ambassador in UNESCO, Dr Ananda Guruge who was himself busy moving around in Europe attending Buddhist conferences and bumping into me in unexpected places, once told me it was high time I changed my name from Olande Ananda to 'All over Ananda'!

After my father passed away in April 1997 I spent around eight months in Holland before returning to Sri Lanka hoping to stay at the Kottawa Nagarannya near Galle, but ended up going back to square one, the temple at Pagoda where I was ordained. When I came I was told that an elderly lady, Sriyawathie Gonsalkorale had donated half an acre of land with a house at First Cross Street, Pagoda to my guru, Gnanissara Nayaka Thera. The Nayaka Thera was away in Australia when I returned and the donor met me and told me she was keen to use the premises as a centre for monks who, after being hospitalised could recuperate for some time there before proceeding to their temples in the outstations. When I was asked whether I would like to be in charge, I declined and said I would only be interested in setting up a meditation centre. She found there was no alternative and when the Nayaka Thera returned he too agreed with my idea. By then I had started planning suitable buildings. I then learnt the Nayaka Thera himself had been working on a plan to put up a two-storey building. I then shelved mine.



In early 1998 I moved to the house which was there and since then it has been my abode.

While functioning mainly as a meditation centre, provision was also made for monks to convalesce after being in hospital, if there was a need to do so. The centre was named 'Bhikkhu Viveka Ashram and Meditation Centre'. I made it the 'Pagoda Meditation Centre'.

Learning Sinhala

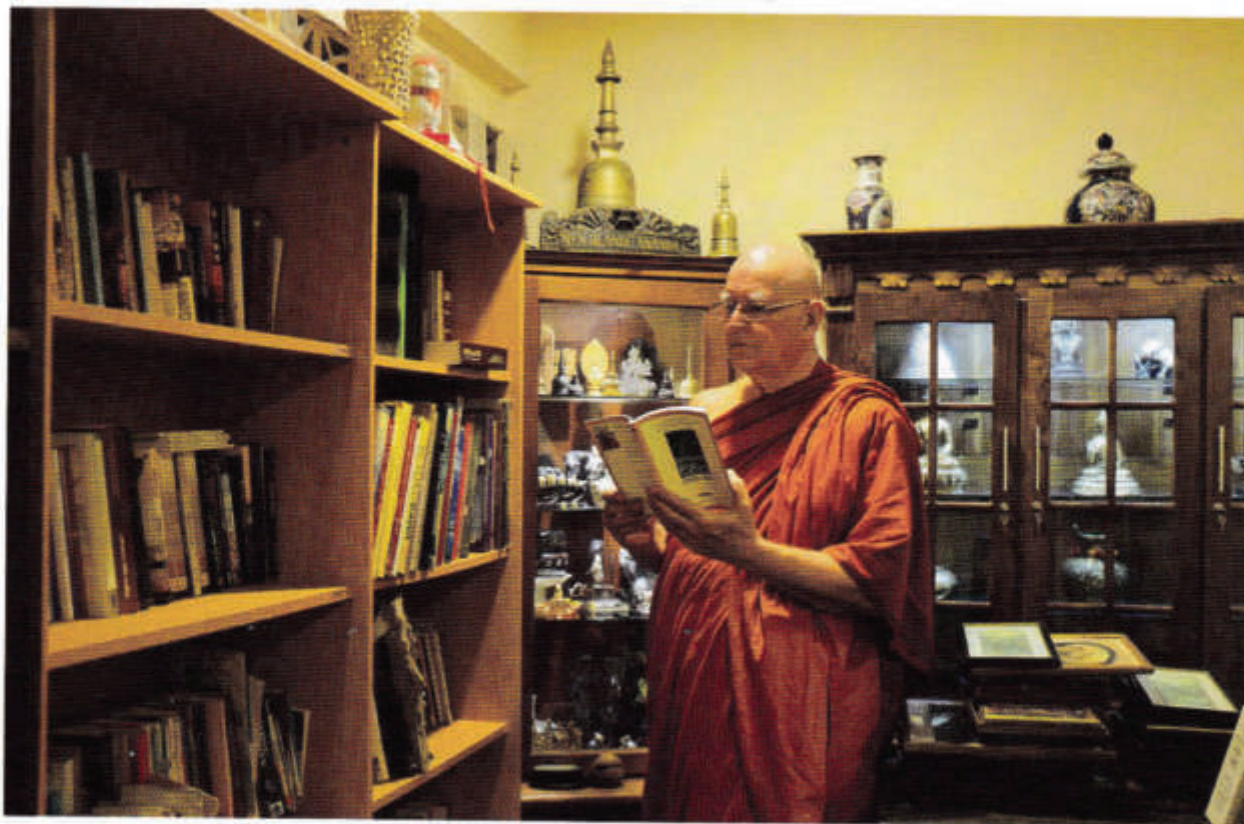
From day one after I became a monk, I was keen to learn Sinhala so that I could communicate with the local community. It didn't take long for me to realise that devoted as they are, the Sinhalese Buddhists were ever so keen to offer alms. Not only did they prepare so many tasty dishes in typical Sinhalese fashion (with a good dose of chillies and spices!), they expected the monks to partake of every dish. Otherwise they felt disappointed.

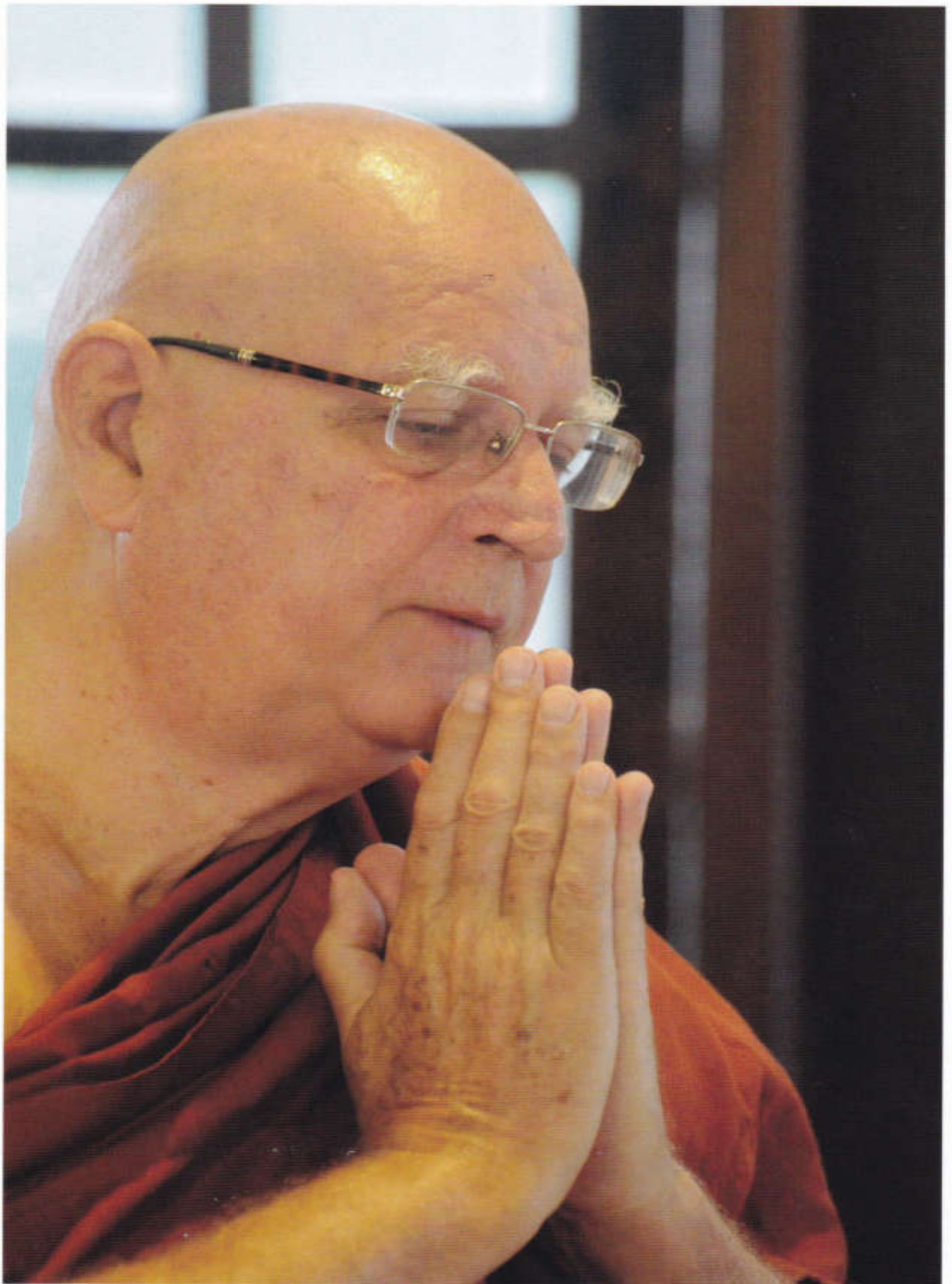
When we get invited for a 'dana' at a home, after the customary welcome by washing and wiping the feet, the family members, relations and well-wishers observe 'Pan Sil' – the Five Precepts - repeating each precept after a monk delivers each. The senior-most monk would then explain why alms were being offered (often it is to remember a close relation who has passed away or to celebrate a birthday or an anniversary) and elaborate on the merit gained by such generosity. Then water is offered to wash the hands and the alms-bowls we carry with us. A queue forms to serve the meal dish by dish and it's always quite a long one. Each person is keen to serve at least a spoonful from his or her dish. At the end it's quite a bowl-full.

I soon found the quantity they serve was far too much – so I first learnt to politely say '*athi*' (enough) to prevent them from serving too much. Not many listened to me!



While I picked up a few words while listening and talking to others, I also studied some simple books including what the renowned linguist, Professor J B Disanayaka had written. My guru, the Nayaka Thera taught me the alphabet and gradually I picked up writing too. I was keen not only to converse in Sinhala but preach the Dhamma in Sinhala. My keenness and determination made this possible and today I am quite confident in delivering a sermon at a temple or in a house, in Sinhala. Life becomes so much easier when one knows the language spoken by most people in a country. In fact, the '*dayakas*' also feel at ease when they meet me. I am happy I followed the Sri Lankan tradition of using the monk's place of birth ahead of the name given when he gets ordained. People also find it so convenient to say 'Olande Ananda' – the place of birth being the Sinhala version of 'Holland'. Otherwise, Ananda being a very popular monks' name, it would have been a problem identifying or addressing me. (The Sri Lankan monks use the name of the village or town they were born in.)





Once things settled down at First Cross Street and a building was constructed, my *guru hamuduruwo* also shifted and in 2002 I started a weekly class on meditation on Sunday afternoons and Tuesday evenings. A Dhamma school was also started in English particularly for the benefit of children going to international schools. The meditation classes were well attended and I found that many more were interested if classes were held at popular temples and other Buddhist institutions in the city. In 2004, a weekly class was started at Gangaramaya and four years later, one at Yamuna Buddhist Centre at Maya Avenue, Thimbirigasyaya. In 2011 the class was shifted to the newly-built Sambuddhatva Jayanthi Buddhist Cultural Centre at Tummulla junction and continues to this day. Special Poya programmes are held at the Pagoda Meditation Centre.

I deliver sermons over the radio and over the Buddhist TV Channel in Sinhala and English and participate in panel discussions held in English and Sinhala.



Poya Day program at the Pagoda Meditation Centre

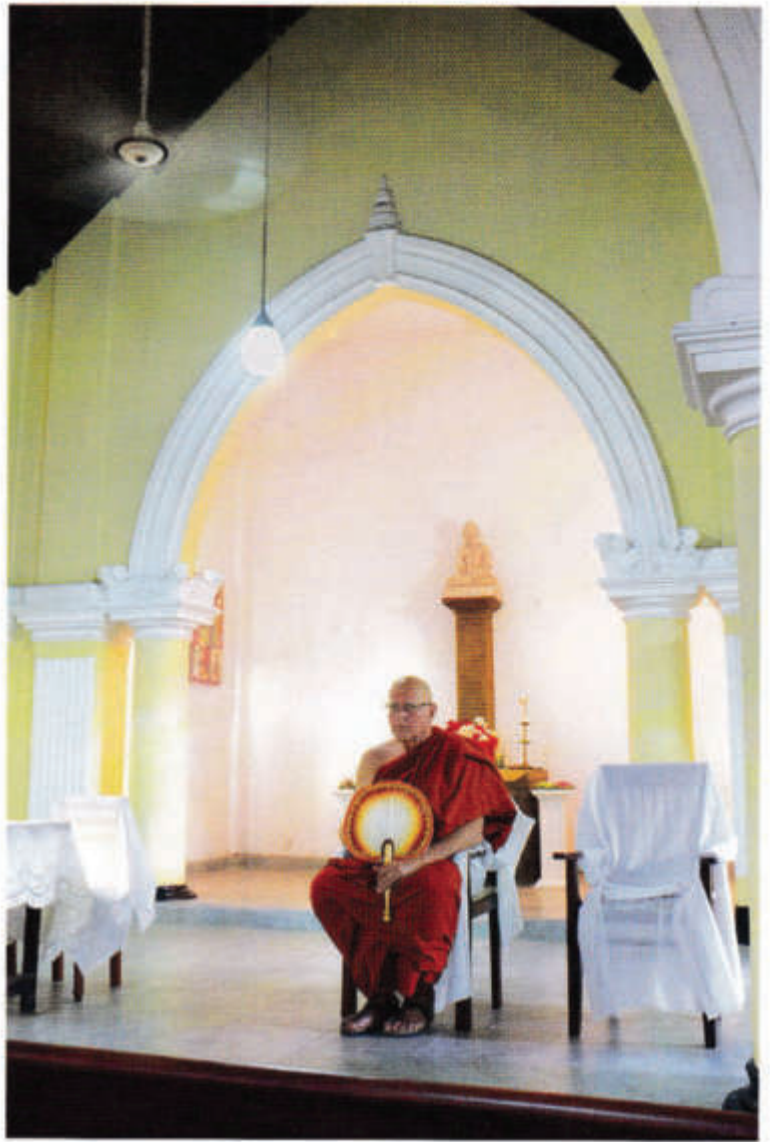




Meditation class at the
Sambuddatva Jayanthi
Buddhist Cultural Centre

Members of the 'Servants of the Buddha Society' (formed in the 1920s) meet every Saturday at the Maitri Hall, Lauries Road, Bambalapitiya (in the premises of Mettaramaya) to listen to a Dhamma Talk, meditate and discuss the Dhamma. Proceedings are conducted in English. I conduct meditation there every third Saturday of the month.

The close resemblance of the building to a Christian church makes one wonder how it came to be known as 'Maitri Hall' ('Maitri' being essentially a word used in Buddhism meaning 'Compassion') where Buddhists gather. It shows the British influence when Sri Lanka (then known as Ceylon) was a colony in the British Empire prior to the country gaining Independence in February 1948. To follow architectural features of the church was the fashion of the day.





Being mindful

Today all over the world there is a lot of interest in Meditation. To many Buddhism is Meditation. There are different types of meditation but those who have an interest in Buddhism find Mindfulness as a good start.

To be mindful is to be aware of what one is doing at the present moment. One should not have high expectations that one's mind can be trained to immediately be completely focussed on one single object without other thoughts creeping in. To start meditating one must sit down with mindfulness on what actually is. This means to experience one's body and feelings at the given moment in a relaxing way with mindfulness and relaxation at the same time.

I try to make it a simple exercise. One sits down and first becomes aware of the present moment – the fact that one is sitting at a particular place in a particular way – and start feeling the body from top to toe sitting there, and vice versa. Then the mind gets away from the tendency to go back to the past and to the future. The mind should only be on the present moment. You give your mind an object which is really there at that moment in time. The object is to make the body feel that you are sitting at that particular place. Next, you can start focusing on something that you are very much used to. The simplest thing is to observe your breath – the practice of breathing in and out. This form of meditation is called 'anaapana sati bhavana' – mindfulness of breath. Breathing is the 'object' to focus on, to stay with as much as possible, to return to when the mind starts wandering about, and also to become aware of all the objects your wandering mind takes you to, sounds and feelings. You should not think that they should not happen but must not get attached to them – just let them go.



Continuous practice makes it easier for you to stay with the chosen object. If your mind doesn't stay focussed it does not mean that you are failing in your meditation. The idea is to have the flexibility to be aware of other objects and to remain mindful or even-minded towards other objects which are to do with our own body, mind and sense objects.

Before starting '*aanaapana*', I prefer to start Guided Meditation by first creating the right environment for the meditators to settle down and then proceed to spread universal loving kindness – '*mettabhavana*' – to all beings– human, animal, the seen and the unseen, including oneself. After spreading loving kindness from your heart, your mind is then settled to concentrate on your breathing.

This is what is known as '*Samathabhavana*' – tranquillity meditation which, I believe, is a pre-requisite for the other form of meditation known as '*Vipassanabhavana*' – insight meditation

The practice of mindfulness leads to insights which give a real view of things as they really are – '*yathabhutanyaanadassana*' which the Buddha talks about – to see things as they really are. This helps us to uproot ignorance and delusion and gradually overcome the causes of suffering like greed and hatred..

The regulars who follow my guided meditation programmes have been consistently practising the way described above and are quite contented with the gradual progress made before venturing into deeper insights.



My Himalayan Connection

After my visit to Sathya Sai Baba's 59th Birthday celebrations in Puttaparti on 23 November 1984, I met a Station Manager of All India Radio who had spotted me there. We met at the Vegetarian Café of the Bangalore bus station. He was one Pillai. When he asked me where I was going and I said I was heading for Mysore, he said he knew of a nice Buddhist Centre in Mysore near the university swimming pool.

My stay in Mysore in the Indian state of Karnataka turned out to be the start of a long-lasting friendship with the Ladakhis who were staying there under the leadership of Ven. Sanghasena, then in his twenties, a disciple of Ven. Dr. Buddharakkhita, who was in charge of the Mahabodhi Centre in Bangalore.

As I had a terrible cold the boys at Mysore told me not to travel and they treated me with hot water baths, medicine and loving care. While visiting Taiwan a year later, I met Ven. Sanghasena again during a WBSC (World Buddhist Sangha Council) meeting in Taipei. We travelled together to Kaohsiung in the South and visited Fo Guang Shan Monastery and met Ven. Master Hsing Yun, Chinese Buddhist monk and founder of Fo Guan Shan movement. Ven. Sanghasena was very keen on getting Master Hsing Yun to visit the Himalayan kingdom of Ladakh, which happened in 1992. I was also there.

Actually, since the encounter with the Ladakhis, I visited Ladakh (part of Kashmir) ten times! Starting with the foundation stone ceremony of the Mahabodhi International Meditation Centre in June 1991 I paid yearly visits during which I used to teach meditation mostly to foreign tourists. Only twice I toured Ladakh, once with my friend Pala, who looked after me in 1984, and once around 2008 I took a smallish group of Sri Lankans for a trip to Ladakh and we saw a lot.

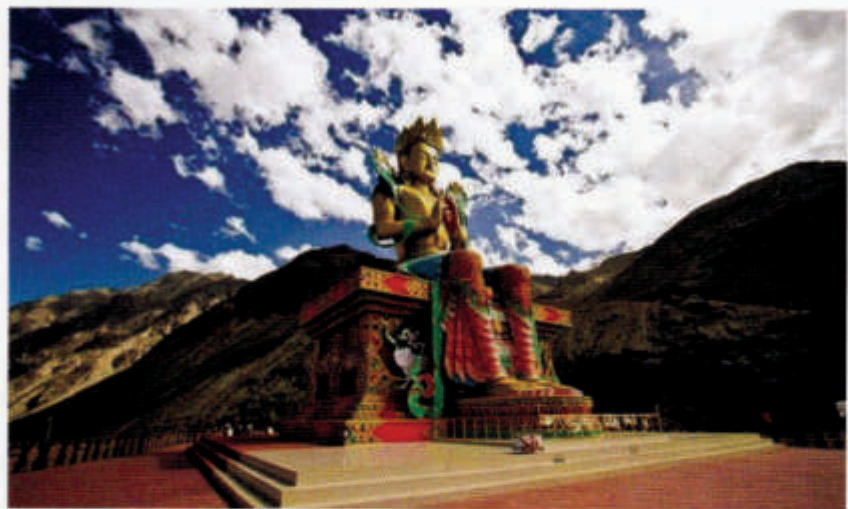
When visiting Mahabodhi Centre in Bangalore in 1991, we went to see a genuine clairvoyant Tibetan lady near the Sera Je Monastery in Bylakupe near Mysore. I asked her if she could see my previous lives. She saw me walking around a stupa holding a lotus in my hand in Kham province in Tibet and dying there in 1933.



Beauty of Ladakh



Shanti Stupa - Ladakh



Buddha Maitreya - Ladakh

During my second visit to Tibet, together with a Tibetan friend, we started from Chengdu in Sichuan Province, China, and went to Kham. While stopping over in Lihang, I had a *déjà vu* experience. We saw a temple on the hill and I wanted to go there. My friend, who was from Amdo, said he did not know how to get there. I said spontaneously: "I know" and showed him the way. To see it was the temple built by the great fifth Dalai Lama! On our next stop in Karze (mispronounced as Kanze), I had some very deep feelings and experiences while visiting temples and villages and the leftovers of hermitages, which brought tears to my eyes.

While in my guide's province Amdo, we visited his monastery, Labrang Gomba which has over 4000 monks, with different departments of Buddhist studies, the Sutras, the Vinaya, the Tantras and also astrology and traditional medicine.

We visited Kumbum Monastery, which was started by Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Yellow Hat Sect of Tibetan Buddhism, the Gelugpa, of which His Holiness the Dalai Lama is the head. We also managed to visit the house where HH was born, asking elderly monks and people at each junction how to get there. This was one of the highlights of my visit.



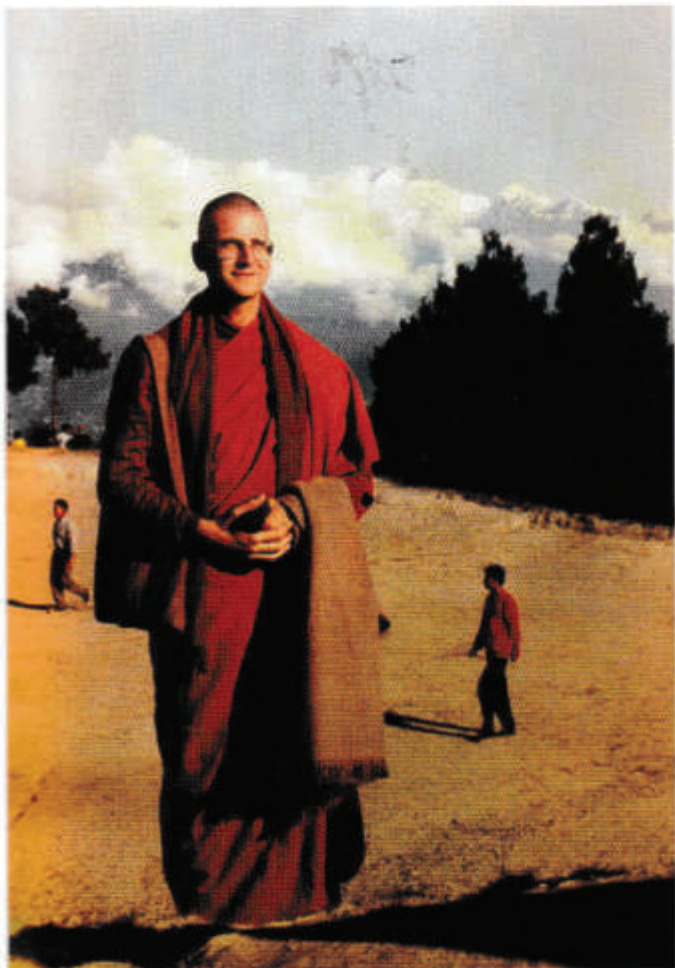
The tangkha is much more than a Scroll - Tibet

The first visit to Tibet was by air, together with a Vietnamese friend of mine. We had been travelling in China and Mongolia and had only four days to visit Lhasa and surroundings. It was still a breath-taking experience, both literally as well as figuratively!

The Khambo Lama of Mongolia, who had studied in Sri Lanka in the 1970s, became a friend of mine after meeting at one of the many international Buddhist conferences where we used to meet around the world. Once he invited me to Mongolia. I told him I had no idea how to get there. He assured me it was simple once one gets to Beijing, which I have done several times.

So, in 2006, with my Vietnamese friend Quang Chanh, I visited Ulan Baator and the Khambo Lama Dambajev and his Dashichoeling Monastery. He gave us VIP treatment. The following year I visited on my own and saw quite a bit around Ulan Baator. Mongolia had been under Soviet domination from the Stalin era until the collapse of communism in 1989 and became a free democratic country in 1990 with religious freedom.

Nepal, Sikkim, Darjeeling, Kalimpong were among the other places in and around the Himalayas I used to travel frequently. They were all very interesting places with a mixture of cultures, dialects, different forms of Tibetan Buddhism as well as Theravada Buddhism. There were also Nepali, Bengali, Tibetan and other Himalayan tribes such as the Rai, Tamang, Gurung and Sherpas.



In the last week of December 1999 and the first week of 2000 I conducted a meditation retreat in Darjeeling in Chota Kagjhora, run by a Theravada Sherpa monk, Dhammadhiroo. The participants consisted of Nepalese, Sherpas, Bengalis, Gurungs and even an Argentine lady. As a group we visited Salagura Stupa, in which the body of the late Kalu Rimpoche (1905-89), a Lama (venerated spiritual master), who was one of the first Tibetan masters to teach in the West, was preserved. The great Tai Situ Rimpoche was just finishing a four-day programme and was blessing the thousands of attendees. When we asked if we could have 10 minutes with him, he generously granted us at least 15-20 minutes. Only later we realised that it was the very time HH the Karmapa (head of the Karma Kagyu, one of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism) was fleeing from Tshurpu in Tibet to safety in India.





In Bhutan

In 2008 I felt like going to Bhutan. It was not me going to Bhutan but Bhutan coming to me!! I happened to see a TV documentary of the Dutch Crown prince to Bhutan, remembered the Bhutanese monks who used to visit our Pagoda temple in Nugegoda in the '70s. Then out of the blues, someone e-mailed me from Bhutan and said she can organise my trip. Dasho Sangye Wangchuk who studied in Sri Lanka then offered his help and there I was on my way to Bhutan, the last Shangrila (earthly paradise) in this world.

I was so lucky to discover that the King's son, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck was having his coronation as I was ending my visit. I have never seen such beautiful people dressed up in such colourful hand woven traditional clothes as the Bhutanese at that festive occasion! The country where King Jigme Singye, the fourth King came up with the concept of 'GNH - Gross National Happiness' and the first country in the world with a negative carbon footprint, although being quite traditional, is ahead of the rest of the world in sustainability.

My visits to the many monasteries and the great warmth with which I was received (I travelled with my old friend from Ladakh Pala Nawang Namgyal) made me feel quite at home. Visits to members of the Royal family and great Rinpoches and Tulkus, such as Minyak Tulku and the daughter of Dilgo Khyentse Rimpoche and a visit to the Reincarnation of Dujum Rimpoche left indelible impressions on my mind. The climb up to the famous Tiger's Nest (Taktsang Gompa), situated 2700 feet above the valley with a very steep climb up and down, left me speechless and full of gratitude, with eyes full of tears. Most probably I had spent a lifetime or two in Bhutan as I discovered a mask which looked at me straight into the eyes, with its three bulging eyes! I remembered that I used to draw that particular mask regularly as a small boy in my school days in Holland. And also the curly decorations on the pillars of monasteries and palaces in Bhutan, Tibet and China.

In China I have visited many Buddhist places, starting in 1989 on a trip with Taiwanese Buddhists. We visited Er Mei Shan in Sichuan Province. Later, during at least seven visits, I went to Er Mei Shan mountain which is the abode of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, the Le Shan Ta Fo (Happy Mountain Big Buddha- 71 metres tall, carved out of the mountainside), Wu Tai Shan (the Five Terraced Mountains) the abode of Manjushri Bodhisattva, with over 108 monasteries in the huge National Park about 350 kms SW of Beijing.

Dhamma activities abroad

In Germany I had especially good connections with the Buddha Haus in the Algaeu, created by Ayya Khema in 1989 and continued after her passing away in 1997 by her disciple Ven. Nyanabodhi. When I visited Ayya Khema June 1997 to assist in the *Upasampada* (Higher Ordination) of Ven. Nyanabodhi, she wanted me to come and teach as I could speak German fluently and my teachings were very similar to her style. From 1997 till 2010 I conducted a one-week meditation retreat every year in Buddha Haus in the beautiful surroundings in the rural countryside accompanied by the sound of the cow bells from the neighbouring farms.

During the same period I used to combine the Buddha Haus course with another at the Waldhaus meditation centre in Nickenich, in the Eiffel mountain area near a volcanic lake, not far from the River Rhine, South of Bonn. Our walking meditation periods also extended to walks in the beautiful nature nearby. I had visited this lovely centre in 1995 when Godwin Samararatne from Sri Lanka was teaching there.



The day I ordained Muditha Theresa at the Buddha Haus in Germany -
Ayya Khema's First Center



Ordaining a German layman at the
Metta Vihara Forest Monastery in Allgaeu - Germany



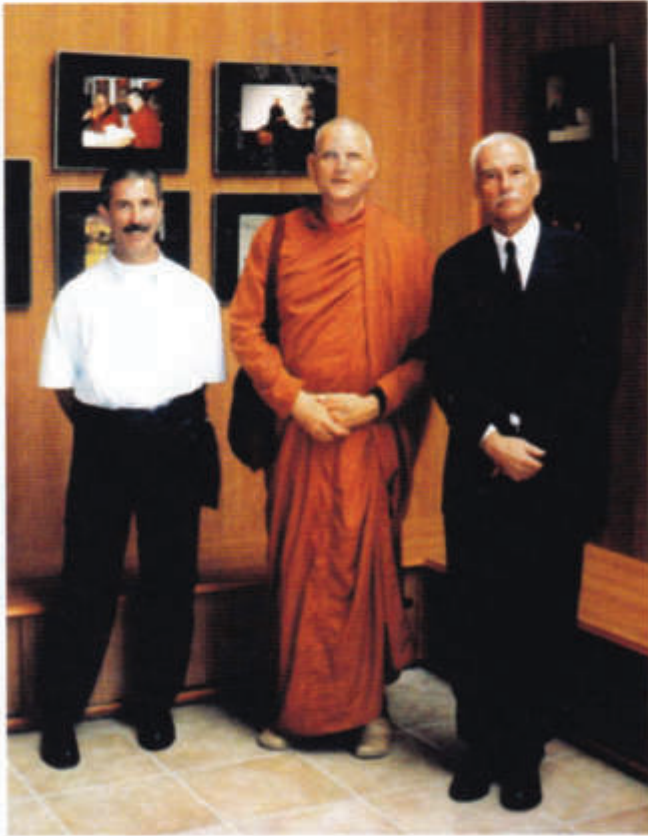
The Berlin Buddhist Vihara



In 1984 spent the 'Vas' (rains retreat) at Thames Buddhist Vihara - Ven. Somaratana, Ven. Horana Pannyasekera & Ven.Elle Chandawimala are also in the picture



At the Singapore Bright Hill Temple Quang Ming Shan around 1989



With Fritz Reg. the Sangha photographer from Munich
at the Nan Tien Temple, Wollangong, Australia



With Ajahn Yantra from Thailand at Bright Hill Temple
Singapore

I stayed and taught at the Berlin Buddhist Vihara (*Das Buddhistische Haus*) in 1987 & 1988 when I spent three months of 'Vas' there, the oldest Buddhist temple of Europe, built in 1924 by Dr Paul Dahlke.

During the Expo 2000 in Hannover, together with my German friend Heinz Roiger, I taught at the Vietnamese temple.

In France, in the beautiful Bourgogne area West of Geneva, East of Lyon, in the mountains is the wonderful Tibetan Buddhist Centre, called Karma Ling, set up by Lama Denys, who was asked by his guru, Kalu Rimpoche while traveling, to look for a place in that direction. They found an ancient Catholic Monastery, a Chartreuse, which was restored and added with a true Tibetan Stupa, blessed by HH the Dalai Lama. I was fortunate to have given some lectures there as well.

At the invitation of Sri Lankan Buddhists living abroad I have been to Buddhist temples in several countries including USA, Canada, Australia, England and France.

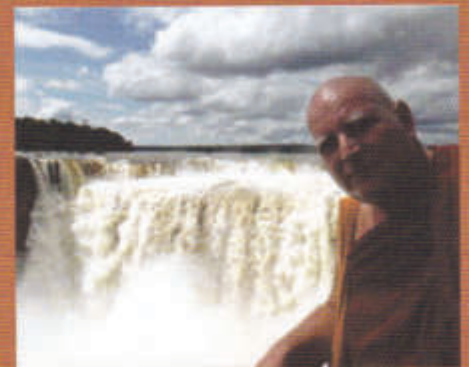
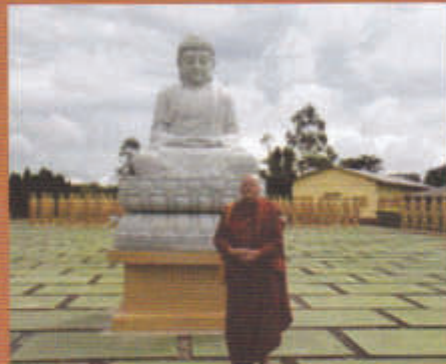
An invitation to South Africa took me there in December 1989 for over three months. Nelson Mandela came out of jail while we were meditating in Summerset West, not far from Cape Town. The Buddhist Meditation Centre in Ixopo (with the click sound!) invited me and also took me around other towns in South Africa and even sponsored my trip to Zimbabwe where we had a lovely mixed-race retreat at a white farm. I was also able to visit my oldest friend Peter Flik (remember, who was in Sri Lanka 1979-85 and was then the Secretary of the Netherlands Embassy in Harare).



With a group of meditators at the Dhammadipa centre in Amsterdam - April 2016

At Buddha Haus in the Allgau - Germany with two German Bhikkhunis one of whom I ordained in October 2000

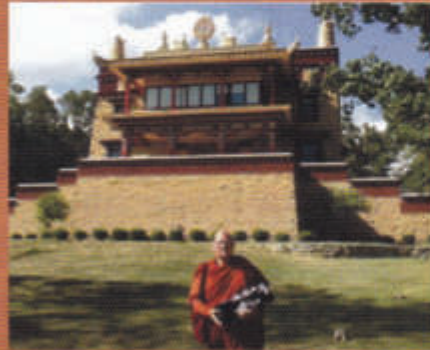
An old friend from University of Amsterdam, Bertil and his wife Jose attended my talk at the Brinkhuls - Laren



Chinese temple near Iguazu waterfalls - Brazilian state of Parana



Fo Guang Shan temple near Sao Paulo a major city in Brazil



With the Lama in charge of the Deer Park Tibetan Temple in Southern Wisconsin inaugurated by HH the Dalai Lama

With the Ola Leaf book presented by the Deer Park Temple Tibetan Lama



With Laotian monks at the Buddha Haksa temple in Waukesha, Wisconsin USA in 2013

'Pindapata' at Wat Buddha Haksa - 2012

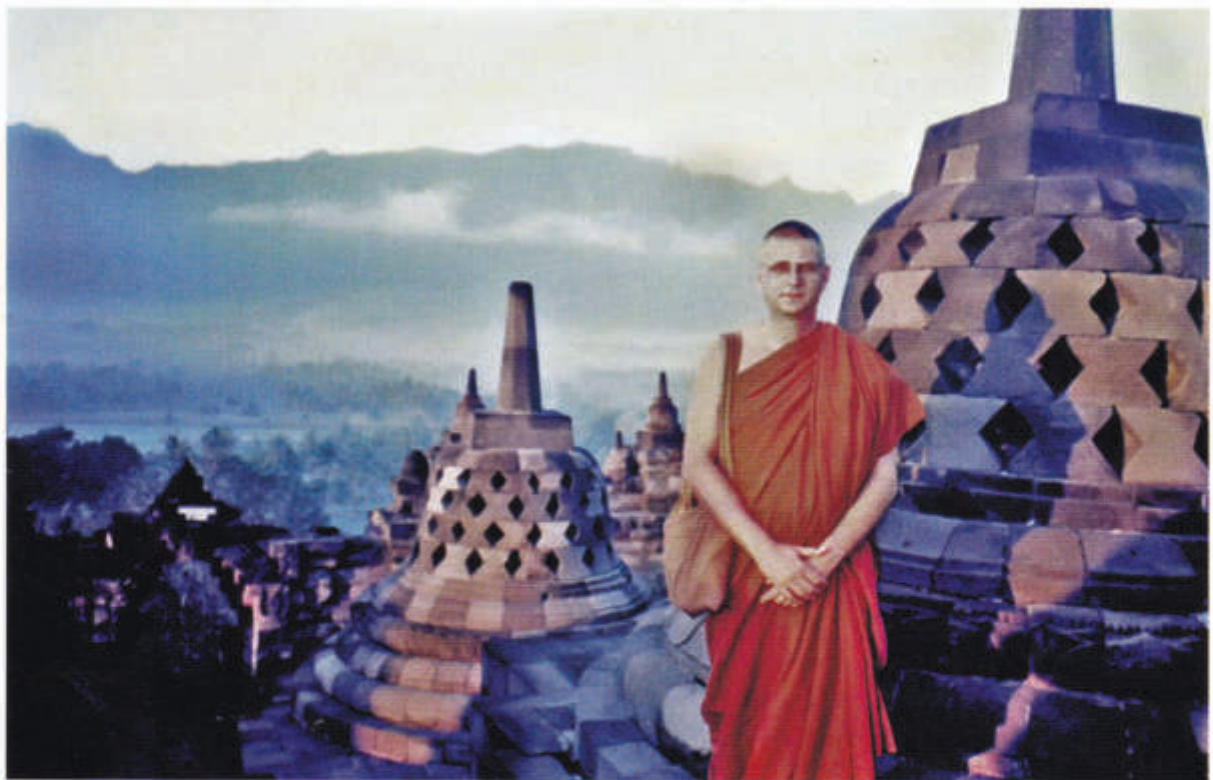
With Sri Lankan 'dayakas' at Wisconsin



Every time I went to and from Australia I made it a point to stop over in Bali, Indonesia, the 'Island of the Gods', with 90% Hindus and 10% Buddhists. I soon felt very much at home there. A number of Buddhist temples became my temporary shelters and my relations with the Balinese, mostly Chinese Balinese Buddhists grew steadily.

At the Borobudur Cetiya, the largest Buddhist monument in the world dating from the 9 and 10 centuries, in Central Java, I was able to attend a few Vesak celebrations when 50,000 Buddhists from all over Indonesia converge in Borobudur.

Around Vesak 1993 and 1995 I conducted two meditation courses titled 'At the foot of the Borobudur'. These were attended by around 20 persons from about five or six nationalities each time. We walked to Borobudur at 4.30 am, arrived at 5 am - one hour before the other tourists, and had the whole monument to ourselves to meditate while the sun slowly rose behind Mount Merapi, the world's most active volcano (since 1548). *'Sheer majic'!*

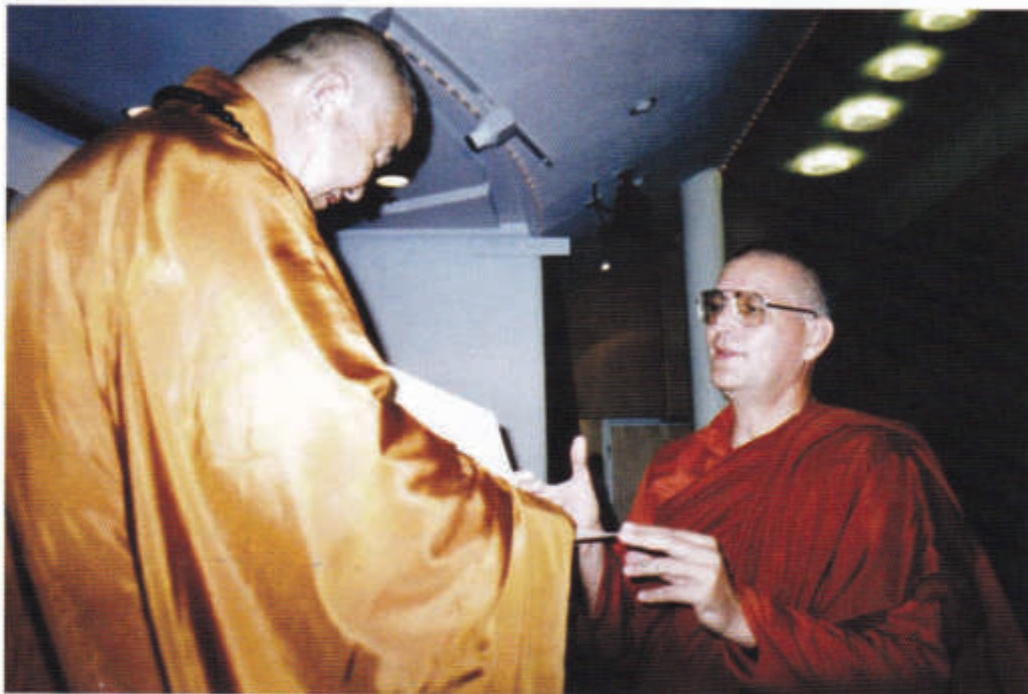




Opening of Vihara Buddhawamsa Singaraja - Bali - January 2008

My connections with Theravada/ Buddhayana/Mahayana Indonesia took me there on a number of subsequent visits. I gave a Dhamma talk during the *katina* week at the Ekayana temple in Jakarta. I attended the opening ceremony of a huge Mahayana Temple near Medan, North Sumatra, along with a meeting of the WBSC (World Buddhist Sangha Council) of which I am a member. The WBSC used to conduct meetings every two years and I used to attend them, mostly in Taipei but also in Hong Kong and other places.

Ven. Master Hsing Yun,
Founder of the BLIA
(Buddha's Light International
Association) with
300 temples around the world



Ven. Master Hsing Yun
giving me a certificate
for my service as the
Chairman of the non-Chinese
Speaking co-ordinating
committee

My connection with Taiwan goes back to 1987. So is my friendship with Ven. Ming Kwang who is now the President of the Chinese Buddhist Association in Taipei. He let me stay in his temple and participate in Buddhist Children's Summer Camps, where I first learnt my Chinese. Later I became involved with the Fo Guang Shan temple in Kaohsiung and temples around Taiwan and the world. I was made the Chairman of the non-Chinese speaking Coordinating Committee and a director of the International Board of Directors. Fortunately it entailed mostly just attending some meetings and opening ceremonies of temples like the Nan Tien Si in Wollongong, Australia and the Nan Fei Si in Bronkhorstspruyt near Johannesburg.

The list goes on, but let me just count the countries that I have visited as a monk since 1978:

Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bhutan, Brazil, Canada (all over), China (many places), Czech Republic, Denmark, Dubai, England, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Holland, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar (earlier Burma), Nepal, New Zealand, Oman, Philippines, Qatar, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, Switzerland, Sweden, Taiwan, Thailand, Tibet, USA (all over), Vietnam & Zimbabwe.



During my travels abroad I have met numerous religious and other leaders in different parts of the world. Among such memorable meetings was my encounter with His Holiness Dalai Lama at the India International Centre, New Delhi around the year 2000.





He guided me to be where I am

On a certain day in May 1975 a young man dressed smartly in white attire, by the name of Rudy Stammelburg came to see me. I saw him and I had a feeling that he is nobody else but a son of mine from a previous life had come back to me. My eyes were filled with tears. My heart melted due to the affection.

These were words uttered by my '*guru hamuduruwo*' - the Most Venerable Agga Maha Pandita Davuldena Gnanissara Mahanayaka Thera when my parents met him during their visit to Sri Lanka to participate in my Higher Ordination ceremony in 1977. He was referring to the day I first met him after arriving in Sri Lanka.

I recall his words as I look back at his illustrious career as a highly scholarly monk who led a full life in the service of the Sasana and passed away in his 102nd year on 3 April 2017. He was then functioning as the Supreme Patriarch of the Amarapura Nikaya— one of the three main sects of the Buddhist clergy in Sri Lanka. This high office was created following a meeting of erudite monks of the Nikaya in the early 1950s to discuss the need for unity among the 21 sub-sects of the Nikaya, particularly relating to national issues when the Maha Sangha's views are sought by the Government or the Nikaya as a whole had to have a consensus on a particular matter.

The Mahanayaka Thera was recognised as one of the foremost Pali and Sanskrit scholars and right up to his passing away he was quite clear in his thinking and had a perfect memory. The titles awarded in recognition of his knowledge and scholarship are quite a handful.

Hailing from the village of Davuldena in Uva Paranagama in the hilly Welimada area, he had got ordained at the age of 12. His father, Aloka Mudiyansele Kavurala and mother Gajanayake Mudiyansele Kirimenike brought up eleven children, three of whom died early. As a monk he had his education at Vidyodaya Pirivena, the first Buddhist educational institution in Colombo started at a time when the Buddhists in the city were being harassed by the non-Buddhist forces prevalent in the country after the British took over the administration of the whole country after annexing the Kandyan kingdom in 1815. They allowed Christian missionaries to come over and spread their faiths and to set up schools.

A few leading Buddhists in Colombo invited the scholar-monk Hikkakduwe Sri Sumanangala Nayaka Thera from South Sri Lanka to set up an institution to provide education in Buddhist subjects to the clergy and the laity giving priority to the former. It was set up at Maligakanda in Maradana and was opened in December 1873 with seven students. It soon began to flourish with the clergy joining the institution for their studies.

After completing his studies, Davuldena Gnanissara Thera taught in a number of Buddhist institutions including the Pirivena he studied in, Sri Vajiranana Dharmayathanaya – the Buddhist Training Centre at Maharagama, Gangaramaya at Hunupitiya and Bhuvanekaba Pirivena at Gampola.

He belonged to the Udarata Amarapura Samagri Sangha Sabha where his knowledge of the Dhamma was recognised and he was elevated as a Nayaka Thera to be followed by being appointed as the Mahanayaka Thera to head the Nikaya. After the passing away of the Most Venerable Madihe Pannasiha Mahanayaka Thera he was selected as the Supreme Patriarch of the Amarapura Nikaya.

The Mahanayaka Thera was well versed in several languages and has authored many books. He travelled widely attending Buddhist conferences and seminars as well as on personal invitations to numerous Buddhist functions. Once he taught Buddhism in Taiwan for several years from 1988 - 1994.

As mentioned earlier, when I first met him he offered me to stay at his Pagoda temple as long as I liked and allowed me to go to the Kanduboda meditation centre to learn the Dhamma and practise meditation. He was keen to teach me Pali which he said one should know to understand Buddhism. I did not entirely agree with him and did not pursue the idea. However, I learnt Pali from text books.

I am deeply grateful for the interest he took in guiding me to lead the life of a Buddhist monk, ordain me first as a novice monk, and later preparing the path for my higher ordination.

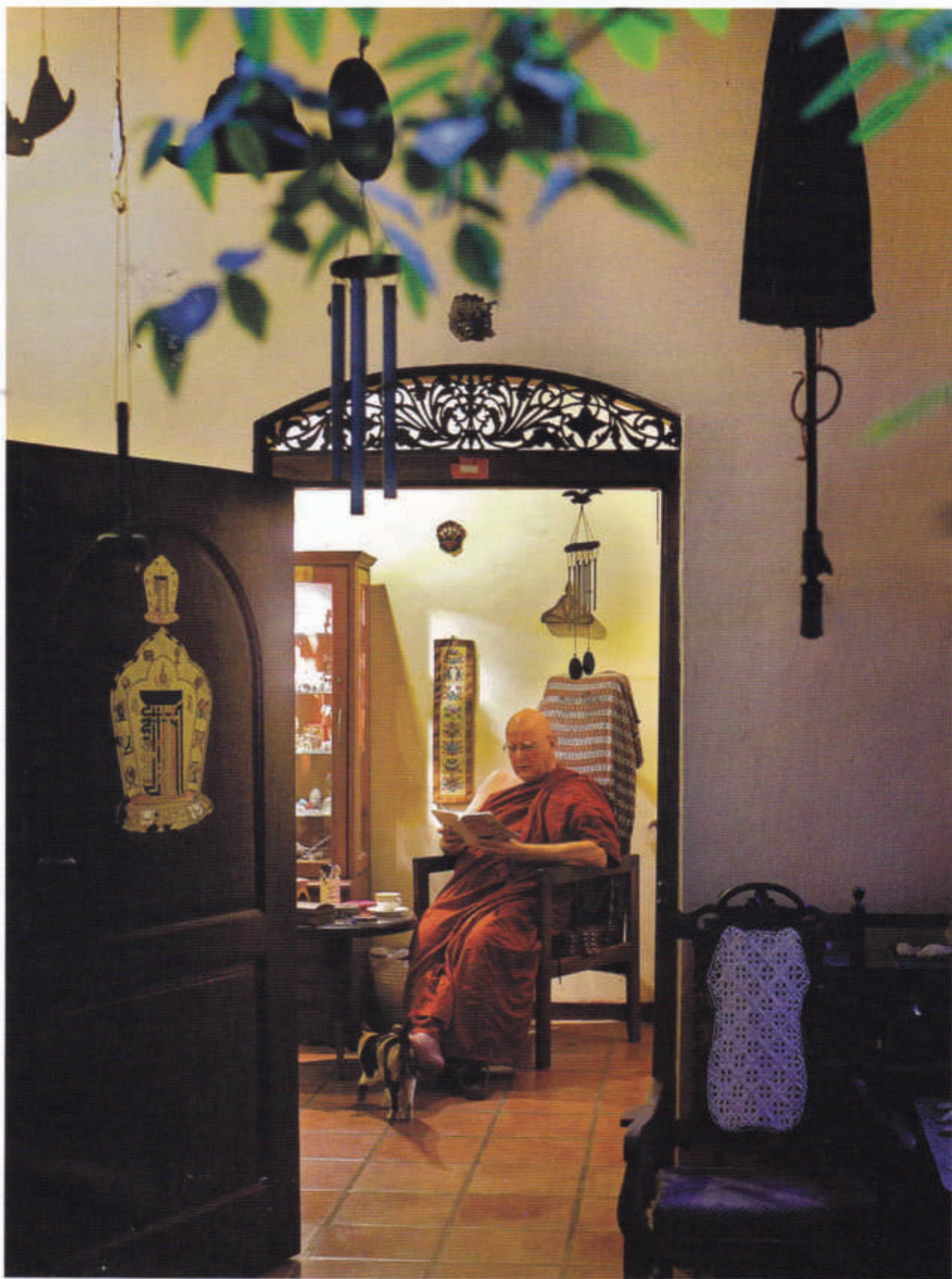
I wish to recognise Venerable Kahatapitiye Sumathipala Nayaka Thera and Venerable Katukele Seevali of the Kanduboda Centre as my spiritual teachers. I was quite impressed with the psychic powers of Venerable Seevali who could read someone's mind and foresee when someone was coming to see him as to why he was coming.

Davuldena Gnanissara Mahanayaka Thera always gladly welcomed and accepted me whenever I returned after long sojourns either in foreign countries or at other abodes in Sri Lanka. I am deeply grateful for the interest he took in guiding me to lead the life of a Buddhist monk, ordain me first as a novice monk, and later preparing the path for my higher ordination.



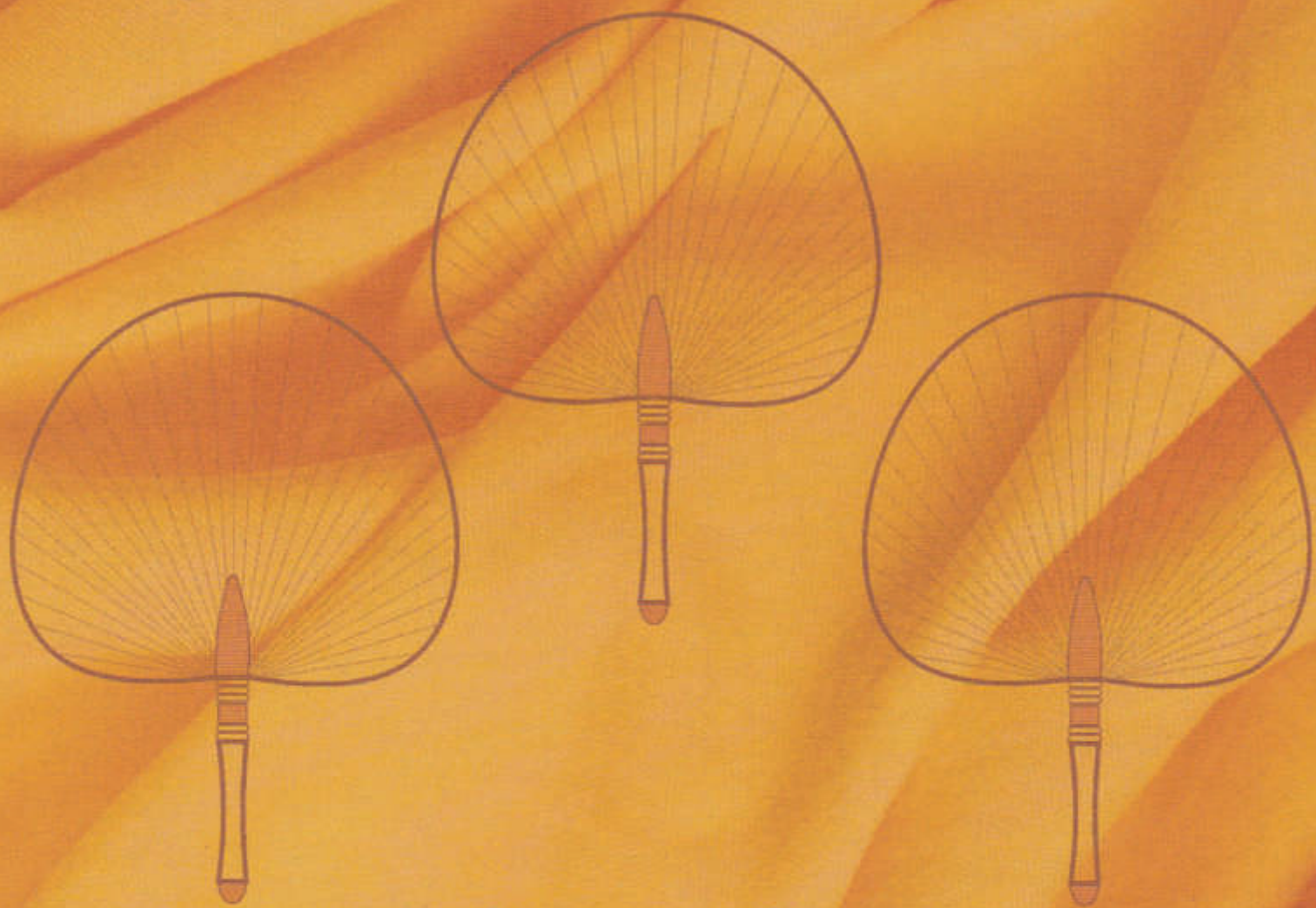
The monk who abides
in universal love and is deeply devoted
to the Teaching of Buddha
attains the peace of Nibbana,
the bliss of the cessation
of all conditioned things

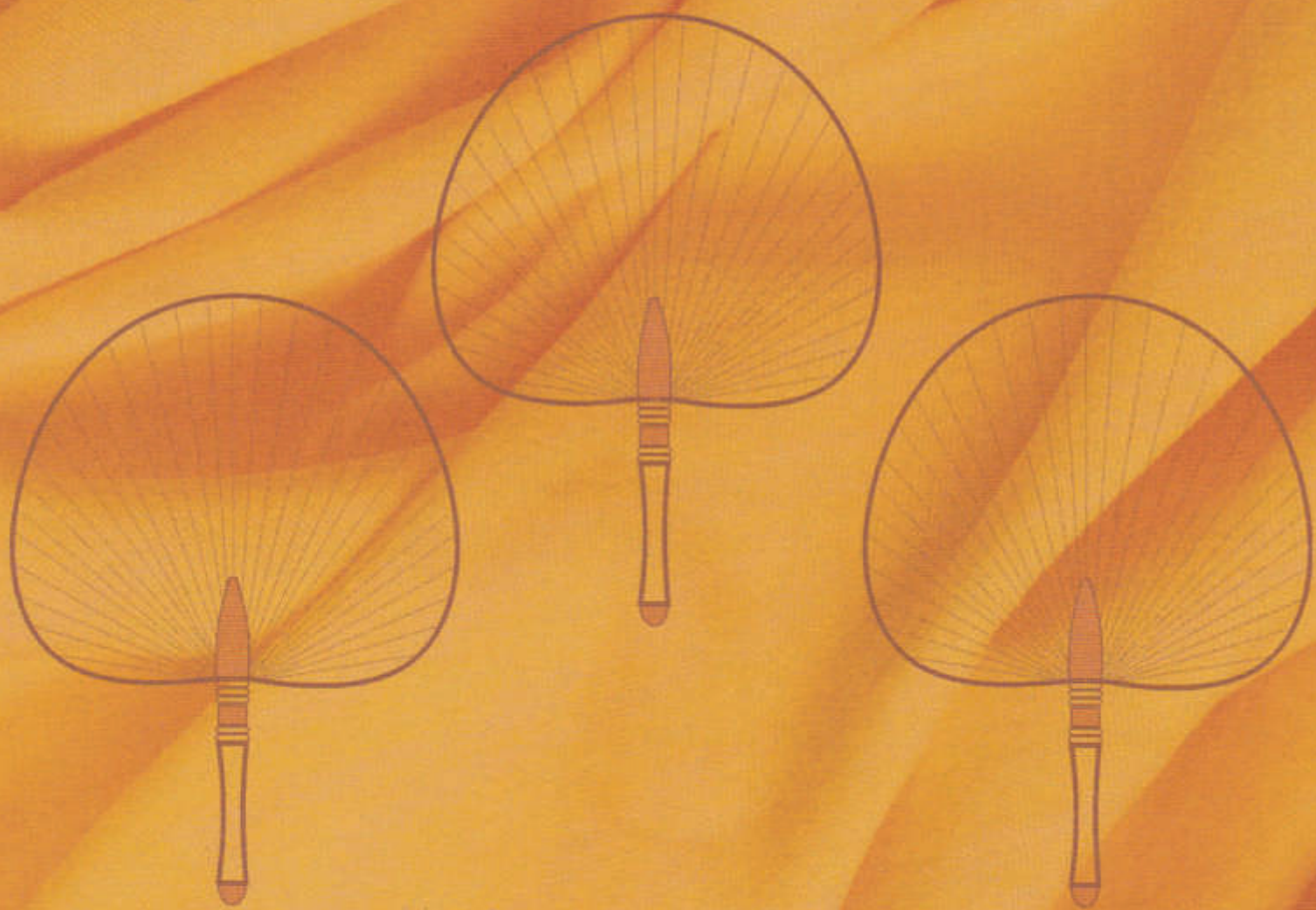
The Monk - DHAMMAPADA














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