

# TRIBUTES TO GODWIN

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## REMEMBERING GODWIN SAMARARATNE

(BASED ON A TALK GIVEN AT THE NILAMBE MEDITATION CENTRE  
ON THE 4TH ANNIVERSARY OF GODWIN'S PASSING AWAY)

BHANTE S. DHAMMIKA

Godwin Samararatne was born on the 6th of September 1932 in Kandy, Sri Lanka. His father was the chief clerk of a tea estate at Hantane in the hills above Kandy and his mother was a simple up-country housewife. He had three brothers and four sisters. A younger sister died prematurely and an older brother died in a car accident on the day of his wedding. His three surviving sisters were Dorothy, Matilde and Lakshmi and Godwin was the youngest of the two surviving brothers, Felix and Hector. The family lived in a modest house on the Peradeniya Road just a short walk from the heart of Kandy. Everyone agrees that Godwin showed an interest in Buddhism from his earliest time, due mainly to the piety of his mother. He always accompanied her to the temple on Poya days and would sit listening to the sermons rather than play games as the other children did. Once he turned up at home with two brinjals which he had surreptitiously picked from someone's garden. His mother went back with him to the house where he had got the vegetables and made him return them.

During his High School years Godwin's best friend was Siri Gunawardana who later ordained as Venerable Sivali and became a well-known and respected meditation teacher. Godwin's interest in meditation was such that during the school holidays he went to the Kanduboda Meditation Centre several times and later got his mother to go too. He was an able but average student and after finishing his education got a job at the Kegalle Public Library in 1956. Even then his gentle, kindly nature was evident. On one occasion the night-watchman of the library, asked him for permission to spend the night inside the library as he had nowhere else to sleep. Feeling sorry for him, Godwin gave it. But when he came to work the next day, the man was gone, as were many library books as well. Godwin had to replace the missing books out of his own salary. Later Godwin became Chief Librarian in the D.S. Senanayaka Library in Kandy where he worked until his early retirement in 1979.

Godwin was about 5 foot 10 inches tall, of average build and with a dark complexion. His hair was straight and black, turning gray and then silvery-white when he got older. He had slightly hunched shoulders which became a little more so as he aged. One of his mannerisms was to run his hand over the hair as if to flatten it. Another mannerism was to hold his right elbow with his left hand and put his right hand up to his cheek. He would sometimes remain like this for hours. At other times he would cross his arms in front of him as if giving himself a hug. Very often when talking to people, listening to them or just sitting quietly, he would close his eyes. But by far Godwin's most noticeable physical feature was his beautiful smile, a smile which would often break into a giggle or a laugh. Godwin had almost no interest in his appearance other than that he be presentable and clean. Whether at home, at the meditation centre or traveling overseas, he always wore simple, plain clothes which he had often not even bothered to iron.

When I was staying in Hong Kong in 1996, I invited him to stop off there after one of his tours before returning to Sri Lanka. I had spoken to my friends in the Colony about him and they were anxious to hear him teach. About fifteen of them accompanied me to the airport to welcome Godwin. He emerged from the arrival lounge dressed as usual in his nondescript

clothes, wearing an old pair of sandals and carrying a rather tattered bag. I noticed my friends' faces drop. 'Is that him?' one of them whispered to me, a doubtful look on his face. Clearly, they were not impressed. But of course it wasn't long before they warmed to him and developed a deep appreciation for him. Godwin needed no fancy props, grandiose titles or public relations techniques to impress people. One only needed to spend a little time in his company to become aware of his very special qualities.

The three people who had the most influence on Godwin's spiritual development were the German monk Ven. Nyanaponika, the famous Buddhist academic and philosopher K. N. Jayatillake and the Indian thinker J. Krishnamurti. Although interested in meditation from an early age Godwin found it difficult to find people who could explain it to him in terms he could understand. In the early 1960's he had begun going to the fledgling Buddhist Publication Society in Kandy to help Ven. Nyanaponika and the then general secretary Mr. Richard Abhayasekera. He would help out around the office, greet visitors and afterwards talk with Ven. Nyanaponika about meditation and psychology. In time he developed the highest regard for Ven. Nyanaponika and always recommended his book *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* and *The Power of Mindfulness* as one of the best books on meditation.

Around this time he also met and became friends with Prof. Jayatillake, author of the ground-breaking work *The Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*. He would often visit the professor at his home to talk about Buddhist philosophy, and in particular, its relation with Western philosophy. It was also Prof. Jayatilleke who first interested Godwin in parapsychology. Godwin once said to me: 'I learned to think from K.N (Jayatillake), Ven. Nyanaponika encouraged me to read the suttas, and Krishnamurti's writings made sense of it all.'

It was Krishnamurti's radical and unstructured approach to spirituality that appealed most to Godwin. He sometimes described it as 'Dhamma without the Buddhism'. He was deeply influenced in particular by Krishnamurti's idea of 'choiceless awareness' and of having no opinions, no self-image and no expectations. But despite his great admiration for Krishnamurti, when the great man came to Sri Lanka in 1980 Godwin did not go to Colombo to attend his talks. I asked him why he was not going and he replied that he was familiar with Krishnamurti's teachings, that seeing him would add nothing to that and it was therefore not necessary to go. Krishnamurti was well-known for sometimes scolding his audience and saying that if they really understood him they wouldn't keep coming to hear him speak. I think it is true to say that Godwin was one of those people who really did understand Krishnamurti.

Except for the few times he went to Kandaboda in his youth Godwin never really meditated in the formal sense of sitting crossed-legged and practicing a particular technique. He was not a meditator in the conventional sense, rather he just seemed to have become effortlessly meditative. From an early age, encouraged by what he learned from Ven. Nyanaponika, Krishnamurti and the suttas, a spontaneous awareness led him to becoming naturally mindful and serene. Likewise, the very palpable warmth and compassion that people felt in his presence were not a result of practicing meditation on loving-kindness in the conventional way, it just seemed to arise from something innately good within him.

I once asked Godwin how he got the way he was and he said, 'I don't really know, Bhante, it just happened. I must have meditated a lot in my last life.' Then he let out one of his characteristic giggles. On another occasion I asked him if he was ever interested in women and he told me that he did in fact once have a girl friend. 'What happened?' I enquired. He

replied, 'I was in my early twenties. In those days boys and girls could only meet in secret. We would agree to meet at a particular place and sometimes she would turn up and sometimes she wouldn't. When she was late or when she didn't come I used to notice how painful I felt and so I just stopped going to meet her and so she gave up on me.'

When I first met Godwin in 1977 he was still living with his mother and sister and her family on the Peradeniya Road. He shared a small room with his young nephew Palitha. The room was cluttered and everything was covered with the dust thrown up by the busy road outside the window. Shelves covered two walls right up to the ceiling and these were stacked with books, photocopies of magazine articles and off-prints of papers from various academic journals.

If the state of the room did not necessarily reflect Godwin's mind then the contents of his reading material certainly did. The range was wide but several subjects predominated - psychology, parapsychology, anthropology, sociology and Buddhism. Godwin's bed too was usually covered with books, newspaper cuttings and journals. Anyone who came to visit him would be invited to sit on the edge of his bed and talk. During the discussion he would sometimes begin rummaging through the mess on his bed or go to the shelves, pull out a book and show a passage from it to the visitor or give it to them to take and read. I often borrowed some of his books and although I always returned them, I can never remember him asking me if I had done so.

Godwin had accumulated his huge unruly library from all the overseas friends he had made through the years. One of the first of these was Prof. Ian Stevenson, the famous parapsychologist from the University of Virginia. He first came to Sri Lanka in 1968 to study cases of children who could remember their former lives. During Stevenson's stay he was helped by Francis Story and V. F. Gunaratna, both good friends of Godwin's. On his return in 1970 Francis Story introduced Stevenson to Godwin who from then on became the professor's interpreter, friend and indispensable research assistant. Whenever Godwin heard of a child with past life memories, he would collect the data and make detailed reports for Stevenson.

In 1977 the professor invited Godwin to Virginia to help with his research. As a result of this association, Godwin gradually came to be known by many of the sociologists and anthropologists who came to Sri Lanka to study. There were few who did not benefit from his translation skills, his understanding of Buddhist doctrine and his wide knowledge of Sri Lankan customs and traditions, and Godwin for his part was always happy to help.

By the early 1970's, hardly a week would go by without him receiving a package from the United States, the UK or Germany, with a book or a monograph either inscribed to him or acknowledging his contribution to it. Godwin's copy of Ian Stevenson's *Children Who Remember Their Previous Lives* is inscribed, 'For Godwin with many thanks for all your contributions to this work, from Ian Stevenson, January 15, 1988'. His copy of J. S Kruger's *Metatheism - Early Buddhism and Traditional Christian Theism* is inscribed by the author, 'To my teacher and friend Godwin with affection and gratitude'. There were dozens of such books in his library.

Although Godwin read widely and enjoyed talking with or listening to academics, he was anything but bookish or academic himself. He had no academic training and was interested in such things only to the degree that they shed light on the human condition. As soon as a

discussion he was participating in or a book he was reading became theoretical or over-speculative he would lose interest.

In about 1977 Godwin got to know Dr. L. Rodrigo who worked in the Psychiatric Ward of the Kandy General Hospital. The doctor was interested in the therapeutic applications of meditation and asked Godwin if he would be interested in seeing some of his patients. People often talked to Godwin about their problems sensing that he was a sympathetic listener and a skillful counselor, but Dr. Rodrigo's offer gave him the opportunity to work more systematically with people. He enjoyed this work enormously, not only because it introduced him to the diversity and complexity of human suffering but also because he liked nothing more than helping people in distress.

Soon a steady stream of people came to see him. On many occasions he invited me to sit and listen as he talked with these people. It was fascinating and deeply moving to watch him work. You could almost see the compassion welling up in Godwin as these people unburdened themselves to him. He nearly always listened with his eyes closed. If they broke into tears, he would open his eyes and take them by the hand or gently pat them on the back. Not surprisingly, many people felt better by just spending some time with him.

Using ideas he had read about in the Buddha's discourses, he gradually evolved ways of helping people with mental problems. His approach was based on these concepts: befriending the person so that they could speak openly and freely about their problem - reassuring them that their problem was solvable - encouraging them to take responsibility for themselves - calming them with breathing meditation - teaching them ways to deal with the symptoms - getting them to do meditation on loving-kindness.

Apart from this informal help, Godwin also initiated several projects around Kandy to assist people in a more sustained manner. The first and most successful of these was the Visitors Program he set up for the Cancer Home. He organized people to provide terminal patients at the home with food, toiletries and other basic necessities. His role in this project was to offer patients counseling and in particular to teach them, through meditation, to deal with pain and the fear of death.

I accompanied Godwin on his weekly visits for about two years and I noticed that sympathetic smiling presence was often enough to make people feel better. On one occasion we stopped to talk to a woman who had a large tumor in her mouth. So bad was the stench of her breath as she spoke that I had to discreetly turn aside. Godwin, on the other hand, sat talking with and listened to her, seemingly unaffected by the smell.

On another occasion a very poor old Tamil woman pleaded with us for some money so she could buy a tin of powdered milk. Godwin took some money from his pocket and gave it to her. After we had finished in the wards, we walked out to the bus stop. As we stood waiting for the bus Godwin said to me, 'Bhante, have you got any money?' In those days I never used money and I replied, 'You know I have none. Where is the money you had?' 'I gave it all to that woman' he said and then giggled. We had to walk all the way back to town. It was typical of Godwin that when moved by compassion he would give without the slightest thought of himself. Of course I know that the Buddhist scriptures speak of 'giving without holding anything back' but Godwin is the only person I have ever met who was able to do this quite naturally and unselfconsciously.

After the students' uprising in 1971 in which many young monks had been involved, the Peradeniya University authorities closed down the University monastery. However, by the late 70's, they decided to reestablish a Buddhist 'presence' on the campus. Consequently the old Engineers' bungalow was given over to be used as a Buddhist centre.

As it happened, very few students were interested in religious activities at that time and the centre was largely unused. However, a few lecturers from the University, specifically Prof. Mrs. Lily de Silva and Prof. W.C. Vitnachchi began meeting there once a week, mainly to discuss suttas. Gradually a few outsiders began to attend as well and by 1977 a regular group had formed. Those in the group were Godwin, Mrs. de Silva, Vitnachchi, Mr. Ratnakara, Pat Jayatillake and Dr. Parakrama Fernando. It was here that I first met Godwin.

The group met twice a week. On Thursdays we would read a sutta and then discuss it. Being a scholar of Pali, Prof. Mrs. de Silva would make comments on technical terms. Parakrama would point out any philosophical implications in it, while Godwin would suggest things that could have practical applications. Discussions would sometimes get heated or would drift off onto other subjects. I noticed that whenever this happened Godwin would cross his arms, close his eyes and become quiet. On Friday nights we would meet, do silent meditation for an hour and then have a discussion over a cup of tea or coffee. Again Godwin's contributions to these discussions were always pertinent and sometimes startlingly profound.

Eventually we all become friends and decided to call our little group Veluvana after the bamboo grove in India where the Buddha sometimes used to stay. As there was no monk at the centre, I was invited to take up residence and became the informal organizer of the group's activities. Various scholars visiting the University would be invited to address us or participate in our discussions, some of the more distinguished being Bishop Robinson, the famous 'Honest to God' prelate, the Sanskrit scholar Richard Gombrich from Cambridge, Walpola Rahula and Prof. David Kalupahana from the University of Hawaii.

In early 1979 a prosperous Kandy businessman, Mr. Alakoon, and his wife began coming regularly to our Friday night meditations. When the University gave notice that we would have to move out of the bungalow so it could be used as the University Staff Club, Mr. Alakoon announced that he would donate some land from his tea-estate for the establishment of a meditation centre and pay for the construction of some buildings. Thus our small group evolved into what eventually became the Nilambe Meditation Centre. Godwin left his job as Librarian in Kandy in 1979, at first to be the caretaker at the new Center but later becoming the resident teacher.

The inaugural meditation course at Nilambe was taught by the popular American meditation teacher Joseph Goldstein and, having attracted about seventy local and overseas participants, was judged a success. But after the course, when everyone including Joseph Goldstein went home, it suddenly occurred to us that we now had a Meditation Centre but no meditation teacher!

In the end I was talked into leading courses during the first ten days of every month while Godwin managed the Center, although within a year he took over as the teacher. In the beginning, like me, he really had no idea how to structure and conduct a meditation course. During meditation sessions he would sit, as usual, slouched against the wall, holding his right elbow with his left hand and his right hand on his cheek. 'Godwin!' I chided him, 'You have to sit up straight or you cannot expect the meditators to do so.' But despite the fact that

he did not have the look of a conventional teacher, word soon spread that there was something very special about him.

Initially, people came to Nilambe mainly to learn meditation but in time they came because of Godwin. By the mid-1980's he became so well-known that he started to receive invitations to teach in Switzerland, Germany, the U.K. and later in South Africa, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore. He taught meditation to all sorts of groups, including Christian priests and pastors, and Chinese Mahayana Buddhists. Throughout the 1990's increasing numbers of both foreigners and Sri Lankans were coming to the expanding Nilambe Meditation Centre.

In all the years I knew Godwin I cannot remember ever hearing him say anything negative about anyone or ever showing the slightest trace of annoyance, anger or disapproval. I don't think this was because he was trying to be 'nice' or because he was blind to people's flaws - he could be uncannily perceptive about people. Rather it was because other peoples' negativity simply didn't affect him, even if he was on the receiving end of it. Nor can I ever remember him being impatient, depressed, angry or worried.

He was very close to his mother, but when she died on the 22nd July 1977, he sobbed for about half an hour and then returned to his usual serene self. During the funeral and the seventh day merit-making ceremony his other siblings either cried or were at least teary-eyed, but he was utterly calm and collected.

If Godwin had a fault it was that he was perhaps overly anxious to avoid any type of unpleasantness with anyone. When a meditator at Nilambe became disruptive or refused to follow the schedule despite being repeatedly asked to do so, Godwin would put off the task of talking to them for as long as he possibly could. There were a few times when his failure to be firm with people caused him or others considerable inconvenience. I recall that a rather unpleasant man used to come and see him at his home, ostensibly for counseling. In fact, all the man did was complain angrily for several hours about the numerous people he didn't like. Every Thursday he would wait for Godwin to come home from work and every Thursday Godwin would sit and endure the man's tirades. Sometimes he even avoided going home if he knew the man would be there. Only after several months did he finally tell the man that he couldn't help him and that he should not come anymore.

Another interesting aspect of Godwin's character was that despite having a profound understanding of the human psyche and being usually a good judge of character, he could be remarkably naive about people, particularly if they were trying to deceive him. Being good-hearted and completely straightforward himself, he could not always see that others were not necessarily like that too. On occasion this caused him to make some bad judgments.

Godwin had been suffering from a liver disease for some time which left him progressively weaker and more and more tired, Although he knew this was a life-threatening condition, he continued with his commitments all over the world. When he returned after a three-month trip to South Africa in February 2000, his ankles were swollen and his stomach was slightly bloated. He was staying with his good friends Harilal and Visakha Wickramaratne and they took him to a specialist who recommended some medication. However, Godwin thought that seeing this specialist might upset his long-time family doctor and so he insisted on going to see him as well. This second doctor recommended a very different medicine.

Two days later at about three in the morning Harilal heard a noise in Godwin's room and went in to see what the problem was. He found Godwin lying incapacitated on his bed. I had returned from India that very morning and, on being told that Godwin had been admitted to hospital, rushed up to Kandy. He looked tired and drawn but otherwise was his usual cheerful, smiling self. I didn't know it then but this would be the last time I would see him. Later he lapsed into unconsciousness and remained in a coma in the Intensive Care Unit for 48 hours. He eventually regained consciousness, and, after being discharged from the hospital, returned to the Wickramaratne's home where they did their best to let him rest despite the many people who wanted to visit him.

While in hospital he had said to Visakha Wickramaratne, 'I'm going to give up teaching. I've done a lot for others, now I think I should do something for myself.' About two weeks later he collapsed into a coma again and was taken to Peradeniya Hospital. After two days Visakha received a call from Upul Gamage telling her that she should come to the hospital quickly. When she arrived the two of them went to the ward where Godwin was but he had died just a few minutes before. I received a call from them to come to the hospital immediately and arrived some twenty minutes later. When I saw Felix, Upul and Visakha, their faces white and with tears in their eyes, I knew what had happened. Godwin had died at 9.30 a.m. on the 22nd of March, 2000.

In Sri Lanka, the body of the deceased is usually kept for two or three days so that family and friends can pay their respects. However, Godwin had specified much earlier that his funeral be conducted as soon as possible after his death. Accordingly, he was cremated the day after his death. Although only one small notice of the funeral appeared in the paper that very day, word had spread throughout Kandy and over six hundred people flocked to Mahayawa Cemetery.

When I arrived at the funeral, Godwin's brother Felix approached me and asked how we should proceed. I was not expecting to be asked to conduct the service, but after thinking for a moment I suggested that for a man who loved silence as much as Godwin did, it might be appropriate if we all just observed a fifteen-minute silence. Felix agreed and an announcement to that effect was made. We closed our eyes, bowed our heads and silently remembered this person who had given all of us so much.

A few minutes later a man suddenly came out of the crowd and began a long-winded farrago at the top of his voice. As this unknown speaker droned on, his finger raised in the air, I was too sad to feel annoyed but I was finding his loud voice an unpleasant intrusion. The faces of many others in the crowd showed a similar feeling. Quite suddenly I remembered how patient and understanding Godwin had been with human folly and how he often saw the funny side of it. I imagined him looking down on all of us, watching this intruder rambling on and then saying, 'Bhante, do you think he's doing that mindfully?' and then giggling. That thought lifted my sadness a little. Eventually, someone grabbed the man by the arm and whispered to him to stop, which he did. When the fifteen minutes were up Godwin's brothers and nephews lifted the coffin, slid it into the crematorium and closed the door. We all chanted the Metta Sutta as a final tribute to our beloved teacher and friend and then one by one left. A few days later Visakha Wickramaratne took Godwin's ashes and tipped them into the quietly flowing waters of the Mahaweli River.

It has been four years since Godwin died and yet hardly a week goes past without me thinking about him. I am sure that at least one or two of my better qualities are due to his gentle admonishments and his example. Godwin showed me by his person that it really is

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possible to transcend the narrow confines of ego, negative emotions, petty ambitions and fears and become a truly joyful, loving person. To me, he was living proof that the Buddha's Dhamma does work. I am now 55 years old and looking back on my life, I can say, without the slightest hesitation, that I owe more to Godwin Samararatne than I do to anyone else, and that he was the wisest and kindest person I have ever had the privilege to know.

## IN MEMORIUM ACHARYA GODWIN SAMARARATNE (1932 - 2000)

(BY VEN. BHIKKHU BODHI, BPS NEWSLETTER, APRIL 2000).

In late March death snatched from our midst, too soon, one of Sri Lanka's most beloved Buddhist teachers, Godwin Samararatne. For close to twenty years, Godwin had been the resident meditation teacher at the Nilambe Meditation Centre near Kandy. He had also taught meditation within Kandy itself, at the Lewella and Visakha Meditation Centres (two affiliates of Nilambe), at the University of Peradeniya, at private homes, and at the Buddhist Publication Society. But Godwin did not belong to Sri Lanka alone. He belonged to the whole world, and he was loved and esteemed by people clear across the globe. Thousands of people from many lands came to Nilambe to practise meditation under his guidance, and they also invited him to their own countries to conduct meditation courses and retreats. Thus over the past two decades Godwin, in his own quiet way, had become an international Buddhist celebrity, constantly in demand in countries ranging from Europe to Hongkong and Taiwan. He was also a regular visitor to South Africa, where he conducted his last meditation retreat earlier this year.

What was so impressive about Godwin, however, was not what he did but what he was. He was above all a truly selfless person, and it was this utter selflessness of the man that accounts for the impact he had on the lives of so many people.

I use the word "selflessness" to describe him in two interrelated senses. First, he was selfless in the sense that he seemed to have almost no inner gravitational force of an "I" around which his personal life revolved: no pride, no ambition, no personal projects aimed at self-aggrandizement. He was completely humble and non-assertive, not in an artificial self-demeaning way, but rather as if he had no awareness of a self to be effaced. Hence as a meditation teacher he could be utterly transparent, without any trips of his own to lay upon his students.

This inward "emptiness" enabled Godwin to be selfless in the second sense: as one who always gave first consideration to the welfare of others. He was ready to empathize with others and share their concerns as vividly as if they were his own. In this respect, Godwin embodied the twin Buddhist virtues of loving-kindness and compassion, maitri and karuna. Even without many words, his dignified presence conveyed a quietude and calm that spoke eloquently for the power of inner goodness, for its capacity to reach out to others and heal their anxiety and distress. It was this deep quietude and almost tangible kindness that drew thousands of people to Godwin and encouraged them to welcome him into their lives. The trust they placed in him was well deposited, for in an age when so many popular "gurus" have gained notoriety for their unscrupulous behaviour, he never exploited the confidence and good will of his pupils.

Though Godwin taught the practice of Buddhist meditation, particularly the way of mindfulness, he did not try to propagate "Buddhism" as a doctrine or religious faith, much less as part of an exotic cultural package. His inspiration came from the Dhamma as primarily a path of inner transformation whose effectiveness stemmed from its ability to promote self-knowledge and self-purification. He saw the practice of meditation as a way to help people help themselves, to understand themselves more clearly and change themselves for the better. He emphasized that Buddhist meditation is not a way of withdrawing from

everyday life, but of living everyday life mindfully, with awareness and clear comprehension, and he taught people how to apply the Dhamma to the knottiest problems of their mundane lives.

By not binding the practice of meditation to the traditional religious framework of Buddhism, Godwin was able to reach out and speak to people of the most diverse backgrounds. For him there were no essential, unbridgeable differences between human beings. He saw people everywhere as just human beings beset by suffering and searching for happiness, and he offered the Buddha's way of mindfulness as an experiential discipline leading to genuine peace of heart. Hence he could teach people from such different backgrounds - Western, Asian, and African; Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, and Muslim; Sri Lankan Theravadins and Chinese Mahayanists – and all could respond favourably to his guidance.

If it was not for a chronic liver condition that he had patiently endured for years, with hardly a word of complaint, Godwin might well have lived on to actively teach the way of mindfulness for at least another decade. But this was not to be, for in late February, almost immediately upon his return from a teaching engagement in South Africa, his illness flared up and a month later claimed his precious life. Those of us who have been touched by him will long bear in our hearts the memory of his calm, gentle personality, and of the impact his life had on our own.

May he quickly attain the Supreme Bliss of Nibbana.

## GODWIN SAMARARATNE AND THE STUDY OF REBIRTH CASES IN SRI LANKA

(BY IAN STEVENSON, FROM "TRENDS IN REBIRTH RESEARCH" ED. NIMAL SENANAYAKE)

I cannot now remember when I first met Godwin Samararatne. This admission says more about him than about me, because Godwin was one of the most self-effacing persons I have ever known. Godwin was not the first interpreter who helped me in Sri Lanka. That was the late E. C. Raddalgoda who assisted me from 1961 until near his death in 1973. E. C. Raddalgoda had built two houses on the compound behind his own house in Kotte, which in those days was outside Colombo. He made one of these houses available to the late Francis Story, who was an English scholar and teacher of Buddhism. In the years after World War II Francis Story's wife had died and he decided to live in Asia. He lived for some years in Burma (now Myanmar) and then moved to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). He adopted the life of an *anagarika* (homeless one) and became the leader of a small coterie of Ceylonese persons interested in studying and practicing Buddhism.

Although he lived near Colombo, Francis Story was an active collaborator of the Buddhist Publication Society, which was established in Kandy. In the 1960s Godwin was an assistant librarian in the Kandy Public Library, and I think he would have met Francis Story through the Buddhist Publication Society. Francis Story had a keen interest in cases suggestive of rebirth, and he had published a booklet on the subject in 1959 (Story, 1959). Subsequently, he accompanied me on all my investigations in Sri Lanka from 1961 until his death in 1972. Godwin joined us in the mid-1960s. I think at first, partly because E. C. Raddalgoda was so good at interpreting and partly because Godwin was somewhat shy; he joined us as an observer more than an assistant.

He soon assumed a more important role. We acknowledged his assistance in the report of the case of Warnasiri Adikari that we published in 1967 (Story and Stevenson, 1967). We thanked him again when we published another case report in 1970 (Stevenson and Story, 1970). Thereafter, Godwin became increasingly active and important as an interpreter. Following the death of E. C. Raddalgoda, Godwin became my principal assistant amid interpreter. He helped me until I ceased regular investigations in Sri Lanka in 1988. By that year I had investigated 180 cases in Sri Lanka, and Godwin had assisted in the study of nearly all of them. In the late 1980s Erlendur Haraldsson became active in studying cases in Sri Lanka, and Godwin worked just as assiduously with him as he had with me.

Godwin had unusual gifts as an interpreter. He fully accepted my wish to record as fully as possible whatever informants told us. He quickly learned to slow or halt their frequent loquacity while I made a detailed record of what they were saying. In our later work he sometimes interviewed informants himself and then sent me a report indicating questions asked and answers given. He became a skilled interviewer, being especially good with the child subjects of the cases.

In the 1960s, and even later, Sri Lanka was not a country in which one could always travel easily and lodge comfortably. No impediments and inconveniences ever daunted Godwin. He always had a good humour and a sense of humour. Once he asked an informant why he had not observed what had seemed like an extremely important recognition a subject had made at the house where he claimed to have lived. The informant explained that he had

been too busy entertaining the visitors thronging to see the subject to pay attention to what the subject said or did. I found this excuse annoying; for Godwin it was highly amusing.

During my years of investigating cases suggestive of rebirth in Asia and Africa, I enjoyed the good fortune of working with about a dozen skilled interpreters. They were all diligent and all interested in the cases. Only two of them, however, showed an interest in the place of studies of paranormal phenomena in Western science. Godwin was one of these two. He regularly asked me to send him not just copies of my publications, but articles and books by other authors whose works had some bearing on our investigations. He was thus well prepared to read and comment upon the drafts of the case reports in my book on cases in Sri Lanka (Stevenson, 1977).

Godwin's interest in paranormal phenomena extended beyond the cases suggestive of rebirth. For example, he sent me several reports about experiences of persons in Sri Lanka who had come close to death and survived; he accompanied me for an interview with one of these persons. Godwin's friends recognize that he was the prime mover in the founding of the Sri Lanka Society for Psychical Research. We also owe thanks to Godwin for the conference from which this book derives.

Godwin's contribution to the investigation of the cases so far exceeded his tasks as an interpreter that it became appropriate for him to become a co-author of published papers. He was not an honorary author, but fully deserved recognition of his contribution by being named a co-author (Cook, Pasricha, Samararatne, et al., 1983a and 1983b; Stevenson, Pasricha, and Samararatne, 1988; Stevenson and Samararatne, 1988a and 1988b). Erlendur Haraldsson similarly identified Godwin as a co-author of their paper on three children of Sri Lanka who spoke about a previous life as a Buddhist monk (Haraldsson and Samararatne, 1999).

Godwin had no wish for recognition as a co-author. Indeed, he seems to have had no wish for any personal compensation. I had to urge him to send me accounts of his expenses. He accepted no money for himself until after he had resigned his position at the Kandy Library, when he became increasingly active in teaching meditation.

Godwin was also unusual in the personal and often enduring interest that he took in some of the subjects of the cases we studied. They liked him and he obviously liked them. I know that with at least three of them he remained friends for many years. One of these was Warnasiri Adikari, the subject of the first case to the study of which Godwin made a substantial contribution. Warnasiri, who was born in 1957, as a young child spoke in detail about a previous life as a young man of another village who had died suddenly about a year before Warnasiri's birth. Francis Story and I (with Godwin's help) studied this case in the early 1960s. Warnasiri also said that he remembered three other previous lives, but he gave few details of these and we could not definitely verify what he said about them (Stevenson, 1977). From Warnasiri's perspective, however, the memories of four previous lives convinced him both that rebirth was a fact and that the Buddha was right in teaching that the only way to end the suffering of life is through attaining *nibbana* (to use the Pali word), which in turn requires the monastic life that permits adequate meditation. He resolved therefore, when still a young child, to become a monk, and this he did. He was ordained as a *samanera* (novice) in 1973, when he was not quite 16 years old. Persons who decide to become Buddhist monks do so for varied reasons. No doubt most of them think of the liberation from rebirth as an ultimate, but doubtfully attainable goal. Warnasiri was unusual in acknowledging that his wish to become a monk derived from actual experience with

remembering previous lives. The reasons for his seeking ordination became fairly widely known, at least in the area where he lived. A considerable throng attended the ceremony of his ordination. Godwin was a member of the audience.

I wish to mention one other feature of Godwin's work with me. Francis Story had become a convert to Buddhism when he was a youth of 16. He had an openly expressed ardour for Buddhism. At times his enthusiasm for Buddhism reminded me of the excessive zeal sometimes attributed to converts. He never tired of expounding the truths of Buddhism to me. Godwin was different. We spent many days together; collectively they must have amounted to several months spread over the years of my work in Sri Lanka. Godwin never once sought to influence my beliefs. He taught Buddhism by the example of his own life, filled with good thoughts and deeds for other persons.

## GODWIN SAMARARATNE

(BY TISSA AMARASEKERA, KANDY. ISLAND NEWSPAPER, THURSDAY 4TH MAY, 2000)

Godwin as he was popularly known is usually associated with the residential meditation centre at Nilambe. It was an ideal location for that purpose, up on a hill nestling among tea estates, away from the hurly-burly of human activity, whither many including foreigners and even monks some of whom have now become incumbents of viharas abroad, trekked their way to learn meditation at his feet. They will be shocked and grieved to hear of his sad demise. No less will it be for the large numbers who made their way up to Rajapihilla Mawatha, the residence of Mr. Harilal Wickremaratne, a disciple and benefactor, where for fourteen years he conducted his classes in meditation every Tuesday, and in recent times also at the house of late Lincoln Weerasekera, another disciple who donated it for this purpose; also for many of those of the University of Peradeniya, every Wednesday.

Godwin was a simple, quiet person, soft-spoken, with an even temper, always unruffled and with a subtle sense of humour, never displaying his knowledge of the Dhamma. He did not belong to any school of Buddhism. He accepted anyone who expounded the doctrine with clarity. Being a votary of his I could say that he did not actually teach meditation. He sat along with those who came to him for instruction, and after a single sentence of initiation to the new comers all joined him in meditation for an hour or half-an-hour and in the dialogue that followed he made them aware of the defilements and other mundane matters that cluttered and burdened their minds. Thus in the course of several such sessions he gradually helped them by awareness to eliminate them and bring relief with wholesome thoughts. This was his immediate objective. It became a daily routine for some who attended these classes. This appealed even to those of other faiths. Some foreigners went back home and gave the message to others and as a result he had many invitations from various countries such as Germany, Switzerland, South Africa, Thailand, Singapore, etc. And of course he visited India even on his own and met Munindrajee, another renowned meditation master at Buddhagaya.

When I first came to know him years back, he was the Librarian of the Kandy Municipal Town Library where he was a friend and guide to anybody who looked for a book on any subject. The atmosphere of the library was conducive to his interests; but there was in him an underlying feeling of mental unrest and it was no surprise when he relinquished his post to take to meditation along with one or two others who shared his interest. In due course he became closely associated with Buddhist scholars like Prof. P. D. Premasiri and others like Mr. Stanley Jayaweera. In the field of research on rebirth he was associated with the famous researcher Dr. Ian Stevenson. He also took an interest in paranormal phenomena, and with some of his friends in the University formed the Psychical Research Society of which he was the secretary. He organised talks on the subject at least one each month to which researchers from abroad were also invited to give talks.

Godwin was one who was deeply touched by human suffering in any form and took an interest in alleviating it whenever possible. Several terminally ill persons have found solace through his counselling. Even those with suicidal tendencies were referred to him by Sri Lanka Sumithrayo, Kandy. Almost impecunious as he was, he found resources to donate ten water beds, a crying need, to the Kandy Hospital.

## TRIBUTES TO GODWIN

He bore his unexpected illness with fortitude and good humour even though he knew the prognosis was not good. His last visit to South Africa and Switzerland was much against the advice of his friends. However, he came back quite satisfied though not quite well. He soon resumed his classes and at the last one fell unconscious. His recovery was brief. He succumbed to his disease, causing a void that cannot easily be filled. It is not so much because he was a meditation master par excellence, but as a rare person with the noblest qualities one could expect of a human being who devoted his life to attempting to relieve people of their existential suffering. May his journey in Samsara be brief.

## GODWIN SAMARARATNE

(BY CLOSE FRIEND MRS. VISAKHA WICKRAMERATNE)

Godwin, the “gentle giant” is no more. Gentle he was, with all that inner goodness and feeling for humanity radiating through the world to those who sought solace from him. Gentle and child-like was his nature so that all who came into contact felt comfortable with him.

He was soft-spoken and calm in all his dealings with people. A very gentle teacher, he did not force his views on people but guided them so that a natural unfolding of the Dhamma took place within themselves, thus transforming their lives. The simplicity with which he taught something so profound, touching the very core of their lives, was understood by all, whether adult or child.

A giant he was in that he embodied all that is good and wonderful in human nature. He did not consider anyone’s need as of little importance. To him each one was special. His boundless goodwill and compassion made him special to all who sought his guidance and friendship. He was loved and respected the world over.

He made giant strides encouraging and instructing people into a meditative way of life. His extensive knowledge of the Dhamma and the wisdom he imparted in his teaching made him a great master, much sought after. His spiritual guidance and counsel brought understanding and with it happiness to many weighted down by the pressures of life. Many are the saddened and the despairing who felt themselves isolated and who found a genuine friend in him to guide them tactfully and gently back to the acceptance of life as it is lived with its “see-saw rhythm”, as he put it. In this way he brought comfort and harmony to many a home torn with conflict and aggression.

He wasn’t the traditionally accepted holy guru seated cross-legged, cut away from the realities of life. He was one of us. He enjoyed company and his laughter was infectious.

His interests were manifold and his knowledge was not confined to one particular topic but extended to many. Once listening to him I was amazed at the skill he displayed in discussing English literature with the Advanced Level students with particular reference to R. K. Narayan and Chekov.

He gave freely not only of his spiritual guidance and counsel but his time and energy wherever they were needed. In addition to running two meditation centres and conducting numerous classes and retreats here and abroad, he was involved with research into near death experiences and rebirth. He was committed to many humanitarian activities and his special interest was to help the two hospitals at Peradenya and Kandy, drawing on his own resources and those of friends abroad. He gave solace not only to the physically ill, especially those desperate with terminal illness, but the mentally sick also, with no concern for the sapping of his energy and health.

He responded positively to the poverty he saw around him. The distribution of frames for pairs of spectacles and hearing aids donated by his foreign friends, and the payment for lenses with his own resources, the contribution of medical supplies and stationery etc. to the less privileged villagers and financial assistance for the renovation of their homes, and active involvement in setting up projects for self employment of youth made him a true friend of

those who were in need. Something remarkable was that he never complained, never fussed but was always with a smile.

Just prior to falling unconscious from which he didn't recover, the smile was there.

His classes in meditation were of great depth imparted with a lightness. His sense of humour and wit were remarkable so that the sessions we attended for nearly seventeen years were fresh and full of life. The mind became a source of experiment and enjoyment, in "knowing the mind, shaping the mind and freeing the mind" so that we could achieve a mind that is "free, happy and full of loving kindness," as he put it.

His was the epitome of such a mind. We learnt many guidelines for harmonious relationships and meaningful living.

In an age when the world's fast losing its sense of humanity, we cannot afford to lose people such as Godwin who in their selflessness are so rare in our midst. His absence leaves an abysmal void in the spiritual world, in our society and in our individual lives. What better monument can there be to his memory than his goodness engraved in many hearts.

May he be always peaceful just as he lived.

## RECALLING GODWIN SAMARARATNE

(BY CLOSE FRIEND MRS. VISAKHA WICKRAMERATNE)

(ON THE OCCASION OF GODWIN'S 7<sup>TH</sup> DEATH ANNIVERSARY  
AT NILAMBE MEDITATION CENTRE)

Venerable Sirs and Friends,

Upul has asked me to speak a few words giving my recollections of Godwin. I have put down my reflections on paper so that I can share it with you, with no hassle or memory lapses.

Most of you here knew him well. The others would have heard of him or read his teachings or listened on tape to his discourses. When Upul gave me this task the first thing I did was to sit down quietly and reflect on the good old days, when Godwin was so much a part of our lives and our family had such close associations with him – as a dear friend and a loved and respected teacher. I had the added good fortune of being his relative as well.

Thinking of Godwin the picture that unfolded before my eyes was of a simply-dressed person, in white, grey or cream, with a cloth bag slung over his shoulder, and a beaming smile on his face getting down from the van, amidst the chaos and confusion caused by our dogs barking in welcome. There was already a large crowd waiting patiently until 4.30 for our Tuesday meditation class to begin. We had a crowd free of any distinctions of race or religion. Most of them were Sinhalese but we had a few Tamils, Muslims, Westerners, Easterners, Hindus, Christians and Catholic novices from the Ampitiya Seminary, who were attracted to Godwin's teaching. Because of his great sense of wit and humour we found the classes fun. Our classes were animated discussions with varied and contradictory points of view being expressed. I can picture Godwin in his good-natured way saying: "That is an interesting question" or "that is an interesting point of view" not wanting to hurt anyone. Teaching us couldn't have been an easy task, for many of us were quite ignorant, or too stubborn to see the truth, grasping onto our own false views and opinions. He didn't give up though, but patiently attempted to guide us to the truth. Meditation was conducted not so much as a strict discipline but as an interesting journey of exploration into our own minds – a journey he took us along for many many years and who knows, the journey in samsara I hope has been shortened for us.

I felt I should give a balanced account of Godwin and so my mind probed for any limitations, any frailties, any negativity in him as he was a human being just like us. I just couldn't find any. Perhaps in his youth he may have worked with some weaknesses and then emerged as a sound wholesome human being - the Godwin we knew. He wasn't a practical man when it came to the guiles and materialism of modern life. Dear Elspeth who lived at this Meditation Centre once remarked that he was like a lamb amidst the pretensions of society. An incident comes into my mind: he made research into rebirth, Buddhist tradition and practices in Sri Lanka associated with the Sangha and the laity that was extensive and he was associated with many Professors of foreign Universities dealing with these subjects. One day he was quite amused as much as I was angry that a person with whom he worked jointly had omitted his name from the published book although it was agreed they were going to be co-authors (there were others of course who were very appreciative of Godwin's contribution and acknowledged it).

He taught by example. Not only did he teach the Dhamma, he lived it. A great tribute to him were the large numbers who sought for guidance in meditation as well as those in need of help for their psychological problems. Being a lay teacher he understood everyday life and was able to cope directly with problems faced by people. He talked, he listened. Many feel the need to communicate, especially those who have a problem and want to share it. He was always there to listen to them. He never turned away, however sick and tired he was. He had the ability to draw the “fiends” as he called mental problems out into the open and he advised people to make friends with them so that the fear of the unknown would be gone. If fiends become friends you would be able to deal with them, he pointed out. He always told us that once we recognise our disease and accept the fact we have it, the medicine is in our hands and we can cure ourselves. I witnessed the efficacy of the psychotherapy he used to give comfort and solace to those, especially young people, who found living a problem, unable to face the realities, tensions and the trauma of modern living. I read somewhere that the living need charity more than the dead. He was a true *kalyana mitta*.

I remember a young friend of his from overseas who was in dire need of psychological help sending an SOS wanting desperately to speak to Godwin, but Godwin was already in hospital and in a critical state. The news we next received was that this friend had taken his own life. Had he had the opportunity to speak to Godwin, I wonder whether he might have had the chance of another go at life.

His ability to communicate in both English and Sinhala was a great advantage that he had. As a result he was not only able to convey the Buddha Dhamma, the practice of Buddhist meditation and mind culture to the Sri Lankan people but carry the message to foreign lands with him. He was a revered teacher in many parts of the world and had so many invitations to conduct courses that he had to turn some of them down.

He didn't live in isolation. He enjoyed company as much as others enjoyed being with him. He was a very welcome guest wherever he went. He was an important person no doubt sought after by many from all parts of the world, but a lovely quality was that he was such an unassuming person and never pushed himself forward into the limelight. One day Godwin came in laughing that he had been considered for the award of the Man of the Millennium by the University of Cambridge. We were all excited. He merely threw all the documents that had to be sent back to them with information into the waste paper basket. Dharmaraja College, where he had studied, was one time felicitating its distinguished old boys and he was nominated as one which amused him as he hadn't thought of himself as being in that category.

He was unassuming, soft spoken and gentle. I remember the incident when Prof. Parakrama was murdered, and on being informed of this my husband Harilal rushed to Nilambe and found Godwin calmly seated in the police jeep waiting to be taken for questioning, not protesting at all till Harilal rescued him by assuring the police officers that this was the resident teacher of the Centre and moreover that he was the teacher of their superior officer as well.

Godwin had the remarkable quality of being at home anywhere, may it be in his own home, or at Nilambe, Lewella, in his friends' homes or anywhere in the world amongst the distinguished and the not so distinguished. He fitted in like a glove. Paradoxically he was homeless as well, as anywhere was home. Some of his friends told me of this incident in Switzerland when his bag containing his documents and money had been stolen while he was on a train. He had to spend a night in jail until his Swiss friends rescued him the next

morning. He had laughingly explained that his mind couldn't be stolen and so he spent a good night in his temporary home, the prison cell, watching his unstolen mind.

I found Godwin very special in that he understood human nature in all its diversity and complexity. There was humility in the way he interacted with all. He was never judgmental. He didn't consider himself always right nor that he was the sole authority on anything. He didn't force his views down unwilling throats. He respected and was willing to consider and accept the views of others. He never looked down on anyone from a position of superiority. He communicated with people of any level of understanding - intellectuals, professionals, housewives, the elderly, the youth, children of all ages - he could respond to them all. It was amazing. He loved the company of children and they loved him. To my little daughter - who is not so little anymore - he was always her "holy father" and he declared he was the president of her fan club - they teased each other like this. Rudyard Kipling's words come to my mind: "If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue, Or walk with kings - nor lose the common touch, ...You will be a man, my son!" - this was so true of Godwin.

He was a versatile man of many interests. While he was the Librarian of the Municipal Council Library and his brother Felix was Librarian of the British Council, both brothers used to attend the discussions on English Literature of which they were very knowledgeable. One day at one of the private literature classes when I asked Godwin whether he could help me out with a discussion of R.K. Narayan's 'The English Teacher' with reference to his philosophy of spiritualism, which was new to me, he agreed, and it looked as though he had taken the students on a really interesting mystical journey as I found them so engrossed in what he had to say.

He enjoyed going on excursions to places of religious and cultural interest in Sri Lanka. We thought these trips would be good for him to relax. The obvious hadn't occurred to us that he was always a relaxed person with a meditative frame of mind. Meditation was a part of him.

I recollect an incident where Godwin was watching the Sri Lanka vs. Australia match on TV. He was a cricket enthusiast and had played for Dharmaraja College in his student days. There he was cheering away for Sri Lanka and someone asked him why he was getting so emotional. His simple answer was that once he goes from there he would leave the match and the emotions behind and wouldn't be carrying them with him. I recall the incident from the Buddhist texts of the young monk carrying a woman across the river and at the disapproval of the elder monk. The young monk remarked that he had left the woman on the shore while it appeared that the elder monk was still carrying her. Godwin had no artificiality and pretence. He was very human and spontaneous.

I don't think I have ever come across another person as kind and compassionate as Godwin was. In all his activities his foremost quality was compassion. Even as he lay in hospital I was amazed at his memory which obviously stemmed from his interest in and caring for people. There were so many who came to see him and I couldn't believe it, he knew them all by name, what their children were doing, what exams they were sitting for, whether the daughter had had her baby and whether her son had returned from England and so on.

A few hours before he lost consciousness he noticed a man in his ward lamenting that he had been discharged but had no way of getting back home as his relatives hadn't come and he had no money to go home on his own. Godwin's immediate response was for me to give him the money and he was full of joy when he saw the man leaving with a smiling face. He

always thought of others. He never thought in terms of I, me and mine. I remember the numerous gifts he received, many from overseas and he distributed them all. There was once an embarrassing instance when a gift given to him found its way back to the giver! But all his friends understood his nature. No one misunderstood. Another incident flashes across my mind. Elspeth once brought him a very expensive rain coat, specially selected by her for him from England. The next day she found one of the workers wearing it in the heavy rain and there was Godwin holding his old umbrella.

His friends abroad were surprised when I told them that Godwin was not only a spiritual teacher but was widely involved with social service and that he helped many with his own funds. He did it all with no advertisement. Helen Minder from Switzerland who was here when he died decided to set up a fund in the name of her revered teacher, to continue the work he had begun of uplifting the lives of poor people. This work is being ably done in Godwin's name by the dedicated and unstinted support of Jeanne Mynett here at the Centre who finds the much needed funds and Herbert too who is involved with fund raising. They, along with the untiring efforts of Malini Wijekoon, Upul's mother and Mahesh at the Lewella Centre keep this work going.

When thinking of Godwin, Shakespeare's words come to my mind. "Some men are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them." Godwin was a glowing example of a man who achieved greatness through his stature of being a great human being with unlimited stores of compassion with the deep need to comfort suffering humanity.

To me his greatest achievement was that he exemplified a life that a layman could live. His meditation was started in his home. On one side was the busy main Kandy road and on the other side was the railway line. He didn't have the ideal conditions of peace and quiet, but achieved the peace and quiet of his mind in spite of it. He epitomised the saying that "peace is found in the market place, and not in the mountains." He gave us the message that we, being laymen, could still tread the meditative path in our busy lives and homes. This was his greatest gift to us.

The large crowds that visited him in hospital - so many that they had to be sent in batches - and the large numbers who came to pay their respects at his funeral were a glowing tribute to a teacher and a friend held in great esteem. May his goodness help him on his journey out of suffering.

Thank you Upul for giving me this opportunity of sharing my recollections of Godwin with all of you. I must end by speaking of another lasting achievement of Godwin's. He used his wisdom to leave behind him an able young guru to take his place. So we have Upul to continue his good work.

## IN MEMORY OF GODWIN SAMARARATNE

(BY PETER VAN LEEUWEN, ROTTERDAM, HOLLAND, 24TH MARCH 2000)

On Wednesday the 22nd of March my voice-mail gave me the message of Godwin's demise, at 7.30 AM that day. Spring was not even one day old.

Some time earlier Godwin had been admitted into the hospital because of an inflammation of the liver. His situation appeared to be very serious and he was nursed in the Intensive Care Unit and wasn't able to talk. Things improved quickly, however, and after being tended in the general ward he was allowed to go home. Once there he was still very weak and could only speak for five minutes at a time before having to take rest again. One of the actual symptoms was sudden fatigue.

Suddenly his situation deteriorated again and he was admitted into the hospital once more. Soon he passed away.

Two years ago Godwin came to Holland for a retreat. Even then his liver was causing him problems. He was often very tired. When we went for a walk I asked him about it and the answer was that he would usually go for a short walk when feeling tired and afterwards he would feel more refreshed and stronger than ever.

I met Godwin for the first time about eight years ago. Approximately 6 months earlier I had left Holland for a trip around the world. I didn't know what I was searching for, but also under the influence of writers such as Jack Kerouac since my early years I had felt a certain restlessness. During that journey the first words I wrote in my diary were, "I'm on my way home." When reading these words again after all those years, I realise they are true. I was searching for my real home.

During six months I was wandering through Turkey, Pakistan and India. They were months of various impressions but didn't seem to actually bring me closer to my goal. Somewhere in a hotel room in the South of India I had to admit that I could not go on like this any longer. I didn't have enough energy anymore to follow the travel guide and again visit another ancient temple or another very interesting tourist place. Things that apparently were the cause of much joy or amazement to my fellow tourists didn't really affect me at all but rather made my own inner emptiness and loneliness even more evident.

Through a Dutch student who was doing research about Ashrams in India, I got into contact with the living Hindu traditions. I went to visit an Ashram in the neighbourhood and here I met many like-minded souls who, just like me, were looking for inner peace. Some of them had found it with the Guru of that Ashram, others didn't. I found myself familiar with the last mentioned party. What I had learnt was that I was searching for something alive that would join with my own experiences.

I decided to take some rest on the beaches of Sri Lanka, despite the knowledge that I would never find that rest under external circumstances – only within myself.

I never saw those beaches. In the plane I met a young German who, like me, had reached a deadlock in India. He was on his way to a meditation centre in the hills of Sri Lanka for a retreat. In the hotel where we spent the night we met a young woman who had just come down from there. My travel companion went to the centre the next morning. I wanted to go

to the beach first, but already followed him the next day. After a four hours journey by train, a bus trip of an hour and a tough climb I arrived in a sweat at Nilambe Meditation Centre.

Not much was said during my first talk with Godwin. He asked about my meditation experience. I didn't have any. When we were sitting together on the bench in front of the kitchen. I asked him what he was doing and he answered, "I'm scanning you." I felt it was o.k. and also experienced some mixture of surrender and nervousness. Also in our next conversations we actually didn't say much. He gave simple instructions and seemed to have a lot of confidence in the process I underwent. And I shared Godwin's confidence, but lacked his patience.

As far as meditation techniques were concerned, Godwin only presented me with the minimum: concentration practice focussing on the breath, sounds or sensations in the body. Only after several months I got to know about the existence of Buddhism and Vipassana meditation. However, already on the very first day he gave me his message and continued to repeat it tirelessly. He told me to be my own best friend.

Gently Godwin guided me along this path, towards that treasury of my own heart. A path that went through a jungle of emotions and thoughts, and only occasionally did I meet a calm pool. He tried to teach me to not think of these things as my own and to not judge myself because of them. To see my thoughts and emotions as the clouds in a clear blue sky, which I cannot call mine: 'the mirror-like mind.' A metaphor that Godwin liked to use and which sticks in my mind was the one about the host. A host will welcome his guests, look after them very well and wave them goodbye when they leave.

Godwin preferred to see himself as a spiritual friend. He knew how to present his vision of the spiritual path such that it was of value for the Westerners, without alienating himself from the Eastern people. His travels to the West were like a holiday for him. Here he was able to move more freely, sometimes even literally, and experience less of the pressure of the Eastern tradition.

I will always remember Godwin as a man whose presentation of Buddhist meditation practice links up with, or even expresses, my own experience without doing injustice to the teaching. A man with a lot of experience on the spiritual path. A man with a fine sense of humour a lot of knowledge about the Western and Eastern ways of thinking. But above all a man with so much love, compassion, understanding and integrity. Godwin was the kindest man I ever met.

May he be well. May he be happy. May he be peaceful.

## MY ASSOCIATION WITH GODWIN - SOME REMINISCENCES

(BY CLOSE FRIEND MRS. PAT JAYATILLEKE)

The following has been composed by a very close friend of Godwin's who has known him for a very long time. She is the wife of the late Professor K. N. Jayatilleke, Head of the Department of Philosophy, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka:

I have known Godwin Samaratne for nearly 40 years. As a young man he was very shy and inclined to be in the background. He used to visit our home often, to meet my husband and seek clarification on certain points of the Dhamma. He made friends with my 2 children, both of whom were under 10 years of age at the time. He could relate stories interestingly and had a charming manner with children. My daughters grew fond of him. I watched Godwin maturing through the years and developing spiritually to become the 'super-human being' he eventually turned out to be. I feel both humble and privileged to have been a witness to this process.

I became a widow at the age of thirty-seven. During those days of crisis and turmoil, Godwin was there to help me. Always a gentleman in his dealings, respectful, kind and courteous, he was there in my hour of need. Never did he violate the trust I placed in him. I respect him deeply for that.

To the surprise of many of his associates, Godwin resigned his job as librarian and went to live at the meditation centre in Nilambe. His friends were quite dismayed about this rash decision as it meant that he forfeited his chance of a pension. Though he had no financial security, Godwin took that bold step. Here was a man who lived from moment to moment, unconcerned about material security.

Before he went to reside at Nilambe, Godwin gave a farewell party to his colleagues at the library. I had offered to keep the ice-cream in my refrigerator and deliver it at the time it would be needed. Later I realised that my car would not be available at that time and so I had to send it earlier. I was quite upset about not being able to keep my promise. When I met him later I asked how his guests had managed, and he said laughing, 'Everything went off very well. The guests drank melted ice-cream with a spoon.' He had a wonderful sense of humour, which he used in good measure to counteract the negative feelings of others.

A few years ago when on a train in Germany, Godwin lost his passport and all his travel documents. He was locked up in a railway station in a strange country. I asked him what his thoughts were at that time. After his usual long pause and deep thought he said, 'I thought people can steal all your material possessions but they cannot steal your mind.' Intrigued by that answer, I asked what he felt at that time. He said he felt calm and peaceful.

Judging by my own experience, I asked Godwin whether he did not wish to stay at home sometimes. I posed this question because he was always on the move catering to the demands of others all the time. I felt he was harassed. His answer was that wherever he was at a particular time, that place was home. He explained to me the idea of boundlessness. He said that when people think in terms of 'this is home' and 'this is outside' they create a boundary between the home and what is not home. In the same way they build boundaries

between my race and the other, my religion and the other, my country and the other, and so it goes on. When the mind is free of boundaries, there is no problem.

Extending the idea of boundlessness, Godwin spoke of boundless love, the sublime virtue, *metta*. The normal love we find around is bounded love, which is love for child, spouse, friend, country, and so on. *Metta* is love to all beings alike, without boundaries.

On one occasion I asked Godwin why the *metta* meditation starts with reference to self, when the core teaching of the Buddha is selflessness. His explanation surprised but convinced me. He said, it is only when you have something that you can give it to others. If you have love within you, you can give love to others. If you hate yourself, you can only hate others. Learn to have love within you. Accept yourself as you are. Forgive yourself. Don't be hard on yourself. Be kind to yourself. If you can do this to yourself, you can do this to others. Hence *metta bhavana* starts with self.

Once when I was ill and in great pain, many friends visited me to comfort me. Concerned and full of good intentions, they suggested various means of getting over my illness. Some said my planets were bad, some said it was the evil eye, some suggested that I had been charmed and I should take remedial action. Others said it was my bad *karma* and I should do meritorious deeds. My Christian friends said that God was testing me, or punishing me for past sins and I should pray and ask for forgiveness. When Godwin visited me, he said, 'Be with the pain; make friends with it; make space for it; don't get the mind involved with the physical pain. Let it be 'the pain' and not 'my pain', and you will find it tolerable.' I followed his advice. It worked and the pain was tolerable.

At one time there was a close friend of ours, highly respected by society, whose secret unethical behaviour shocked me beyond measure. It was difficult for me to accept it. When I discussed the matter with Godwin he told me it was not his (the friend's) problem but my problem; that I had images about people that made me feel that such and such a person should live according to my expectations. When my expectations are not fulfilled, I become disappointed and unhappy. 'There lies the problem and you have created your own problem. Think of him as a human being subject to human weaknesses, just like yourself. Forgive him and forget it.' That was Godwin's advice on the matter. He also told me often, 'Don't take yourself too seriously. Learn to laugh at yourself.'

In more recent times my daughter bought herself a computer and installed it in her room. Soon afterwards she was dismayed to find a rat in the room and feared for the safety of the computer. Faced with a moral dilemma she turned to Godwin for help. His gentle reply was: 'Do what has to be done but be very clear in your mind about your intention. Take full responsibility for what you do. Don't blame others and don't make excuses.' This he called 'Situational Ethics'.

Godwin never talked about himself nor did he talk about others. He was always concerned about others. Metaphorically speaking, he was always there with a shoulder for anyone to cry on. He heard the secrets and confessions of many a person, but he never let them down. His method of conflict resolution always intrigued me. He spoke little but his body language solved most problems. He never wore reading glasses. He never carried pen or paper now did he have a list of things to be done. Yet he had much to do. He carried everything in his head.

## TRIBUTES TO GODWIN

Godwin would never participate in a group discussion asserting his own point of view. He would listen, observe, and occasionally smile. What amazed me was that he was able to keep silent, without expressing his own ideas, unlike me who felt compelled to have my say.

## TRIBUTES TO GODWIN

I am happy and grateful for having had the chance to know Godwin, an embodiment of Dhamma, living according to it, teaching what he practised, practising what he taught. There was no inside and outside in his way of life. He was what he was as perceived by others. He was transparent.

The best way we can pay tribute to Godwin is to remember his good qualities, follow his example and set an example to others.

## MR. GODWIN SAMARARATNE

(AN APPRECIATION BY T.B.DISSANAYAKE, HALI ELA)

As a student Upul Nishantha Gamage, who was studying at Kingswood College, was interested in reading many books: Buddhist books and books written by J. Krishnamurti. He thought that Krishnamurti must be an Arahata. He asked the following question of Ven. Dhammika who had had the experience of meeting many meditation teachers:

“Is Krishnamurti an Arahata?”

“I have met him.” answered Ven. Dhammika Thera “He is a great philosopher, but he is not an Arahata, because I have seen that sometimes he gets angry.”

“Have you met someone who does not get angry?”

“Yes.”

“Where?”

“In Sri Lanka.”

Upul was excited by this answer.

“Whereabouts in Sri Lanka?”

“Kandy.” answered Ven. Dhammika Thera.

This was unbelievable news to Upul, who was living in Peradeniya.

“Whereabouts in Kandy?” Upul questioned again.

“In the D.S.Senanayake Library. He is the Librarian.”

“Is it Mr. Godwin? I have seen him, but I don’t know him very well. But I have seen him always with a smile.”

“Yes. He doesn’t get angry.” answered Ven. Dhammika Thera.

Mr. Godwin Samararatne worked as a Librarian in order to look after his mother. After the death of his mother his home was Nilambe Meditation Centre. But much of the time he lived in other countries. He travelled to many Eastern and Western countries in order to teach Buddhist meditation. Most of the foreigners loved him because he conducted meditation programmes, which addressed practical living rather than theory. No one saw him in an angry mood. Not only that, but he was not accustomed to speaking about the faults of others. He had the very good practice of admiring the good aspects of others’ lives.

Bernard Haymoz, a Swiss man who has had experience of meditating in many countries, said that he hasn’t met any meditation teachers as kind and humble as Mr. Godwin.

A German Meditator, Helmut, came to Nilambe to meditate for one week before going to India. But he changed his plan of going to India and stayed at Nilambe for seven years. He is now a very dedicated Buddhist monk, Ven. Anuruddha.

Once a political leader visited Nilambe. He was very happy with the place. Then he offered to provide electricity and a vehicle for the Centre, and he asked if anything else was needed. But Mr. Godwin didn't want anything. He kindly invited the leader to meditate whenever he was free. Even some foreigners were willing to pay for electricity to be installed. But he kindly declined their proposals. What he valued most was the light within oneself, rather than outer things.

Mr. Godwin was a simple person. He was not married and therefore his life was really a simple life. Ramaiya was a neighbour who lived on the nearby tea-estate. One day he came to Nilambe Meditation Centre to receive something from Mr. Godwin. Some foreigners had hired a vehicle to go to town. They offered the front seat to Mr. Godwin, and they sat in the back seats. As they were leaving, Ramaiya was there, wishing to go to town with them. Mr. Godwin asked the driver to stop the vehicle and invited Ramaiya to sit up front with him. He travelled to Kandy talking with Ramaiya in close friendship.

Mr. Godwin had no regard for caste, nationality, religion or any other group identification. Everyone was a human being to him. His life style reveals to us his vision.

Mr. Godwin had great respect for the Dhamma. Once there was a villager who came to the Meditation Centre to meditate. This person had been teaching Dhamma to a certain group. Mr. Godwin heard of this. He reflected on it, and the following day he met the villager and greeted him. Then he invited the villager to teach that same Dhamma to him. He went to the villager's kuti humbly and listened carefully. He didn't pay regard to the status of the person. He behaved towards him just like a humble student.

Sometimes the Meditation Centre is full of meditators from both Sri Lanka and abroad. If Mr. Godwin got to know that there was a meditator without a room, he would offer his room to that meditator and sleep on the bench in the kitchen. He didn't expect comforts. He considered the well being of others very highly. According to some people he was one who exuded holiness.

One day Mr. Godwin saw a meditator who was wearing slippers which were worn out. The following day he brought a new pair of slippers from town and quietly placed them in front of the meditator's room, saying nothing about it. When this incident was recounted to a group of people at his funeral, they said that there are thousands of such stories of his similar actions.

He was always ready to address anybody with pleasant words and treat them to his humble smile. He was keen to teach Dhamma at any time. His language was very simple – even when discussing Dhamma he kept it very simple so that it was suitable and understandable to professors, villagers or small children.

Mr. Godwin Samararatne expired on 22nd March last year. Today Mr. Upul Gamage, who got to know about Mr. Godwin from Ven. Dhammika Thera, is the meditation teacher at Nilambe Meditation Centre.

Nilambe Meditation Centre is situated about two miles uphill from Nilambe Office Junction on the Kandy – Galaha road. Sri Pada is nicely visible from the Centre. The Mahaweli River adds extra beauty to the landscape.

But the spiritual beauty of Mr. Godwin surpasses all others. Its an open secret to anyone.

May He attain Supreme Nibbana.

## **THE LATE GODWIN SAMARARATNE, A PERSONALITY I LOVED AND RESPECTED**

BY **SAMPATH DISSANAYAKE, TORONTO, CANADA**

(WRITTEN IN COMMEMORATION OF THE SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF GODWIN'S DEATH)

I first met Godwin Samararatne when I was a student at Dharmaraja College in Kandy in the late seventies. At that time he was the Librarian of Kandy's D.S. Senanayake Memorial Public Library. I used to see him frequently when I visited the library almost every afternoon after school.

During a discussion session on psychotherapy which I attended at the library, Godwin spoke briefly at the request of the medical professionals who were gathered there that evening. He said only a few words regarding his experiences about the workings of the mind and the importance of meditation in understanding the psyche. I felt something deep in his gestures and soft voice beyond what he expressed verbally. I experienced a kind of deep calmness in his dignified appearance, his smile, his half-closed eyes and his white attire.

I started inquiring about him after this encounter. I also spoke to him when I was at the library. He had many intellectual interests. He had read widely, from religion to psychology to philosophy to politics. He was an academic researcher in addition to being the Librarian of the public library. His investigations encompassed fields such as the therapeutic aspects of Buddhist meditation, the development of Buddhist meditation traditions in Sri Lanka and other Buddhist countries, reincarnation (rebirth studies), near-death experiences, and other paranormal phenomena.

He started as a member of the research team set up by late Prof. K. N. Jayathillake in the early sixties and later served as a field worker and as a collaborator in various research projects carried out in Sri Lanka and abroad with researchers and academics connected to the University of Virginia, the Northwestern University, the University of Iceland, and many other institutes throughout the world which pursued studies in the preceding fields. He collaborated with Prof. Ian Stevenson of the Dept. of Behavioural Medicine and Psychiatry of the University of Virginia in his research projects in the field of parapsychology for nearly thirty-five years. In the last stage of his life, he worked closely with Prof. Nimal Senanayake, a well-known Sri Lankan medical educator, researcher and practitioner, in his research projects in this particular field.

I did not see Godwin for one or two years. However I remained interested in the topics that he had spoken of. In the early eighties I tried to meet him to discuss those subjects further. I learnt through his friends that he had retired from the public service and started a

meditation centre with a close circle of his spiritual friends in a village called Nilambe. This place was located about seventeen miles away from the city of Kandy on the Peradeniya-Galaha road. I also learnt that he was the Resident Teacher there. I went to the Nilambe Meditation Centre after a couple of weeks with a friend of mine. The Centre was located on a beautiful hill overlooking a number of small towns and villages around Nilambe. There was a beautiful forest and a small lake in the vicinity of the Centre. There were about fifteen Westerners and a couple of Sri Lankans in addition to my friend and myself. The Centre had just opened, and it was crowded with foreigners, especially Westerners, who outnumbered the local people.

Godwin was very casual. We were undergraduates of the University of Peradeniya at that time. When my friend and I started talking to him, he did not utter a word on meditation or anything related to that. He just asked about our problems related to memorizing course material, paying attention to lectures in our classes, applying the facts that we have learnt in our exams, and things of that nature while offering us some tea. Then he said that there was going to be a group sitting around 6:00 pm and asked whether we would like to experiment with some meditation techniques with him. We told him that the purpose of our visit was to experience these things.

The sitting lasted about two hours. Godwin showed the people who were gathered there some simple techniques for improving their concentration. He taught us to accomplish this by paying attention to a particular natural process taking place in our body (such as breathing) and by listening to a particular sound in our surroundings. Then he suggested that we pay attention to how distractions arise when we try to focus attention on something. He gently guided us in observing how thoughts about a past incident take our attention away from the present. He also showed us how a simple casual thought proliferates to manufacture an entire new story which is not related to what is happening at the moment, and how subsequently we create anger, jealousy, anxiety and all other forms of psychological suffering. He encouraged everyone to experiment with trying to catch distractions immediately when the mind started to wander off and to see how long it takes even to realize that the mind has become distracted.

We also experimented with attempting to bring our attention back to the present moment in a gentle way without forcing the mind too much. This was one of Godwin's ways of understanding and overcoming psychological suffering. This experiment, although using simple techniques like calming down and observing one's mind, was the beginning of a learning process for me towards seeing, knowing and understanding the way our minds work.

Around 8:00 pm, after experimenting with these techniques, we sat for a discussion session while having soya coffee. Everyone was given a chance to briefly tell what they thought about the techniques and whether they could use them in day-to-day life as well as in a relaxed environment such as at home or in a Centre like Nilambe. Everyone shared his or her experiences about how thinking associated with emotions from the past could become an unnecessary burden in everyday life. The positive aspects of objective thinking and planning and the importance of being in the present were also discussed. From time to time, when it was necessary to explain and open people up to underlying processes and the subtleties of the mind, Godwin told us of some of his own experiences. Sometimes he quoted parallel descriptions found in Buddhist and other spiritual texts. Whatever he said, his every word and every gesture conveyed the fact that everything he said came from an experiential source rather than from an intellectual process. It was interesting to observe that

everyone could relate to what he said through their own background and experiences in life. This inner learning process which I started with Godwin continues in my life even today.

I spent one or two days at the Centre with my friend. I became a frequent visitor to the Centre in the weeks and months that followed. During these visits I gradually learnt what a busy person Godwin was. During one subsequent visit, when we were chatting about things related to meditation, I learnt that he had been invited to conduct sessions and discussions in a number of countries in Europe. The invitations had come from universities, colleges, social organizations and other community organizations. In addition he had been invited to participate in some group discussions with professionals in fields such as psychiatry, psychology and various schools of alternative medicine.

When I inquired about his private schedule he humbly told me that he was going to be away for about 6 months and invited me to come and stay in the Centre and further explore the techniques which I had been practising. He suggested a number of things for me to experiment with, such as whether it is really difficult to live in the present moment, whether and how far we can let go of our negative emotions associated with the past as well as daydreaming about the future, and whether there is a positive and objective way to deal with psychological wounds which we have created through our past relationships.

He also mentioned the names of a couple of frequent visitors to the Centre and told me to discuss, practice and work with them on these things. Two of the names he mentioned to me were Harilal Wickramaratne and Upul Gamage, who is now the Chief Administrator and Resident Teacher of the Nilambe Centre. The association which thus began between Godwin and I grew into a lifelong relationship which lasted almost two decades, until his passing in March 2000.

A few years later, around 1985, Harilal Wickramaratne encouraged Godwin to form a discussion and a practice group at his residence in Kandy. Godwin accepted this invitation. The group met every Tuesday. Godwin travelled from Nilambe to Kandy each week to conduct the sessions and guide the discussions. One thing that really impressed me during these discussions was Godwin's open-minded approach to meditation and his handling of day-to-day situations and human relationships. The main topic or theme most of the evenings was the application of mindful meditation to real life situations. The group consisted of people from different age groups and backgrounds, such as teachers, students, doctors, nurses, businessmen and other professionals. People regularly brought their relatives and friends. Some parents attended the sessions with their children. The discussions which Godwin initiated in this way continue even today in different forms and in different places in Sri Lanka and abroad. The people who were regulars at these earlier meetings have now created their own small groups in their own communities, workplaces, schools, and so forth.

The people who gathered at the Nilambe Meditation Centre as far back as the early eighties branched out into different activities in their social lives as time went on. But one thing remained with them. That was the application of the insights and understandings which they achieved through the light of meditation to their personal as well as their social lives. The people whom I met there came from different walks of life, different educational levels, different professions, different schools of thought and different religions and faiths. Everyone gathered to discuss life experiences and issues with each other and how mindful meditation could be applied in different situations to gain understanding about these situations and qualitatively change one's responses to them.

Godwin was not only a facilitator in this process. His deeper understanding of the phenomena of life provided the necessary guidance in this exploration to many of those present. Some other facets of Godwin's life that became clear to me during these meetings were that meditation was not something external to his life. The essence of it was present within him wherever he went, whatever he said and whatever he did throughout his life. A great and deep awareness was present in his whole personality in all life situations, whether he was attending a birth, attending to last minute arrangements for a foreign trip, visiting a patient, or attending the funeral of someone close to him. He had a deep sense of alertness towards both external events and his own thought processes regarding them. In this respect he was not only a teacher or a guide but also always a student and an experimenter.

Another marvellous aspect of his teaching was the way he used his own experiences, anecdotes, stories, and quotations to illustrate the application of meditation in everyday life and ways of overcoming challenges associated with doing so. He never neglected to discuss and emphasize the problems associated with using meditation in a society where the majority are unaware of the importance of meditation. Some days he spent hours discussing the traps, pitfalls and escapism associated with meditation. He always encouraged us to investigate these things. Both highly educated people and persons with limited formal education were comfortable with his approach and responded to his words and guidance in a favourable manner.

One evening in the early nineties a few of our friends met at a place in Kandy to give a farewell dinner to Godwin and to wish him the best prior to his going abroad to teach for an extended period. This was just after the country had undergone a period of terror and violence. At the time Godwin was becoming busier than ever. The demand for him both locally and abroad was becoming increasingly great. He was not used to having such a busy official schedule. But his desire to help his fellow human beings was great and he adjusted to the increasing demands on his time little by little. He spent certain days of the week at Nilambe. Other days he spent teaching and meeting regular groups in Kandy and the surrounding area. Sometimes he went to schools located in very remote areas to conduct discussions and retreats at the invitation of teachers and student societies. At other times he visited the Peradeniya Teaching Hospital where he offered his services as a counsellor to the medical team at the psychiatric ward.

During the dinner Godwin came up with an idea to create a continuing dialogue regarding the burning issues in the country and whether there was a way of handling these issues in the light of the Dhamma and meditation. This idea became very popular among our close circle of friends. As a result of this, we developed a series of lectures, discussions and dialogues which we presented in public halls in Kandy, in the University of Peradeniya and at private homes on a very regular basis. We invited a lot of specialists and experts in different fields, living in the country as well as sometimes from abroad, to these meetings. We discussed spirituality and its relationship to social and economic development, ecology, education, aesthetics, health and human relationships, the therapeutic aspects of meditation, alternative therapies, issues and problems associated with violence, and many more psychological and social themes.

Dr. Kithsiri Herath and Bertie Seneviratne, two close friends of both Godwin and myself, acted as pillars in organizing and coordinating these events. More than anything else this gave my friends and myself a chance to interact with Godwin very closely and to feel his deep concern for other human beings. Godwin worked with other groups of people to

implement support services for the ill, vocational training programmes for youth, educational programmes for the disadvantaged, and much more. It was sometimes difficult to imagine how he managed these things while being the Resident Teacher of Nilambe and undertaking a large number of teaching assignments abroad. The Nilambe Centre had only three or four guestrooms for short and long-term residents at the beginning of eighties. He managed to expand it by adding more guest rooms and some additional facilities for bigger groups to practice meditation. His kalyana mittas (Dhamma friends) and the committee members of the Nilambe Meditation Centre offered generous support to him in achieving these ends.

Another important and unforgettable quality of Godwin was his generosity. He was one of the most generous people I have ever met in my life. Every time he went abroad he brought at least a small gift for every single person he knew. Sometimes he brought things for people whom he did not even know. Yet I cannot remember any occasion when he brought anything for himself, other than a large number of books and other resources he purchased for the Nilambe Meditation Centre. Thousands of people still visit and make use of the Centre he built up over the years during his life at Nilambe.

Without any exaggeration, Godwin was a great and beautiful person who brought insight to this world every moment he lived. I personally feel it is extremely important for us to remember and reflect upon Godwin and the things he did during his 68 years on this planet. This will help us to understand the deeper dimensions of human life and provide an example of the kind of a life one should lead during this short span of existence. He was an embodiment of the Buddhist way of life. He led his life totally for the benefit of himself and for the benefit of others. He accomplished the Buddhist ideals of generosity, compassion and wisdom.

Although he did not expect any praise or honour for what he did, I was personally disappointed that he was not recognized and given the honour he deserved inside Sri Lanka when he was widely recognized and respected abroad. People living on the other side of the planet frequently visited Sri Lanka to learn, discuss and practice meditation under his guidance. The main reason for this lack of recognition in his native country may have been the simple and self-effacing life he led. But I was immensely pleased when he was honoured as a distinguished Old Boy by the Arts Foundation of the Dharmaraja College, where he had received his complete education in Kandy from the late 1930's to the early 1950's, in the latter part of 1999 for his contribution to the culture and tradition of the country and for his services to humanity, six months prior to his passing away.

May he attain Nibbana within the shortest possible span of time.

## GODWIN - DER SANFTE RIESE

### EIN PORTRÄT VON PAUL KÖPPLER

In der vergangenen Ausgabe von U&W (Nr. 32, S. 29) meldeten wir den Tod des Meditationslehrers Godwin Samararatne am 22. März. Paul Köppler, der ihn gut kannte, würdigt nachfolgend das Werk des von vielen geschätzten Meisters.

Godwin Samararatne wurde 1932 in Sri Lanka geboren. Über sein Leben und sich selbst hat er kaum etwas erzählt, denn Bescheidenheit und Zurückhaltung waren sein Lebensausdruck. Nach einem Studium wurde er Bibliothekar und in dieser Zeit begegnete er der Meditation. Als schließlich ein Übungszentrum in Nilambe (nahe Kandy) gegründet wurde, gab er Beruf und Sicherheit auf und sorgte für den Betrieb. Im Laufe der Zeit wurde er zum Hauslehrer, der er bis zu seinem frühen Tod im März 2000 blieb.

Bald schon kamen die ersten Sucher auf dem spirituellen Weg in das abgelegene Hügelland und von Anfang an hatte der dunkelhäutige, freundlich lächelnde Singhalese eine besondere Wirkung auf die seltsamen Westler. So blieb es nicht aus, dass er bald nach Europa eingeladen wurde und in wenigen Jahren eine große Anzahl von Zentren und Schülern auf der ganzen Welt hatte, die er regelmäßig besuchte und von denen er als Freund und Meister (ohne Titel) verehrt wurde. Seinem Namen folgend wurde er zum große Gewinn für alle, die ihm begegneten.

Trotzdem scheint es so, als hätte er fast im Verborgenen gearbeitet. Beeinflusst von großen Buddhisten wie dem Ehrwürdigen Nyanaponika hatte er seinen Weg mehr oder minder selbst gefunden, und so war es ihm immer auch ein großes Anliegen, den Menschen zu helfen, aus dem großen Medizinschrank des Buddha ihre eigene Medizin zu finden. Es gibt von ihm keine Schriften und Bücher, keine großen Medienereignisse und spektakuläre Auftritte. Dennoch bin ich überzeugt, dass die Wirkung seiner Worte und Lehren für die Entwicklung eines zeitgemäßen Buddhismus ungeheuer groß ist. (Derzeit werden zahlreiche seiner Vorträge gesammelt und archiviert, um sie später anderen zugänglich zu machen, vielleicht auch als Buch.)

Eine seiner großen Leistungen lag darin, West und Ost auf geniale Weise zu verbinden. Niemand konnte so sehr die Eigenarten und Verrücktheiten unserer westlichen Denkart verstehen und damit heiter arbeiten, obwohl er völlig in der buddhistischen Tradition wurzelte und auch als Laie im Grunde einfach wie ein Mönch lebte. Eine entscheidende Wende in seiner Lehrtätigkeit vollzog er, als er merkte, dass die Übung der Meditation die Menschen oft noch unfähiger machte, in ihrem Alltag auf glückliche Weise zu leben. Von da an öffnete er den Bereich der Übung und von da an gab es kein „Hindernis“, das er nicht in die Praxis integrierte. Ob es das Geräusch eines nervenden Rasenmähers war oder der eigene innere Schatten – alles wurde zum Objekt der Einsicht. Schließlich forderte er die Übenden geradezu auf, sich ihren Dämonen zu stellen und sie einzuladen. Die mühelose und praktikable Verbindung zur modernen Psychologie herzustellen war eine andere große Leistung.

Wie jeder große Lehrer hatte er die natürliche Fähigkeit, auf eine Art präsent zu sein, die die ganze Schwingung veränderte. Er war ein Lehrer, der sich völlig für andere einsetzte, der da war – zum Anfassen, zum Zuhören und Lachen. Besonders sein köstlicher Humor und

seine ansteckende, fast schon kindliche Heiterkeit haben viele Menschen tief bewegt und ermuntert, selbst über die eigenen Schwächen zu lachen.

Er war einer der Ersten, der viele neue Elemente wie Yoga, Massage, Reiki und Singen in seine Kurse integrierte, und eines seiner liebsten Themen war es, uns klarzumachen, dass wir zunächst unser eigenes Selbstwertgefühl stärken sollten, um fähig zu werden, in die Tiefe zu gehen und andere wirklich selbstlos zu lieben (wie er es tat). In den letzten Jahren hatte er noch ein weiteres Werk ins Leben gerufen: zahlreiche Hilfsprojekte in Sri Lanka für arme und kranke Menschen, besonders für krebskranke Kinder.

Wie zu Buddhas Zeiten lebt sein Werk in den Köpfen, Herzen und Taten zahlloser Menschen weiter, die bei ihm die wahre Praxis gelernt haben. Mögen die Samen, die er gelegt hat, in uns aufblühen und die Welt positiv verändern.

(TRANSLATION OF ABOVE)

## GODWIN - THE GENTLE GIANT

A PORTRAIT BY PAUL KÖPPLER

Godwin Samararatne was born in Sri Lanka in 1932. He didn't speak much about himself or his life as he was always most modest and reserved in regard to these matters. After his studies he became a librarian, and it was during this time that he came across meditation. When eventually a meditation centre at Nilambe near Kandy was established, Godwin left the security of his profession to look after the running of the place. Over time he became the resident teacher at the centre, where he taught until his premature death in March 2000.

Soon the first spiritual seekers found their way to the remote centre in the Hill Country. With his friendly smile Godwin made a good impression on the strange Westerners from the beginning. Thus it soon followed that he was invited to Europe, and within a few years he had a huge amount of centres [where he was invited to teach] and students all round the world, whom he visited regularly and who referred to him as a friend and master (but without the title). Living up to his name he became a great good to all those who met him, although he worked for other's benefit in an almost hidden way.

Though influenced by eminent Buddhists like Ven. Nyanaponika he found the path more or less by himself, and it was one of his concerns to help others find the medicine they needed out of the Buddha's great medicine-store.

He wrote no books, held no great media events or spectacular public appearances, nevertheless I am convinced that the effect of his words and teachings is immensely important for the development of modern Buddhism. At the moment many of his recorded talks are being collected and being transcribed and made available for those interested in them, and they may well be published in book form also.

One of his great achievements was that he had a genius for bringing together East and West. Nobody could understand the peculiarity and craziness of our Western way of thinking and work more humorously with it than Godwin could, even though he was completely rooted in the Buddhist tradition and even as a layman lived very simply, like a monk.

He initiated a crucial turn in his teaching when he realised that the practice of meditation often left people less able to live their daily lives in a happy way. Because of this he opened up the practice, and there were no obstacles that he wasn't able to integrate, whether the disturbing sound of a lawnmower, or one's own inner chatter, they were all made vehicles for insight. He encouraged his students to invite their 'monsters' into the practice and then to face up to them. This effortless and practical connection to modern psychology was another great achievement of his.

Like any other great teacher he had the natural ability to affect the whole atmosphere around him. he was a teacher who completely supported others. he was there for others, to be touched, to listen to and to laugh with them also. Especially his delightful humour, and almost childlike cheerfulness touched many people deeply and encouraged them to laugh at their own shortcomings also.

He was one of the first Buddhist teachers to introduce elements like yoga, massage, reiki and singing into his meditation courses. One of his favourite topics was that we first have to strengthen our own self-confidence before we can go into the depths and truly find out how to love others unconditionally (as he himself did).

In his last years he started numerous aid projects to help the poor and sick in Sri Lanka, and in particular children suffering from cancer.

As with the Buddha, Godwin's work lives on in the minds, hearts, and acts of countless people who learned the true praxis from him. May the seeds he sowed blossom in all of us and change the world in a positive way.