

INTRODUCTION TO GODWIN

Acarya Godwin Samararatne was one of the best known lay meditation teachers in Sri Lanka in recent times, based at his meditation Centre at Nilambe in the central hill country near Kandy. After his death in March 2000 letters and tributes poured in as many people around the world attested to the impact that Godwin and his teaching had made on their lives.

Godwin was born 6th September 1932. He grew up as one of seven children in a Kandy-based family, in the central hills of Sri Lanka. He attended a well-reputed Buddhist school, but later admitted to neglecting his studies there in favour of exploring the deeper philosophical questions of life. After school he became a Librarian, serving in libraries in and around the Kandy area before being promoted to the post of Chief Librarian at the main Kandy Public Library.

While his brothers and sisters all married, Godwin remained living at home, devotedly supporting his widowed mother until her death in 1977. By that time Godwin was already involved with a Buddhist lay group who were studying the Dhamma and practising meditation, so when in 1979 this group founded a Meditation Centre at Nilambe, at the top of a tea estate some distance outside Kandy, he gave up his work as a librarian and took up residence in the new Centre.

He subsequently became the Centre's chief meditation teacher. Godwin based his teaching on his own practice and the understanding he gained of the Dhamma through that. He had no particular teacher himself, but he discussed the Buddha's teachings widely with many experienced monks, scholars, and other meditators.

News soon spread about Godwin and the new Centre, passed on by word of mouth by those who had been there and benefited from their stay. Young Westerners especially who were seeking a spiritual dimension to their lives were attracted to the Centre, appreciating Godwin's ability to translate the Dhamma into a language relevant to people's everyday lives and concerns.

Godwin's reputation as a meditation teacher grew steadily throughout the 80's both in Sri Lanka and abroad. By the mid-80's Godwin had already been invited to teach in Europe and South Africa, and he became over time an internationally acclaimed and much loved teacher.

In the 1990's his teaching tours extended to many more countries, including England, Germany, and Switzerland; and other Asian countries such as India, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Fortunately many of the talks and retreats he gave on these tours were recorded, and it is transcriptions of these recordings that form the heart of this website.

At the end of 1999 he made another teaching trip to South Africa and Botswana, and it was shortly after his return to Sri Lanka that he passed away on 22nd March 2000 in Peradeniya Hospital of a progressive liver disease. He was 67 years old.

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What was so special about Godwin was that he lived what he taught - his teaching and his life were seamless. He had the marvellous ability to put the teachings of the Buddha concerning suffering and the way out of suffering into his own simple words which were relevant to the everyday lives and experience of the people he was speaking to, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist.

Godwin's deepest concern was to help people free themselves from their suffering, and having realised the fruits of the Buddha's teaching himself, he brought a great depth of wisdom and compassion to his explorations of the Dhamma with others. He also evinced a lightness, humour, and sense of the absurd, as much in his talks as in his day-to-day life.

His teaching style was direct and practical, and he always insisted that his students concentrate on the realities of their lives, rather than getting lost in theoretical speculation. With simple stories, similes and examples he was able to communicate the Dhamma he had imbibed so well to audiences who were perhaps unfamiliar with the often difficult language of the books.

What Godwin taught then was for us to explore and find out for ourselves the simple truth of the Dhamma in the context of our everyday lives, by putting the practice of awareness and loving-kindness at the centre of our lives, and thereby experiencing a natural unfolding of our inherent capacity for wisdom and compassion.

Godwin didn't see meditation as being about having special experiences; rather he saw the spiritual path as encompassing the whole of life, and providing a set of tools for meeting all the challenges and difficulties of everyday life. By practising and consistently applying these tools he believed we could overcome our suffering and find a lightness, joy, and contentment in our lives just as they are.

Not only was he a living example of this himself, but so many meditators around the world who took to heart his teachings were able to experience the benefits of the practice, and the Centre where he taught for 20 years continues to this day to provide the opportunity for people from all different backgrounds to find the space and support for their own spiritual journey.