



Buddhist Publication Society

Newsletter

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For the Welfare of Many

In the hour before dawn on Wednesday, 19th October 1994, our esteemed Founding-President and Patron, Venerable Nyanaponika Mahathera, passed away peacefully at his residence, the Forest Hermitage in the Udawattakele Reserve, Kandy. His death took place on the last day of the Vassa, the annual rains retreat observed by Buddhist monks since the days of the Buddha, in the quiet of the forest he loved so much, before the screeching of the fruit bats and the chatter of the monkeys could herald the approach of dawn. Three months earlier Ven. Nyanaponika had celebrated his 93rd birthday, frail but still in remarkably good health for his advanced age. In late August, however, the wheel of ageing accelerated rapidly, ushering in a combination of illnesses that ended two months later in his demise.

The passing away of Ven. Nyanaponika marks the end of an era, both in the annals of the Western encounter with Buddhism and in the history of the BPS. Among Western Buddhists he was perhaps the last survivor of what might be called the “second generation” of pioneers, comprising those who forged their initial contacts with the Dhamma during the 1920s and 1930s. Ordained as a pupil of the illustrious German elder Ven. Nyanatiloka Mahathera in 1936, Ven. Nyanaponika was for decades the seniormost Theravada Buddhist monk of Western origin in the world. On the day of his death he had just completed his 57th rains as a member of the Sangha. He was also one of the four “Great Mentors, Ornaments of the Teaching” (*maha mahopadhyaya sasanasobhana*) in the Amarapura Nikāya, the monastic fraternity to which he belonged.

Through his own writings and in his editorship of the BPS, Ven. Nyanaponika played a momentous role in shaping the expression of Theravada Buddhism appropriate for the latter half of the twentieth century. Gifted with keen intelligence, a profound grasp of the Dhamma, and extraordinary sensitivity to the needs of his fellow human beings, he endeavoured both in his personal writings and in his publication policy to articulate a vision of the Buddha’s teachings that underscored its crucial relevance to humanity in the present age. The early decades of the century provided the background to this vision. In his own mature years he had witnessed two world wars (one involving the mass extermination of his own ancestral people, the European Jews), countless small-scale social conflicts, and the breakdown of existential meaning in the lives of so many thoughtful, well-intentioned people. Against this background he constantly sought to emphasise, from different angles, those aspects of the Buddha’s teachings that speak most directly and meaningfully to men and women earnestly searching for clear spiritual direction. His writings, though sparse and compact in expression, constitute a veritable “Guide for the Perplexed” in this age of confusion when it often seems that the only alternative to rampant materialism and religious fundamentalism is the bewildering potpourri of cults and fads that make up the spiritual supermarket.

Ven. Nyanaponika did not pursue his aim of sharing the Dhamma by sweetening and diluting the original doctrine in order to make it more palatable. His interpretations of the Dhamma always flowed from a clear personal discernment of its innermost essence—the Four Noble Truths and the three characteristics, and were built upon a solid respect for the commentarial tradition that has come down from the ancient elders. He based his writings, not

only upon sound and thorough scholarship, but also upon a penetrative understanding of the human condition rooted in a deep sympathy with his fellow human beings. Hence his books and essays go far beyond the repetition of stale, stereotyped formulations of the teaching. They refract the Dhamma through the prism of a highly astute Western mind shaped by the best qualities of the European intellectual heritage, presenting it in a way intended to teach, to transform, and to edify his readers at the very core of their being. His appreciation of the Buddha's teachings was as comprehensive as it was profound, as vitally direct as it was systematic and orderly. In his view the Dhamma offers a sublime ethics that can provide a psychological basis for morality in place of a theological one. He found the teaching fully acceptable to the most critical demands of rational thought, yet capable of providing sustenance for the nourishment of our emotional life, so badly impoverished by scientific objectivism and economic consumerism. Above all, he stressed the importance of self-knowledge and inner self-transformation and the role of Buddhist meditation as a means for knowing, developing, and liberating the mind. His book, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, translated into seven languages, still remains today, after 33 years, the clearest, most thorough, and most convincing contemporary account of the Buddha's way of mindfulness.

The supreme expression of Ven. Nyanaponika's endeavour to share the Dhamma with others was his commitment to the work of the BPS, which he helped to found and served as its first Secretary, first President, and long-time Editor. From the inception of the BPS in 1958, Ven. Nyanaponika dedicated himself completely to the work of the Society. During the first three years of its life, in fact, the Society was quartered entirely in his study at the Forest Hermitage. During this period he himself personally shouldered a large portion of the routine paperwork, though he soon divested himself of this when Richard Abeyasekera assumed the position of General Secretary, leaving him more time to attend to the editorial side.

As Editor, he carefully examined every manuscript to ensure that BPS publications accurately reflect the spirit of the original Buddhist teachings. It was above all his sagacious guidance, his overflowing compassion, and his dedication to the Dhamma that transformed the BPS into a major Buddhist publisher bringing the teachings of the Buddha to over eighty countries around the world. Even after his retirement from the editorship (in 1984) and from the presidency (in 1988), as our Patron he continued to take an active interest in the Society's development. We always apprised him of any important decision or line of policy that required consideration, and he was always ready to offer his wise advice.

On a personal note I must state that with the passing of Ven. Nyanaponika I have lost my life's closest friend, my teacher and spiritual guide. The last ten years, during which I had the privilege to live with him and to look after him at the Forest Hermitage, were indeed a blessing hard to encounter in the round of rebirths. Yet, although we shall miss his wise and loving presence, his subtle humour and sympathetic counsel, it is not sorrow and grief that we should feel at his parting, but rather a serene joy over a noble character that embodied the most worthy human traits, and immense gratitude for a life supremely well lived for the welfare and happiness of many. By the vast merits of his life's achievements, may Ven. Nyanaponika be able to pursue his aspiration unhindered in future existences and may he attain the supreme bliss of Nibbāna.

—Bhikkhu Bodhi

A commemorative booklet in honour of Ven. Nyanaponika will be issued with the next BPS mailing.

Last Wishes of Ven. Nyanaponika Mahathera (found in his Final Dispositions)

My thoughts of gratitude go:

- To all my kind supporters and friends, for the help and encouragement given to me throughout my life as a monk. May their lives be happy and lead them closer to their aspiration and to the final attainment of Nibbāna.
- To all at the Buddhist Publication Society, for their dedicated co-operation. May the merit they have acquired by devotedly helping to give the gift of Dhamma to the world bring them happiness here and hereafter and be an aid to them on the path to deliverance and its attainment!

May the work of the Buddhist Publication Society continue and grow for a long time to come, and bestow the precious gift of the Dhamma on Sri Lanka and on many other lands!

May the Buddha-Sasana in its purity be preserved for long in a peaceful and prosperous Sri Lanka and may the inner strength of the Sasana grow in this country, to which I feel a deep sense of gratitude.

With thoughts of mettā,
Nyanaponika Mahathera

Publications

Recent Releases

- *The Pali Literature of Ceylon*. G.P. Malalasekera. This is a reprint of an old classic by the doyen of Sri Lanka's Oriental scholars, originally issued in 1928 as a Prize Publication by the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland. In a little more than 300 pages, the author admirably surveys Sri Lanka's rich legacy of Pali Buddhist literature, from the earliest period down to the present century. More than a mere catalogue of works and authors, this book is a gracefully written history of Sri Lankan Buddhism as reflected in its Pali literary heritage.

Softback: 350 pages 140 mm x 214 mm
U.S. \$15.00; SL Rs. 350. Order No. BP 610S

- *Fundamentals of Buddhism*. Nyanatiloka Mahathera. A Wheel publication comprising four lectures by the eminent German Buddhist scholar-monk: on the Four Noble Truths, kamma and rebirth, dependent origination, and meditation.

88 pages. U.S. \$3.00; SL Rs. 75. Order No. Wh 394-96.

- *Violence and Disruption in Society*. Elizabeth J. Harris. In this Wheel booklet the author makes a penetrative examination of the Early Buddhist texts to uncover their approach to the problem of violence in society and their suggestions for resolving the moral dilemmas raised by violence in our own time.

64 pages. U.S. \$2.50; SL Rs. 60. Order No. Wh 392/393.

- *The Vision of Dhamma*. Nyanaponika Thera. This outstanding one-volume collection of our late co-founder's writings from the Wheel and Bodhi Leaves series offers one of the most mature and authoritative contemporary expressions of Theravada Buddhism. Contains: The Worn-Out Skin; The Power of Mindfulness; The Roots of Good & Evil; Anatta & Nibbāna;

and more. "The writings of Nyanaponika Thera are a 'Guide for the Perplexed' in the last quarter of this century" (Erich Fromm). Not for sale in U.S.A.

Softback: 368 pages 140 mm x 214 mm
U.S. \$16.00; SL Rs. 350. Order No. BP 4145 A

- *Pali-English Glossary of Buddhist Technical Terms*. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli. This compilation by the well-known British scholar-monk contains close to 3,000 entries of Pali philosophical and psychological terms, as well as words and word-meanings not in the PTS Dictionary: with meanings, textual references, enumerations, etc.

Softback: 176 pages 124 mm x 182 mm
U.S. \$8.00; SL Rs. 250. Order No. BP 608S

Back in Print

- *The Progress of Insight*. Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw. In this booklet the great Burmese meditation master charts the entire "way of mindfulness" up to its culmination. His treatise emphasises the advanced stages of the path, showing in great clarity their distinctive features as they become manifest in the course of actual meditative practice.

Softback: 64 pages 124 mm x 182 mm
U.S. \$3.00; SL Rs. 75. Order No. BP 504S

- *The Noble Eightfold Path: Way to the End of Suffering*. Bhikkhu Bodhi. A concise, clear, and thorough account of the Buddha's Eightfold Path. The author explains each path factor from the angle of both theory and practice, with a final chapter showing how the eight factors function in unison to bring realisation of the Buddhist goal.

Softback: 144 pages 124 mm x 182 mm
U.S. \$5.00 ; SL Rs. 150. Order No. BP 1055

- *Buddhist Meditation & Depth Psychology*. Douglas M. Burns. This Wheel publication forms a practical introduction to Theravada Buddhist meditation, written from a psychological orientation.

72 pages. U.S. \$3.00; SL Rs. 75. Order No. Wh 88/89.

In Preparation

- *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*. Original translation by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli; revised and edited by Bhikkhu Bodhi. This book offers a complete translation of the Majjhima Nikāya, a collection of 152 discourses of the Buddha, many of them among the most important in the Pali Canon. The book is produced as a high-quality hardback, 3 volumes in one, with notes, glossary, indexes. Available by March 1995; advance orders are accepted. For sale in Asia only. (In the Americas, Europe, and Australia available through Wisdom Publications, Boston.)

Hardback: 1,420 pages 160 mm x 235 mm
U.S. \$50.00; SL Rs. 2,400. Order No. BP 218H

- *The Great Discourse on Causation: The Mahanidana Suttanta & Its Commentaries*. Translated from the Pali by Bhikkhu Bodhi. Reprint; planned for early 1995.
- *The Seven Contemplations of Insight*. Ven. Matara Sri Ñāṇarama Mahathera. This is a profound examination of the "seven contemplations" of classical Buddhism and of the actual way they

are experienced in the course of meditation. By one of Sri Lanka's foremost meditation masters of recent times. Planned for mid-1995.

- *Great Disciples of the Buddha*. Ven. Nyanaponika Thera & Hellmuth Hecker. This volume will combine all past issues of our Wheel titles in the "Lives of the Disciples" series. Planned for mid-1995.
- *A Short History of Buddhism in Myanmar*. Roger Bischoff. For the Wheel series, 1995.
- *Buddhist Ceremonies and Rituals of Sri Lanka*. A.G.S. Kariyawasam. For the Wheel series, 1995.
- *Nibbāna as Living Experience*. Lily de Silva. For the Wheel series, 1995.

Correction

The book *Being Nobody, Going Nowhere* by Ayya Khema, priced at Rs. 300 in the last newsletter, had to be re-priced at Rs. 350. The former price was the result of a miscalculation.

Notes and News

Dhamma Dana Project

On 21st July, the BPS simultaneously celebrated three joyful events. One was the 93rd birthday of our Patron, Ven. Nyanaponika Mahathera. The second, scheduled to coincide with this event, was the release of the BPS edition of *The Vision of Dhamma* (see Publications above). And the third was the launching of the BPS's Dhamma Dana Project, a scheme to send gift copies of our major book publications to Buddhist centres, viharas, and libraries around the world. On the morning of 21st July, the BPS staff and friends gathered at the Forest Hermitage to wish Ven. Nyanaponika a happy birthday. Our printer, Mr. M.W. Karunaratne, arrived from Colombo to present the Mahathera with the first copies of *The Vision of Dhamma*, a beautifully produced felicitation volume to honour one of the great exponents of the Dhamma in our time. Appropriately for this occasion, we began the Dhamma Dana scheme with *The Vision of Dhamma*, sending copies to some 120 Buddhist centres, both locally and overseas.

(Note: After the death of Ven. Nyanaponika, the BPS has decided to rename the Dhamma Dana Project after him as the Nyanaponika Dhamma Dana Project.)

BPS Maligawa Display

On 7th October the BPS formally opened a small book display unit at the Dalada Maligawa, the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic in Kandy. The purpose of the display is to make known to the many visitors to the Maligawa, who include a large number of foreign tourists, the existence of our own Society just one kilometre further down alongside the Kandy Lake. In a short talk to the Kandyan dignitaries and well-wishers who assembled for the occasion, Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi pointed out that the Maligawa and the BPS share a common goal in the preservation and protection of the Buddha Sasana. He explained that the Maligawa is concerned primarily with the preservation of the Buddha's "form body," as represented by the precious Tooth Relic, while the BPS is dedicated to preserving the Buddha's "Dhamma body," the collection of his teachings.

1995 Subscriptions

We wish to remind our subscriber members to renew their BPS subscriptions for 1995. Owing to the increasing costs of printing and paper, as well as other overheads, we are reluctantly compelled to increase our local subscription rates to:

- Rs. 200 per year for full subscription;
- Rs. 100 per year for Damsaks-only subscription;
- Rs. 2,000 for life membership.

As overseas subscription rates are still sufficient to cover production and mailing costs, these will remain the same:

- U.S. \$15 (or £10) for sea mail delivery;
- U.S. \$25 (or £15) for air mail delivery;
- U.S. \$300 (or £200) for life membership (air mail only).

Bound Volumes

As the cost of reprints included in our latest bound volumes of *The Wheel* and *Bodhi Leaves* has increased substantially, we are no longer able to maintain the uniform selling price in respect of these volumes as given in our 1993–94 catalogue. This factor, coupled with the increase in other overheads, requires us to fix the prices of the bound volumes on an individual basis.

Please Help Us

Although our Society has long been a leading publisher in the field of Theravada Buddhism, we feel that enormous scope remains for increasing our membership and for expanding our range of distribution. We appeal to our present members, both in Sri Lanka and abroad: please make a sincere and methodical effort to encourage friends and acquaintances with an interest in Buddhism to join our Society and to purchase our publications. We will be happy to supply enrolment forms to those who wish to solicit memberships; folders, flyers, and catalogues to those who want to stimulate an interest in our books. We also appeal to Buddhist centres and viharas overseas: please carry a stock of our folders and catalogues that can be easily made available to your members and visitors. The success of our work depends largely on maintaining an active, dedicated body of associate members and in increasing the sales of our books. Without your wholehearted co-operation in this endeavour we will not be able to reach potential readers who at present know little or nothing about the BPS. If you can think of other ways in which you might be able to help us, please let us know your ideas.

Buddhist Monastic Code

The Buddhist Monastic Code is a handsomely produced book of 570 pages containing a translation of the Patimokkha, the training rules of the Buddhist monk, with detailed explanations of all the rules, by the American bhikkhu Ven. Thanissaro. A free copy of this book—the product of over five years of painstaking scholarship—will be sent to any inquirer upon request; a donation to cover the cost of postage and packing for the book, which weighs almost 2 lbs. with wrapping, would be appreciated. To obtain a copy write to: Buddhist Monastic Code, Metta Forest Monastery, P.O. Box 1409, Valley Centre, CA 92082, U.S.A.

Guidelines to Sutta Study

In the last instalment of this series of guidelines on the Kandaraka Sutta (MN 51) we saw that the first major sphere of training undertaken by the bhikkhu is restraint by morality (*sīlasaṃvara*). This phase of training is expressed in the sutta by the undertaking of principles of conduct that enjoin both the abstinence from unworthy modes of behaviour and the active exercise of the opposing virtues. The Kandaraka Sutta (and many other suttas of this type) do not refer to the Patimokkha—the more technical codification of monastic rules—but to the basic guidelines to right conduct, both ethical and ascetic in character, that the Buddha has prescribed for those who have renounced the household life in quest of the highest goal.

The attainment of the highest goal, however, cannot be achieved by moral restraint alone, which focuses primarily upon external behaviour. The final goal of liberation requires not only purification of conduct but, building upon this, the purification of mind and the arrival at right understanding, and this involves the direct endeavour to discipline the mind and penetrate the true nature of things by insight. The next three steps in the gradual training mark a transition from moral purity to purification of mind. They are intended to internalise, by way of a more vigilant awareness of one's motives and mental patterns, the process of purification already started with restraint by morality. In exercising this transitional role they help to prepare the mind for the attainment of concentration (*samādhisampadā*), the next major division of the path.

In the version of the gradual training described in the Kandaraka Sutta, these three steps are:

- (i) contentment (*santutṭhi*)
- (ii) restraint of the sense faculties (*indriyasaṃvara*)
- (iii) mindfulness and full awareness (*sati-sampajañña*).

The virtue of contentment is exemplified in the sutta by a monk who is content simply with robes to protect his body and with sufficient almsfood to sustain his life. The texts compare such a monk to a bird that is at liberty to fly wherever it wishes taking its two wings as its only burden. Just so, equipped with only his robes and almsbowl, the bhikkhu dwells free from the encumbrance of possessions, yet in his freedom enjoying complete contentment.

The next step—"next" more in the sense of expository sequence than of practice—is restraint of the sense faculties, also called guarding the doors of the sense faculties (*indriyesu guttadvāratā*). The relevant passage of the sutta reads:

On seeing a form with the eye, he does not grasp its signs and its features. Since, if he left the eye faculty unguarded, evil unwholesome states of covetousness and grief might invade him, he practises the way of its restraint, he guards the eye faculty, he undertakes the restraint of the eye faculty.

The same pattern is repeated for the other senses and their objects, including the mind faculty and its objective sphere of purely mental phenomena.

Normally, we take our sensory experience for granted, assuming that the shifting patterns of objects we encounter through the senses are extending us an open invitation to enjoy them freely with no harmful consequences to be faced. Yet the Buddha shows repeatedly in his discourses that this thirst for sensual pleasure is one of the most powerful expressions of craving, the root cause of suffering. Responses to sensory contacts governed by "covetousness and grief," that is, by lust for the pleasant and aversion towards the unpleasant, forge invisible links in the chain that ties us to the cycle of birth and death, and hence heap up more suffering.

The ability to withstand the lure of sense objects is therefore a step in the opposite direction: towards dispassion and relinquishment (*virāga, paṭinissagga*), the harbingers of liberation. The

Buddha indicates the key to the practice of sense restraint by the phrase “he does not grasp its signs and its features” (*na nimittaggāhī hoti na anubyañjanaggāhī*). The problem of attachment to sense pleasures is not to be resolved by avoiding all sensory contact, but by putting a stop to “grasping,” to our habitual tendency to seize upon sense impressions and weave them into our subjective fantasies and personal dramas. Thus what must ultimately be restrained is not so much the sense organs themselves, which are by nature only instruments of perception, as the mind in its responses to the data of cognition. Instead of seizing upon the attractive and repulsive features of things, the disciple in training learns to view his variegated sense impressions with a sublime equanimity.

The third transitional step between virtue and concentration is the practice of mindfulness and full awareness:

He becomes one who acts in full awareness when going forward and returning; when looking ahead and looking away; when flexing and extending the limbs; when wearing the robes and carrying the cloak and bowl; when eating and drinking; when defecating and urinating; when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, and keeping silent.

As the passage indicates, what is meant by mindfulness and full awareness in this stage of training is not the intensive development of a specific subject of meditation, but the application of mindfulness and full awareness to the common activities of daily life. For one training for the highest goal, the round of routine activities is not to be dismissed as an annoying distraction but to be utilised as a basis for cultivation of the mind. The performance of these activities with mindfulness helps us to avoid carelessness and to understand their purpose and real nature. Even when engaged in such banal activities as eating and dressing, defecating and urinating, by performing them mindfully in the light of clear awareness, we are able to transform them into fodder nurturing the growth of concentration and insight.

(to be continued)

The Buddhist Publication Society

The BPS is an approved charity dedicated to making known the Teaching of the Buddha, which has a vital message for all people.

Founded in 1958, the BPS has published a wide variety of books and booklets covering a great range of topics. Its publications include accurate annotated translations of the Buddha's discourses, standard reference works, as well as original contemporary expositions of Buddhist thought and practice. These works present Buddhism as it truly is—a dynamic force which has influenced receptive minds for the past 2500 years and is still as relevant today as it was when it first arose.

For more information about the BPS and our publications, please visit our website, or contact:

The Administrative Secretary
Buddhist Publication Society
P.O. Box 61
54 Sangharaja Mawatha
Kandy, Sri Lanka
E-mail: bps@bps.lk
Web site: <http://www.bps.lk>
Tel: 0094 81 223 7283
Fax: 0094 81 222 3679