

**MEMORIAL TRIBUTES TO GODWIN**

*from*

**REMEMBERING GODWIN:**

***A SELECTION OF TALKS BY GODWIN SAMARARATNE AND  
SOME APPRECIATIONS OF HIS LIFE AND TEACHINGS***

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**DENNIS CANDY AND SAMPATH DISSANAYAKE**

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**FOREWORD**  
**BY BHIKKHU BODHI**

(PALI SCHOLAR AND TRANSLATOR,  
PRESIDENT OF THE BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY)

As a predominantly Theravada Buddhist country, Sri Lanka has secured its place in the international Buddhist arena primarily through its distinguished monastic order, which has included some of the most erudite and eloquent monks of the modern world. However, in addition to its monks, Sri Lanka can also boast of a corps of outstanding lay Buddhist teachers who have achieved international renown as scholars, thinkers, preachers, and spiritual guides. Among these are Anagarika Dharmapala, who spearheaded the Buddhist revival in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the Buddhist scholars G.P. Malalasekera, O.H. de A. Wijesekera, and Lily De Silva; the philosophers K.N. Jayatilleke, David Kalupahana, Y. Karunadasa, and P.D. Premasiri; and the social activist and proponent of peace, A.T. Ariyaratne, founder of the Sarvodaya Shramadana movement.

Belonging to this same current of eminent lay teachers was a quiet, thoughtful, and serene resident of Kandy named Godwin Samararatne, with whom I had the fortune to be closely associated during my twenty-three years living in Sri Lanka. I first met Godwin within two months of my arrival in Sri Lanka, in late 1972, when I was visiting the great German elder Ven. Nyanaponika at the Forest Hermitage. At the time, Godwin was working as librarian at the Kandy Municipal Library, but his keen interest in Buddhism, psychology, and human spirituality often drew him to the Forest Hermitage to borrow books and discuss ideas with Ven. Nyanaponika. It was Ven. Nyanaponika's books, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* and *The Power of Mindfulness*, that inspired Godwin to take up the practice of meditation. Within a decade his commitment to the practice had become so serious that he left his job as librarian to become a full-time meditator, then a local meditation teacher, and finally an international meditation teacher.

For close to twenty years, Godwin had been the resident teacher at the Nilambe Meditation Centre in the lovely Sri Lankan hill country. He had also taught meditation at the Lewella and Visakha Meditation Centres (two affiliates of Nilambe), in Kandy itself, 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 around the globe. Thousands of people from many lands came to Nilambe to practise under his guidance, and they also invited him to their own countries to conduct meditation courses and retreats. Thus for over two decades Godwin had become an international Buddhist figure, constantly in demand in countries ranging from Europe to Singapore and Hong Kong. He was also a regular visitor to South Africa, where he conducted his last meditation retreat just months before his death.

What was so impressive about Godwin was not what he did but what he was. I can say that Godwin 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 Godwin in two interrelated senses. First, he was selfless in the sense that he seemed to have almost no inner gravitational force of a self around which his personal life revolved: no pride, no ambition, no personal projects aimed at self-aggrandizement. He was humble and non-assertive, not in an artificial self-demeaning way, but 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 on 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 empathized with others and shared their concerns as vividly as if they were his own. In this respect, Godwin embodied the twin Buddhist virtues of loving-kindness and compassion, *metta* 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 a path of inner transformation whose effectiveness stemmed primarily 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 better 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 personal 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 practice 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 readily 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 of the year 2000, almost immediately upon his return from a teaching engagement in South Africa, his illness deteriorated and a month later claimed his precious life.

It is an act of merit that several of his students and Dhamma friends have decided to collect into a single volume a number of his discourses as well as personal tributes to this gentle ambassador of the Dhamma whose life touched so many. This volume will help to keep his legacy alive for years to come, enabling us to long bear in our hearts the memory of this calm, gentle personality.

Bhikkhu Bodhi,  
Bodhi Monastery, U.S.A.

**MY FRIEND GODWIN**  
**BY DR RANIL ABEYASINGHE**

(HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHIATRY, FACULTY OF MEDICINE,  
UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA, SRI LANKA)

My friendship with Godwin went back to late 1970s. I had arrived in Kandy as a junior lecturer at the University of Peradeniya. Godwin was the librarian at D.S.Sennanayake Library then. One day I met this serene looking tall man. My departmental colleague introduced him as a person interested in psychiatry and meditation. I was interested in psychiatry then but not in meditation. But I was developing an interest in Zen Buddhism. I was tired of all those Hindu rituals that were creeping into Theravada Buddhism even then. I was then a brash young doctor who wanted to see scientific proof in everything, meditation included.

Moreover, I liked to form first impressions or judgments about people I met. I judged people differently depending on what they were doing. I judged my colleagues by their competence and politicians by their commitment to a political cause. Humaneness did not figure prominently in the way I judged people then. Competence was all that mattered to me. Godwin was one person, I could not thus judge. He baffled my analytical and judging brain. He was calm and did not say much. But he made me feel comfortable and at ease in his presence as no one has ever done before. For the first time, instead of judging a man, I allowed what his presence and what he did to me to influence my relationship. Such was the beginning of my long and beautiful friendship with Godwin.

We had many meetings and many a discussion on meditation and psychiatry. In those days, I was not a believer in the benefits of meditation. In the early 1980s I was running my own clinic for neurotic patients. Looking back, I was trying out then known Western techniques of behaviour therapy and relaxation. Western psychiatry was only beginning to come to term with neurosis then. Some patients seemed to benefit and some clearly did not. Neither Western psychiatry nor I had any solution to many of these difficult cases in those days. These patients would attend my clinic for a few weeks and when they realised they were not getting better they would stop attending. That was how things happened in the early 1980s.

When I discussed my dilemma with Godwin over dinner one day, he offered to try meditation with some of them. I arranged for him to see my patients in my clinic on a regular basis. Those of my patients who did not improve dropped out. His clients seemed at least to attend regularly! It was then that the idea occurred to us that we should conduct a clinical trial to see if meditation was effective. We were about to start this but I was sent away to Britain for my post graduate training. Godwin continued to help patients with meditation. We never found out scientifically if meditation helped our patients.

I recall one particular instance in London. He wrote to me to say that he was coming to Britain to take part in a meditation workshop. I offered to pick him up from the airport and put him up in my London house. He was clearly joyous at seeing me. So was I. It was his first visit to Britain. Wishing to give him the 'sights', I took him home via a 'scenic' route that gave him the sights such as Hyde Park and Buckingham Palace. I noticed that he was not looking around! When I asked him why, his answer was simply that "No I am listening to you"! He was not moved by the usual 'sights'.

Later after my return to Sri Lanka, he would often spend nights in my house. It was the routine that whenever he came down from the meditation centre to Kandy he would spend the last night in my house. We had to prepare special meals because he did not eat meats. I once offered him a glass of wine, which he accepted. He accepted it without any comments and with his usual equanimity. He maintained the conversation with the glass of wine in his hand. My interest in and knowledge of Zen Buddhism was improving then. He reminded me of the Zen master who took the beautiful woman who was cowering in fear of crossing a marsh on his shoulder and dropped the woman on the other side. His disciples continued to talk about this 'bad' deed for a week. When confronted by the students, the Zen master said "I carried her on my shoulders but dropped her on the other side, but you are still carrying her on your shoulders!"

In the last 5-6 years of his life he was clearly too busy with meditation matters and he had a large clientele to help out. I, too, was too busy with my university life and patient care. His regular weekly visits to my house stopped. We met only rarely. It was then that I heard he was sick. I heard that he was very sick indeed. One day he made a rare visit and asked me if I would make a presentation on rebirth at an international symposium on rebirth. I was aghast. Here was my friend asking me to make a presentation on a phenomenon that I did not believe in. I had rejected the concept of rebirth while learning about evolution as a school boy! My zoology master had shown us that evolution and rebirth were concepts that were totally incompatible.

Godwin knew very well that I was a non believer. But Godwin was my friend, and I knew that he did not have long to live. This could be his last request or even his last visit to my house. I explained to him that I, a non believer, should not go out there, where true believing researchers were presenting their research findings to an audience of true believers. It could cause a riot, I explained to Godwin. I recall his answer. "If there is a riot, so be it. You should say what you have to say. I expect that from you." I could not say "No" in the face of such firm insistence. I did cause a 'riot' at this symposium with my presentation! No one in the audience was pleased. The presentation was followed by a stream of verbal abuse by the true believing researchers and the audience! I was called all sorts of names! Only Godwin was pleased!!

I listed these instances to illustrate the most striking qualities that impressed me during our long standing friendship. He had a serene sense of presence that would put any man or woman at ease. I have not found this quality in anyone before or after Godwin. It would have been the first thing that you felt too. It was Godwin's humaneness that struck me on the first day I met him. His total humanity made him listen to me rather than look at Buckingham palace in London. To his humane nature, listening to his friend that he met after so many years was more important. And his accepting a glass of wine told me about non-judgmental nature. He did not judge me, nor the glass of wine, even though he clearly did not enjoy drinking wine. His fierce intellectual independence was the last I saw in getting me to cause a riot in that symposium on rebirth.

His faith in meditation has been amply validated. What the two of us could not do, due to my departure and subsequent work pressure, has been done by others. Today three forms of psychological therapies based on meditation exist. One is Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy developed by the Cambridge based group of clinical psychologists. This form of cognitive therapy uses Vipassana based awareness of one's immediate environment and thoughts to deal with negative thoughts associated with depression. This type of therapy has been scientifically validated and proven to be effective in preventing relapses in depression.

The other form of psychological therapy that is again derived from Vipassana meditation is Dialectic Behaviour Therapy for helping a certain category of people with disturbed personalities. The third form of cognitive therapy is called Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. One of the authors of this therapy, Steven Hayes, called these therapies the third wave of behaviour therapy. I have attended several seminars on some of these new forms of therapies and I was struck by the extent of the use of Vipassana meditation in those therapies. I had to gently remind the speakers that they should acknowledge their indebtedness to vipassana meditation. I could only pay my tribute silently to Godwin at those times. Knowing Godwin, he would have silently approved this borrowing from vipassana meditation for the good of many in the West.

Godwin's calm exterior belied a sharp intellect. He did not have blind faith in meditation nor did he consider it a panacea the way others have made therapies such as hypnosis panacea in our society. Godwin would have been pleased with these developments in psychotherapy. I still believe that neither did he have that total faith in rebirth. He was very curious about the research done on that front but was not a total believer. That must be the reason why he brought me at the risk of causing a riot. Maybe he hoped that would turn, in time, into an intellectual riot!

I have often wondered where to fit Godwin in a saintly hierarchy. Once my friend, Dr. Rodrigo, said that Godwin would have at least achieved *Sowan*. Unlike some of those bogus Buddhists, who claimed they have achieved a higher state, he never claimed it. But then due to my interest and reading on Zen Buddhism, I have convinced myself that he was the Zen master who had achieved *satori*.

My friend Godwin, you may have left us physically, but your sweet soul still hovers over us and stirs us for ever. My friend, I no longer judge others by their competence alone! Humanness figures prominently in the way I form impressions about people. It was you who showed me, in your own way that humanness matters above all. It is my fervent hope that your humanness will be a shining example to our people in Sri Lanka in these troubled times.

Dr Ranil Abeyasinghe,  
Department of Psychiatry,  
University of Peradeniya

**GODWIN: IN MEMORIAM**  
**BY BHANTE OLANDE ANANDA**

(INTERNATIONALLY RENOWNED MEDITATION TEACHER)

I first met Godwin Samararatne in 1979, while I was residing at Rockhill Hermitage at Wegirikanda, just on the other side of the Mahaweli River. Godwin had just started to live at the Nilambe Meditation Centre and I went there for a visit. His brother, Hector, was our Secretary at Rockhill Hermitage.

Godwin had left his job as Librarian at the D. S. Senanayake Library in Kandy and was fully committed to developing Nilambe Meditation Centre on the land that Mr Alahakoon had so generously donated for the purpose in a beautiful, cool tea estate. At that time Professor Parakrama Fernando (one of Godwin's close Dhamma friends) was residing in the estate bungalow nearby and Godwin had built a *kuti* at the centre to stay in. Upul Gamage had already begun to assist Godwin while he was still a very young man and also used to stay there. He had great admiration for Godwin and the spiritual calling.

In 1984 I once again visited Nilambe together with the participants in an inter-religious dialogue group who had been meeting at our centre. Godwin was, as always, so accommodating and so kind and patient with us.

By 1989 Godwin was already a well-known meditation teacher and Dhamma friends from all over the world used to invite him to come to their countries and teach. He would regularly visit South Africa and Tanzania and was in great demand. When he was unable to go that year he suggested that I go in his place to the Buddhist Retreat Centre at Ixopo (with the click sound for the X!) in South Africa, a beautiful place of 325 hectares started by the Dutch engineer Louis van Loon. It gave me an opportunity to be in South Africa during the time when Apartheid came to an end and Nelson Mandela was released from jail, which happened in early 1990.

Godwin was not only residing and teaching at Nilambe and at other centres around the world, but was also helping with care for cancer patients and mentally disturbed patients at Peradeniya and Kandy hospitals on a very regular basis. In addition to this, through his many contacts around the world, Godwin also did a great deal of social service in a very quiet and unassuming way.

I remember that in 1991, while I was looking after a small Thai Temple/Meditation Centre in Amsterdam, Godwin was in Holland teaching and we met there. His vast knowledge of literature, philosophy, psychology and Buddhism and his association with J. Krishnamurti's teachings, made him a gold mine of knowledge. But it was never knowledge for knowledge's sake, it was used by him only to help the people he encountered.

Godwin's regular weekly evening meditation classes at Harilal Wickramaratne's home in Kandy also stand out in my memory. On several occasions when I happened to be in Kandy on such days, Godwin would ask me to take over the class, as he felt that the people already knew what he was saying and would like to listen to someone else for a change. It was there, at Harilal's residence, that I met him after his return from southern Africa in 2000, and I noticed how his health had deteriorated. His famous smile, however, did not diminish and he remained the same old Godwin, notwithstanding the pain he was undergoing and the deterioration of his body.



## MEMORIAL TRIBUTES TO GODWIN

Bhikkhu Bodhi gave a very worthy eulogy at Godwin's *Pansakula* (paying last respects to the body) at the Lewella Meditation Centre, where Godwin was also the spiritual teacher. Many, many people came to say farewell to his body. The cremation in Kandy also drew large numbers of people, as the word of his passing away had spread far and wide.

We still miss Godwin's gentle presence, but thanks to modern technology and the efforts of some of his students, Godwin's teachings are now available via the internet for all to see and hear.

Bhante Olande Ananda,  
Pagoda Meditation Centre,  
Nugegoda, Sri Lanka

**PUBLISHING GODWIN**  
**BY ANANDAJOTI BHIKKHU**

(WEBMASTER OF GODWIN HOME PAGE)

I first met Godwin on my initial visit to Sri Lanka in 1990. I had arrived in the country from an ashram in Southern India with just two addresses for meditation centres. The first one hadn't worked out very well as the teacher was conceited, rude and uncompromising, and being used to a welcoming hand in India I had almost decided to give up on a country that I was unfamiliar with and whose hosts appeared to be so unfriendly.<sup>1</sup>

Still I had the second address and rather than give up I decided to go along and see. From the beginning Godwin was so humble, open and friendly the contrast could hardly be greater, and I quickly settled in at the Nilambe Centre near Kandy. In those days Godwin was mainly teaching choiceless awareness, a meditation technique that, at least in the way Godwin was teaching it, was based as much on the teachings of J. Krishnamurti as on those of the Buddha. Godwin asked me to try it, and immediately I could see that all the many benefits I had gained from my meditation practice in India had only been a by-product of the practice I had been doing there, and that this was a direct way, simply looking straight at the mind, without interference or objectives. I dropped all other practices for the next few years, and concentrated on developing this one.

As meditation was my main interest in those days I asked Godwin if I might tape some of the evening group discussions with him, to which he readily agreed. Everyone who attended Godwin's retreats either at Nilambe or abroad will be familiar with the group discussions he used to conduct, but in those days, owing to political violence and instability in Sri Lanka, there was sometimes only Godwin, myself, and one or two other people present at the Centre, and the discussions were more or less one-to-one.

I spent about 3 weeks making the recordings and about 3 months transcribing and re-editing them! It was quite a labour of love as I worked them up to try to cover all of Godwin's main teachings, but it was well worth it as I was excited about the new insights I had gained and wanted to share the teachings with others. Eventually the transcripts were ready and I sent out photocopies of them to friends worldwide. The response was very good and I continued working on them over the next couple of years as I spent more time in Godwin's presence and understood his teaching better.<sup>2</sup> That was my first literary involvement with Godwin and his teaching, and at the time I had no idea what it would presage for the future.

My second involvement was in 1995, when Godwin was invited to attend the J. Krishnamurti centenary celebrations in Madras<sup>3</sup> in Tamil Nadu, an offer he was more than happy to accept. The Gathering and Dialogue lasted for seven days, and he was very excited about it when he returned. He had the idea to prepare a newspaper article about the conference, and he asked me and Jeanne Mynett to help him write it up. This was the first time we had worked

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<sup>1</sup> The teacher was not a Sri Lankan who, as I later found out, are almost without exception as hospitable as their Indian counterparts.

<sup>2</sup> These *Conversations with Godwin* were published by Nilambe Meditation Centre to commemorate Godwin's 3rd Anniversary. All the works mentioned in this article are also published online at <http://www.godwin-home-page.net>.

<sup>3</sup> Now known as Chennai.

together on such a project, and Godwin more or less roughed out what he wanted to say and Jeanne and myself put it into presentable English - Godwin was a great communicator, probably one of the greatest communicators I have ever met, but his style was conversational and personal, and literature has more stringent demands which we endeavoured to meet.

I had earlier decided to ordain as a Theravada monk and was very honoured indeed that year when Godwin and a group of friends from Nilambe drove down to the Kanduboda International Meditation Centre<sup>4</sup> to attend my ordination. Godwin was well-known at Kanduboda, and his best friend had earlier ordained there and had become famous as the English Meditation Instructor, Ven. Sivali, a monk whose memory was still revered in the Centre when I was there, even though he had passed away more than a decade earlier.

Over the next few years I rarely visited Nilambe and had little contact with Godwin as I pursued my early monastic training at the Kanduboda Centre and at branch centres around the country. Although my training period was very necessary, of course, I am sorry that the way it worked out I had so little time left to be with Godwin. The next time I saw him was at the end of 1999 in the Lewella Meditation Centre, just before his final teaching trip to South Africa. I was very shocked to see how poorly he had become - when he walked across the room it struck me that he looked as though he was trying to walk on air and every small jolt to his body must have been painful.

I questioned Jeanne as to whether his decision to go abroad at this time was really the right thing to do, but she very sensibly pointed out that Godwin enjoyed his trips enormously, and besides he had much less to do when he was abroad than when he was in Sri Lanka, owing to the endless stream of people who came to seek his instruction and advice whether he was in town at the Lewella Meditation Centre or in the main centre at Nilambe.

It just so happened that I was in Lewella again when he returned from South Africa in February 2000. He was very frail and very tired and I am sorry to say he was obviously dying, though how little time he had left at that point none of us realised. After a few days I had to return to my monastery at the Island Hermitage near Galle, and I left early one morning. As soon as I arrived there I received a call from Ven. Analayo, who was the resident teacher at Lewella, saying that Godwin had been hospitalised. I was unable to return to Kandy at that time and Godwin died only a couple of weeks later.

It seems odd now that we didn't think of the obvious at the time, but it was in fact only a couple of years later, in 2002, that a Swiss friend of Godwin's, Helen Minder, started a project to collect Godwin's teachings. She asked Jeanne to re-edit the talks that were being transcribed in Germany. It was a good choice as Jeanne knew Godwin's teachings well, having spent the better part of her time since 1989 in Nilambe with Godwin. She was able to fill in the gaps when necessary and restructure the talks into a literary form without losing Godwin's "voice" in the process.

There was one thing that Jeanne lacked however, and that was any ability with computers. By that time I was already very familiar with computer work, having prepared a number of my own works for publication, and I also had a fledgling website of my own, something still rare in those days amongst monks. Jeanne therefore asked if I could help correct the transcripts and get them into a publishable state, something I readily agreed to do, as I felt that Godwin's works were able to reach people in a way that my own more studious works couldn't.

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<sup>4</sup> At Delgoda, about 35 kilometres east of Colombo.

The tapes that we worked on in those days were originally published on Helen Minder's *Help for Sri Lanka* website, but when Helen had to abandon that work around 2004, Jeanne had the bright idea to start a website dedicated solely to Godwin's material. As I had the necessary skills we divided the work up and I became the webmaster, and Jeanne the general editor.

It was really only at that time that we made more efforts to collect, transcribe, and publish Godwin's work, something which is still being pursued to this day, though the amount of material left is diminishing. We also sought to collect other memorabilia like photographs, audio tapes, etc. In 2006 we published *Meditation for Everyday Life*, a collection of retreat talks given by Godwin at the Waldhaus in Germany in 1998.<sup>5</sup>

The following year we were looking to publish *The Gentle Way of Buddhist Meditation*, a representation of Godwin's Retreat Talks in Hong Kong in 1997 which Jeanne had been working on for a long time. I had learned in Sri Lanka that the only way to get the work published successfully was to oversee it myself, and so when the book was accepted for publication for free distribution by Inward Path in Penang, I agreed to travel to Malaysia and see the publication through, which was completed successfully in a beautiful edition by May of 2007.

One of the main supporters for the publication was Ven. Dhammika's Buddha Dhamma Mandala Society in Singapore, so as soon as it was published I took down a share of the copies to Singapore. This was a very auspicious trip as while I was there we found two whole sets of Godwin's talks on cassette that had been made during his visits in 1991 and 1992, as well as a few others that were undated. Up and till then we had only a couple of talks on record that were in anything like a publishable state of preservation, but here I found about twenty and most of them in good condition.

In the early years of preparing Godwin's talks for publication I had helped Jeanne with some of the editing of the transcripts, before learning that she was making such a good job of it, it hardly needed anything more than a quick read through to polish them up a little. Editing the audio tapes was a much more difficult task though, as Godwin sometimes left things unstated, occasionally a dialogue would flounder, and I came across many other things that would have been easily corrected on paper, but took a lot of patience to sort out on live recordings. The task though was accomplished over a period of time, and the re-edited tapes went on to form the basis of the audio section of the website, which also quickly became the most popular page that was being visited.

In 2008 we were joined in our work by Peter van Leeuwen, an old friend of Godwin's who helped organise some of his European tours, who had fortunately had the foresight to record Godwin's retreats in the Netherlands. He has transcribed and re-edited talks Godwin made in the Netherlands in 1996 and 1998, and they are now available in a book entitled *Learning through Meditation*,<sup>6</sup> and as audio files on the website.

More of Godwin's works are being prepared for publication<sup>7</sup> and it seems that the longer we go on the greater number of people we are able to reach with his teachings. I sometimes

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<sup>5</sup> Published by Buddhist Cultural Centre, Dehiwela, Colombo. See [http://buddhistcc.net/bookshop/book\\_info.asp?bid=205](http://buddhistcc.net/bookshop/book_info.asp?bid=205).

<sup>6</sup> Published by Nilambe Meditation Centre to commemorate Godwin's 9th Anniversary.

<sup>7</sup> Awaken Publications in Singapore have just this year (2009) published a beautiful edition of *Discovering Meditation*, which was re-edited from Godwin's talks in the Waldhaus,

regret that we didn't undertake the collecting, preserving and publishing of the material that was available at an earlier stage, as some that we collected later had decayed with time, and digitalising the material earlier would have saved much more.

It is also unfortunate indeed that Godwin only saw one or two small articles published in obscure publications during his lifetime. But at least we have the satisfaction of having preserved so much of his teachings for his old friends, who would have only their fond memories otherwise; and we have also been able to pass on his still relevant teachings to a new generation, who never had the good fortune to meet him.

Anandajoti Bhikkhu,  
Bodhi Lankarama Buddhist Temple,  
Malaysia

**GODWIN SAMARARATNE: IN APPRECIATION**  
**BY ANNE M. BLACKBURN**

(ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF SOUTH ASIA AND BUDDHIST STUDIES,  
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In this last decade since the death of a dear teacher and skilful friend, Godwin Samararatne, it frequently occurs to me that I grew up in Godwin's company. When first we met I was just shy of twenty, still very much a child though I did not (of course) recognize that at all. In the more than twenty years since then, shared with Godwin both in his life and in later memory and reflection, much has happened, all of it deeply improved and made easier by the fact of his wisdom and generosity. At Godwin's death, I felt bereft, as though a fundamental touchstone in life were lost. Gradually, I came to realize that what he taught - in smile, word, tone, and gesture - could not be lost without wilful neglect, and that it would assure his continued presence.

This is, really, enough to say in *personal* appreciation of Godwin. Yet his friends and students seek something more, contributing to a collective affirmation of his work in the world. For those who missed the opportunity to meet Godwin Samararatne, but who pursue some connection to his practice, our images of Godwin may enrich a sense of possibility, and of confidence.

So let us begin again, with a few images. Godwin, ill at the Wickramaratne home in Kandy, smiling one of his winsome smiles of delight at a parcel of oranges and palm sugar. Godwin, well but fatigued, standing in front of the house on Peradeniya Road, saying farewell after a strange hard year spent coping with the news of burning tyres and vanished teens. Godwin, earlier in that same year, speaking gently with those gathered weekly thanks to Harilal and Visakha's hospitality, about anger, violence, and pain, within a circle overtaken by the hardship of the island's second JVP era. Godwin, at his brother Hector's home in Watapuluwa, before that household's tragedies unfolded, standing in the garden with a smile for the flowers in the sunshine. Godwin, in the bright hilltop afternoon at Nilambe, watching clouds change the pattern of the tea terraces across the valley.

The kitchen at Nilambe: a place in which preparing beans for curry was a greater pleasure than preparing beans for curry anywhere else, because Godwin's presence infused the place. And because the cook, whose name I have unconscionably forgotten, taught a great deal also with the generous warmth of his eyes, in the face of so many earnest seekers, and so very, very few chillies. Godwin, during a first stay at Nilambe, answering one of the classic questions with generous gravity, as if it were the first time ever: "Won't this meditative distance reduce my life by taking away its spontaneity?" "This is one of the fundamental defences of the mind at this stage. Later you may come to see that awareness does not reduce spontaneity." Godwin on his cushion in the meditation hall at Nilambe, anchoring a room and the people in it, as mountain light caressed the room with the *potentia* of dawn and dusk.

One striking dimension of Godwin's work was his interest in psychotherapeutic studies. For many years he read avidly about psychology, psychiatry, and psychotherapy, gathering books from corners of the world. In doing so, Godwin had in mind both patients undergoing psychiatric treatment and people experiencing less profound forms of disorientation but still grappling with emotional suffering and distress. Given the strong presence of a psychological discourse within many of the non-Sri Lankan communities among whom Godwin taught and

travelled, it was natural for him to explore areas of overlap and resonance between Buddhist teachings and techniques, and the analyses made by psychologists and psychotherapists. But Godwin's circle of care and practice retained a crucial, central, orientation to Sri Lanka and to local experience. He spent many years exploring characteristic patterns of emotional expression within Sri Lanka, considering whether Buddhist teachings and modes of understanding mental and emotional life might be used for psychotherapeutic purposes where a Euro-American psychological discourse was not at home.

A dedicated partnership ensued between Godwin and some of his colleagues at the Kandy Hospital and the University of Peradeniya's Medical Faculty, nurturing a rare creative attention to the role of Buddhist teachings in psychological treatment. This continues even now among some of the island's most talented physicians. Outside the hospital sphere, Godwin's meditation sessions and discussion groups also reflected his creative movement between these two modes of analysis in the work of, and with, emotions. Rather than directly tackling questions of repression, attachment, childhood experience, trauma, guilt, and the like, Godwin was usually most inclined to harness Buddhist terms and idioms for the work of exploring the mind and its sources of distress.

Among the most central moves was, I think, his striking use of loving-kindness (*metta*): "How can we feel loving-kindness for others if we do not feel it for ourselves? Let us see whether it is possible to make friends with our mind. Can you find loving-kindness for what is in your mind, even if it is painful?" Since one cannot make friends with a stranger, investigation was also necessary. Here Godwin relied on local familiarity with insight (*vipassana*) meditation, which he introduced usually in the spirit of 'bare awareness' interpretations borrowed from Burma: "So let us look at the mind. See what is coming and going. Don't try to push it away. Let us try to become familiar with our mind."

Nilambe - a space for meditative retreat perched high in tea-estate country and accessible from Peradeniya campus on the Galaha Road - is central to my memories of Godwin. And, yet, so is Kandy town. Godwin's movement between the aerie and the city was one of his greatest strengths, emblematic of the wide-ranging and compassionate interest he took in human lives. Moving weekly between Nilambe, Rajapihilla Mawatha, and the Buddhist Publication Society near the Kandy lake (and, in earlier days, the old house on Peradeniya Road), with regular forays to the hospital, Godwin brought the Dhamma to those without the luxury of retreat. In Kandy, over decades, communities formed around Godwin in the city: clusters bound by meditative practice, conversation, a friendly warmth, and ginger tea.

Such relations made a crucial difference to the lives of many who shared them, offering a gentle and often humour-filled space for the cultivation of a mindful life. It is hard enough to live thus in any time or place, making friends with the mind as Godwin encouraged us to do. In contemporary Sri Lanka, which has now seen decades of brutality, as well as the harshness of an ailing economy burdened by inflation, the mind-heart and the body are taxed harder still. Those fortunate enough to know and work with Godwin found a buffer in his subtle work of Buddhist therapeutics, as they benefited also from his warm laughter and a smile that was, itself, a lesson in living well. An island where Buddhism often lives with dark violence in the words and deeds of politics writ large and small brought us also a man of great insight, strength, and creativity. Godwin Samararatne was - and remains - an important reminder of the Dhamma's beauty, a sign of the good work it may do quietly, in skilful friendship.

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## **GODWIN'S IMPACT ON MY LIFE**

### **BY AMY CHIANG**

(ADMINISTRATOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG)

I knew Godwin since his visit to Hong Kong in 1997 and attended his talks and retreats held there in 1997 to 1999. Though I only had chance to meet him three times in Hong Kong, his impact to me is lifelong. He was a great Dhamma teacher, with profound wisdom and boundless loving kindness. In one of the talks in his retreat which I attended for the first time he asked the retreatants not to call him "Master", and said that he and all the retreatants were spiritual friends of each other and we learnt from each other. I never found a distance between teacher and student when I interacted with Godwin and never felt shy to tell him if I thought I did something in a silly or unwholesome way because he was such a kind spiritual friend of mine.

During the breakfasts and lunches in the retreat Godwin sat in the dining room with other retreatants to have meals. We could even sit beside him to eat together (but we did practise noble silence when eating). Again this demonstrated Godwin's moment-to-moment friendliness to the others. I was deeply impressed by this - I have never had meals together with other masters in retreats just like a family. Godwin did not have any privilege in meal arrangement. He simply ate what the other retreatants ate. As he told us, we were spiritual friends of each other!

Discussion and sharing sessions in the retreat were often filled with the laughter of Godwin and retreatants. The laughter was not recorded in the transcript of Godwin's talks but I always remember the friendliness and openness when we were together with Godwin. I recalled that in the sharing session in the last night of his retreat in Hong Kong in 1999 - his last retreat in Hong Kong - we had a small "party" with cakes and drinks, and of course lots of laughter. It was really a surprise to all of us!

Do you remember Godwin's laughter? So genuine and naïve. He reminds us that we can indeed live and laugh in a genuine and simple way. I will remember this throughout my whole life.

Godwin repeatedly taught us the importance of gratefulness. Each time at the end of retreat, he gave a long "speech" to express his gratitude to the organizer, workers, cook, yoga teachers, place where the retreat was held, etc and the retreatants. Godwin and retreatants bowed to each other. We were so grateful that we had Godwin and also a group of mutually supportive spiritual friends.

Godwin was a great and extraordinary spiritual teacher who touched and enlightened numerous hearts because he taught not only by words but also by the way he lived. Do you remember the smile always on his face? He showed us the powerfulness of the medicine given by the Buddha by the way he lived and he enabled us to develop confidence in Buddha's medicine by the way he lived.

May our beloved friend and teacher, Godwin, be well and happy and free from suffering.

Amy Chiang,  
Hong Kong



## **GODWIN IN SOUTH AFRICA**

### **BY MERVYN CROFT**

(CO-FOUNDER, TRUSTEE AND RESIDENT TEACHER  
EMOYENI RETREAT CENTRE, SOUTH AFRICA)

Godwin first visited South Africa in April 1984 at the invitation of Molly and Louis van Loon, the founders of the Buddhist Retreat Centre (BRC) which is situated near the small town of Ixopo, about 140 km from Durban. I remember the first talk that Godwin gave at the van Loon's home in Durban, the day after his arrival. Godwin was very relaxed and laid back, and during his evening talk would sometimes pause for what seemed like a long minute or two, eyes closed and a gentle smile on his face, and just as we were wondering whether he had nodded off, he would pick up from his last point and continue the talk.

Godwin led several meditation retreats at the retreat centre and made an immediate impression. June Atkinson, the administrator, wrote in the May 1984 newsletter "This quiet, unassuming teacher reflects a deep, inner calm - an uncommon mien in these troubled days. Quite clearly he lives just as he teaches, and it is obvious that he has reached a state of mind largely free from habituated reactions." South Africa was under the control of the Apartheid government at this time which meant that there was a climate of fear and unrest underlying the surface of everyday life. Godwin returned to South Africa the following year, this time for three months. He led a series of Vipassana retreats at the BRC in July and August before travelling around South Africa giving talks in the main cities and leading weekend meditation retreats at Buddhist centres. All his retreats were fully booked and word spread quickly about the depth of his teaching.

One of the most lasting impacts that Godwin had was the gentle and playful approach that he brought to meditation practice. When he said "We already have enough suffering in our lives, we don't need to make meditation into another form of suffering," he tapped into the driven, achievement approach so many westerners brought to meditation. He encouraged us to relax and be gentle with our effort - to find joy in our practice even if our minds were all over the place. I remember his story about teaching a group of young monks in Sri Lanka to meditate. When he asked them what they found most difficult at the monastery they replied "meditation". When asked what they enjoyed the most they said "playing with the dog". Godwin then suggested to them "Why can't you make meditation more like playing with the dog?" It was such a relief to many of us to hear this gentle approach to the Dhamma.

The war in Sri Lanka intensified in the mid-1980s and as a result the meditation centre at Nilambe often had very few retreatants. This meant that Godwin had more time to travel to Europe and South Africa to teach and we were able to host Godwin for longer, 5 month periods in South Africa. From December 1987 to April 1988 and again December 1990 to April 1991 he taught extensively at the BRC and centres around the country, including a month-long retreat in March 1991. We came to appreciate his kindness, sensitivity and depth of meditation experience. His gentle approach to looking at the mind, his emphasis on developing awareness outside the meditation hall and his encouragement to meet with and heal the wounds in our mind, gave us a wonderful opportunity to deepen our practice. I remember him saying "If your mind is all over the place when you are meditating, don't blame the meditation. Rather look at the way you live your life. Your meditation is just reflecting this."

As a teacher Godwin continued to grow, both in the structure of his Dhamma talks and the skill with which he facilitated the discussions. It somehow felt easy for retreatants to contribute to the discussion sessions and Godwin would often deflect questions for others to respond to instead of always adopting the role of "teacher" who knew the answers. He would always say "I am not a Guru. We are all spiritual friends searching on this path together." Of course it was natural for many people to project the "guru image" but he never bought into these projections, with a quiet smile they would slide past him. This approach to being a Dhamma teacher also meant that he was not personally caught up in expending psychological energy during the intensive retreats to ensure that the retreat was a "success" - it almost seemed to me that should the retreat fall apart (which it never did) that he would not be devastated by it being a "failure".

I would watch Godwin leading a 10-day Vipassana retreat on his own, giving two private interviews to each of the thirty-odd retreatants during the retreat, and in addition regularly seeing one or two of the retreatants who were grappling with deep psychological issues! All this, and once the retreat was over was he wiped out? Not a bit, after a day's rest he would be ready to receive visitors or to accept an invitation for a private visit. In later years once I began to teach meditation retreats I would look to this approach of Godwin's as a wonderful guide to leading a retreat - that I did not need to feel personally invested in the retreat being a success. That it was OK if sometimes I felt inadequate or a "fool". He also encouraged me to be authentic to my own experience and not to try to play the role of "teacher".

Once it became safe to travel to Sri Lanka again the Meditation Centre at Nilambe began to attract many retreatants and Godwin could no longer be so generous with his time to teach internationally. We established a 3-year cycle with him and his last three visits to South Africa were December 1993 to January 1994, December 1996 to February 1997 and December 1999 to early February 2000. In addition to teaching at the Buddhist Retreat Centre and at a number of venues around the country, Godwin also led retreats in Botswana and Zimbabwe when time permitted. Godwin came to be respected by all the Buddhist traditions in South Africa and he regularly led retreats at both Zen and Tibetan centres. He began to place more and more emphasis on the practice of Loving-kindness to awaken the heart and to heal wounded relationships - the way we related to ourselves and the way we related to others. He would end each day of the retreat with a short meditation on Loving-kindness. This practice together with his encouragement to develop our mindfulness outside the meditation hall, in the activities of everyday life became essential aspects of his teaching.

Godwin continued to develop as a teacher and, noticing how many people were not well grounded in their bodies, he began to introduce "body work" into the daily program on his retreats. Martin Zullig from Switzerland and Susan Harmer from Singapore both came to South Africa with Godwin to assist with leading yoga or movement periods on retreats. Another addition came in 1996 when he introduced chanting with Susan leading the chants. So we now found ourselves including body, speech and mind in the daily program which added to the breadth and quality of the retreats. Godwin had a very open and warm attitude to other Dhamma teachers whatever tradition they came from, and would freely include aspects of these traditions in his talks. When he taught with other teachers at the BRC we would see Godwin's delightful sense of humour bubble out.

In 1999 I left the BRC and travelled to Sri Lanka to do a 3-month retreat at Nilambe, and was able to experience being on retreat with Godwin at his own centre, and to meet with the staff who ran the centre. Godwin was extremely warm and caring during my stay there, and had arranged for me to have my own room and provided gentle guidance over the three months. Every so often the cook would arrive at my room with a gift from Godwin, some bananas or a couple of delicious mangoes which subtly added to the feeling of being cared for. I was

astonished at how available he made himself to receiving people - it seemed that he gave so much of himself. Too much I felt sometimes when I observed how many came to see him, especially on the holiday weekends. Much of his teaching came without words. I remember once when a taxi had been ordered to take a group of people including Godwin to Kandy after breakfast one day. The taxi did not arrive and the group was standing grumbling and complaining about the unreliability of taxi drivers, when Godwin strolled past, umbrella under his arm, to walk the 2 km to the main road and said simply "Anyone coming?" All the grumbling stopped ... .

After I had been at Nilambe for a few weeks Godwin "volunteered" me to lead some of the evening discussions when he was away from the centre. Though very intimidated by this at first I felt his support and confidence that I could fill that sometimes very challenging role. This encouragement in turn gave me the confidence on my return to South Africa to found the Emoyeni Retreat Centre in the Magaliesberg Mountains 100 km from Johannesburg, together with some Dhamma friends. Watching Godwin over the years I would often observe him encouraging others to take tentative steps into teaching the Dhamma.

At that time I was going through a stage of being critical of the arrogance displayed by many monks. They seemed to me to take their revered status in Buddhist cultures for granted, and I felt that by living a life isolated from the busy world they tended to avoid or suppress issues that were triggered in normal lives. These unresolved problems were often revealed when a monk disrobed and had to make his way in the world like everyone else. Surely it was better to practice as a lay person and learn from problems that everyday life posed, like relationships and practical financial difficulties. I asked Godwin what he thought about all of this. He said to me "Do you think that it is possible for a monk to become enlightened?" Of course I had to say "Yes". Then he asked "Do you think it is possible for a lay person to become enlightened?" Again I had to say "Yes". Then he finished me off with "So what is your problem?"

I returned to South Africa at the end of August 1999 and when Godwin arrived in South Africa in December I was shocked by how much his health had deteriorated in just 3 months. He looked just a shell of himself. He was well cared for at the BRC and at the centres where he taught. In Johannesburg just before he left South Africa we arranged for Rob Nairn, a well known Buddhist teacher in South Africa, to share the teaching duties on the retreat with Godwin so as to lighten his load. They had a great time teaching together and sparked off many laughs by pulling each others legs. I can remember waving goodbye to Godwin at Johannesburg airport as he left to return to Sri Lanka - he was in good spirits and I had not the slightest thought that he would be dead in just six weeks time.

Godwin had a profound impact on the Dhamma in South Africa. Over the fifteen years a great many people benefitted from his teaching, but at a deeper level it was his example and his presence that left a lasting mark on so many hearts. He was an example of how to live the teaching in everyday life. In bringing his gentle way of meditation to our country he made the practice of Dhamma a practice of joy and aliveness rather than a grim struggle towards enlightenment. His teaching lives on in the hearts of all those who had the privilege of meeting him. The Emoyeni Retreat Centre was founded in October 2000 and the new meditation hall that was built in 2004 is named the Godwin Samararatne Meditation Hall.

Mervyn Croft  
Emoyeni Retreat Centre,  
South Africa

## **TEACHER, FRIEND, NOBODY**

### **BY UPUL GAMAGE**

(MEDITATION TEACHER AND SUCCESSOR TO GODWIN AT NILAMBE MEDITATION CENTER)

I first met Godwin when I used to visit Kandy Library as a schoolboy in the 1970s. He was an assistant librarian at that time and he was so kind, always smiling. Sometimes he organised seminars for us and games at the end of the year to help develop our intelligence and speaking skills. One year I was the winner and got a book as a gift from him. But I learnt from Godwin that the greatest gift I can obtain is not from reading books or by not talking, but comes from reading myself when I am being silent.

After high school I started to practise meditation and staying in monasteries. As a teenager I was so radical because the traditional practice was doing rituals and expecting Nibbana in the time of the next Buddha. I thought: "Why do I have to wait many life times to achieve enlightenment in the future Buddha's time?" Therefore when I heard that there was a spiritual person who had a well-developed mind I used to visit them with big expectations, only to return with big disappointments.

The traditional preachings and books didn't feed my spiritual needs, so I started to read teachings from living masters from other countries as well. I was very impressed by J. K. Krishnamurti because he said "The present moment is more than enough to see reality." I thought he was an enlightened person because of the way he presented his teachings.

There was an Australian monk living in one of Peradeniya University's bungalows and I used to visit him to get spiritual nutrition. One day I asked him about Krishnamurti and whether he was enlightened. He replied that Krishnamurti "knows a lot about the human mind, but sometimes he gets angry and sometimes when people ask questions he replies in an angry way."

Then I asked: "Dear venerable sir, did you ever meet anybody who did not get angry?" He said: "Yes, there is a person who never gets angry." I was so excited and asked: "Where is that person?" "In Sri Lanka," he replied. "Which area?" I asked. "In Kandy," he answered. Then I was so happy and thought: "Now I know what to do, and whom to follow."

"Venerable sir, please tell me, who is this enlightened person?" I asked. Then he opened one of his photo albums and pointed at one of the photographs. I said "How can it be? He is a librarian, an ordinary person." "Yes, but he is always calm and quiet, nobody can make him angry. Upul, if you are searching for a spiritual person, go and meet him."

Now by that time in 1985, following his mother's death, Godwin had given up his job and gone to the Nilambe Meditation Centre to help the meditators there. So when I went there to meet him, he recognised me after 10 years and asked me what I was now doing. I told him that I was trying to meditate and was also teaching monks at the Subodharama monks' training centre near where I lived. I then invited him to visit Subodharama to teach meditation and he came many times. There were monks there from several countries and all of them were so impressed by Godwin and his friendly approach. He came many times to Subodharama and conducted guided meditations and discussions over-night.

I used to go and meet other meditation masters and long term meditators. They were nice, but after the meetings I had a headache. All of them seemed to have as their favourite

question: "How long did you meditate? What are your achievements?" I replied by saying: "Nothing, I just meditate." Then they started to speak about the 1<sup>st</sup> stage, 2<sup>nd</sup> stage, 3<sup>rd</sup> stage and the 4<sup>th</sup> stage, "and when you meditate you can see this colour, this picture ... " But I told them that I saw no colours and because of this I felt a lot of stress. But Godwin did not ask such questions, not even once in the entire time I was with him at Nilambe. He just encouraged me to continue to enjoy the practice, to be in the present moment, and to let go of any attachments to being someone else. I was so relaxed and so comfortable with him.

I also noticed that whatever he taught us, that was the way he lived. His entire life was a teaching; therefore he needed very few words to explain even deep Dhamma. He was very simple as well. Sometimes we used to go to other centres to conduct meditation retreats and sometimes we might have to stay over-night. I was taking my big travelling bag, but Godwin would just go as he was. People would ask: "Godwin, where are your clothes and personal things?" Then he'd put his hand in one of his trouser pockets and take out his rolled up sarong and show it to everyone like a magician. Then they'd ask: "Godwin, is that all?" "No," he said and took his toothbrush from his other pocket and showed it to everyone. He told them that was all he needed. And that was true.

I think there were several reasons for so many people from different countries being attracted by Godwin's way of teaching meditation. One was because he was not teaching a "religion" and was not teaching theories. Therefore most people felt very comfortable with him because it did not matter what framework of ideas they came with. He didn't make arguments against the beliefs of others and didn't make any complications in the meditators' minds. His teachings were so simple, so practical, and so understandable.

Once there was a Dutch meditator at Nilambe who was a scholar. He would put forward very complicated arguments during the evening discussions, but Godwin's simple answer was usually: "Buddhism doesn't speak of such things." Then that meditator began to learn Pali so that he could argue with Godwin using the language of the Buddhist scriptures.

One evening he asked: "Godwin, Buddhism says that our mind is conditioned. But you said that if we meditate we can go beyond all the conditions. How does that happen? How can the conditioned mind become the unconditioned mind?"

He asked that question very loudly and with an argumentative tone, and he may have thought that he was putting a very deep question and that Godwin could not answer it. But Godwin replied in his usual calm and kind manner: "The conditioned means that the mind is suffering but the unconditioned mind means that the mind is not suffering. So if you meditate then your mind is not suffering, that is all." That was the man's last question; after that he did not make any more arguments, stopped learning Pali and concentrated on meditation.

Another reason for people being attracted to Godwin's way of teaching meditation was that he knew how to calm people down when they had arguments and conflicts, especially about spiritual ideas. Once Godwin and two friends were waiting for a bus near the stream that flows through the Peradeniya campus after participating in a seminar at the University. They could here the sound of the nearby stream and one of the two friends said that the sound was very beneficial for meditation. But the other friend said that it was good, but only for concentration meditation, not for vipassana (insight) meditation. Then the first friend started to argue with that saying: "No, you *can* do vipassana with this sound of the water stream." So this argument went on and on while they were waiting for the bus.

They were unable to come to agreement about the matter so finally they decided to ask Godwin what he thought. "In the hearing is only the hearing," was his gentle response. Then a deep silence was there because the argument had been much louder than the sound of the water in the stream.

Another reason for Godwin's popularity was his manner of teaching. He didn't give long discourses; instead his talks were short and simple, but very direct and practical, because a few words can be enough to entirely change one's life. Near the Nilambe centre is a place where water comes from the ground which Godwin used to call the "well" and which he liked to visit to bathe. There is a popular and well-known Sri Lankan spiritual teacher who was once staying at Nilambe. This teacher later told me that one day he decided to join Godwin on his visit to the well to wash his face. When they got to the well the teacher was very disappointed because it was just a small place where water came out of ground into a little depression. He told me that he said to Godwin: "Dear Mr Godwin, we can make a beautiful pond here," and went on to describe his plan: "We can build a concrete wall here ... " etc.

Godwin then gently said to him: "Sir, you don't need any projects to wash. You came here to wash your face, which you can do without having to make any projects." The spiritual teacher told me that it was the best teaching that he had ever had.

Godwin also had unlimited kindness and most of the time he knew what people's problems were before they described them. So often he was able to give a solution before any help was asked for. Once we had one of our regular meditators staying at Nilambe and when Godwin came back from Kandy he put something in the man's top pocket. The man looked at it and saw that it was quite a lot of money. Now he had financial problems and had been unable to get any help from anybody. Then he had come to Nilambe to try to reduce his worries, but he hadn't spoken to Godwin about his financial problems. The money Godwin had given him was exactly the right amount that he needed. He didn't know how Godwin knew about his situation as he hadn't told him about it.

Another quality of Godwin's was that he wasn't pompous and had the ability to laugh at himself. Once we had a young cook working at the centre who was very aware of his own poverty. He thought that all the foreigners who came to Nilambe were enjoying life because he thought they were rich. He was therefore looking for work abroad, but as he had little education he could not fulfil his dream. At that time we needed to replace our coir carpets in the meditation hall and one German meditator offered to pay for new ones. The estimated cost of that was 1,000 Rupees and that surprised the meditator as he said in Germany the cost would be the equivalent of 100,000 Rupees.

I told this to the young cook hoping to reduce his depression by letting him know how expensive life was in the West. But to my surprise he became more depressed. He said that Godwin was crazy. I asked him why he was saying that just because of the cost of the coir carpets. He said that Godwin was crazy because he could be selling coir carpets in Germany instead of teaching meditation.

I told Godwin what the young man had said and he laughed and laughed and laughed. He told this story many times to other people by telling them: "My friend asked me to stop teaching meditation and to start selling carpets!" So this is another reason that many people were attracted to Godwin: self-humour. He encouraged us to laugh at ourselves. It's not easy, but Godwin did it often and without any effort.

Godwin also applied meditation and the Dhamma to his own experiences in daily life. He used to visit Bodh Gaya in India every year from August to September to teach Theravada

Buddhist meditation to American university students. Once he told us in a discussion about the first time he went there. He had flown to New Delhi and from there he was picked up by the program director to be taken to the train station where he would go by first class overnight express to Bodh Gaya. When he took him to the train the director said: "Dear Godwin, this train will arrive at Gaya station at 4 a.m. but it will stop there for only 2 minutes. Will you be awake at 4 a.m. to get down, or do you need an alarm clock?" Godwin said he didn't need a clock because he woke up before 4 a.m. every day.

After a few hours he became aware that another passenger was talking to him: "Dear friend, you told me that you want to get down at Gaya station." "Yes," said Godwin. "Well, now we are past the station." Godwin called the conductor, but was told that the train could not stop now and that he would have to wait until the train stopped at the next station in a few more hours. Eventually he was able to get off the train at the next stop, but had to take an ordinary train back to Gaya. This train was not first class, it had no air conditioning, no sleeping berths and people were everywhere: below him, above him, sweating, hot, smelly and crushed together. He was in trouble.

Godwin asked the people at our discussion how they thought he dealt with this and we gave many suggestions, such as loving-kindness, none-self, awareness of the breathing, etc. Godwin told us that when he looked around at the other passengers he realised that nobody was suffering like he was. Everybody was enjoying the train journey except him, so he contemplated about that. Then he realised that psychologically he was still travelling by first class express and therefore he was expecting a comfortable journey. But the other passengers didn't have that expectation so they were quite content. So he let go of his first class expectations and joined the third class group. Then he could enjoy the journey, no sweat. I asked him what happened the next time he went to Bodh Gaya and he told us that after that he remembered to take an alarm clock by letting go of his self-image as a first class meditator.

Knowing Godwin and staying there at the Nilambe Centre with him brought me many spiritual benefits. At first I had the idea that practising meditation for the spiritual benefits it brought meant that I had to sit meditating for as long as possible. Therefore I tried to sit many times per day and I tried to lengthen the time that I sat in meditation. Then I began to realise that there were some conflicts between when I was sitting and when I was not sitting. Godwin's central teaching was that there should not be any kind of duality of that sort. He said that meditation is a life-time programme. When I learnt and practised meditation in that way I began to experience peacefulness and equanimity wherever I was and with whatever I was doing.

Originally I always expected positive qualities like peacefulness, calmness, tranquillity, and so on, out of meditation. Whenever I did not experience these then I created conflicts in my mind with such thought as "I am not a good meditator," or "Other people are disturbing my meditation," and so on. Godwin advised me to let go of my attachments to gaining spiritual benefits. So now I am relaxed in most situations, it doesn't matter where I am.

Godwin always emphasised that we should try to see the Dhamma through our life experiences, not from books. Whenever we would ask questions or give answers to questions, he asked us to give practical examples. Therefore we could not play word games with him; we had to practice and experience for ourselves.

Whenever I knew that Godwin was giving a talk I used to go there if possible to listen to his wisdom, but whenever he noticed that I was there he would invite me to speak. So he trained me as a person available for the Dhamma 24 hours per day, for everybody and everywhere.

MEMORIAL TRIBUTES TO GODWIN

So I am fortunate to have had such a beautiful meditation master, and he may have been fortunate in having such a pupil as me.

Upul Gamage,  
Nilambe Buddhist Meditation Centre,  
Kandy District, Sri Lanka



## **GODWIN SAMARARATNE: AN APPRECIATION**

### **BY DR KITHSIRI HERATH**

(FORMER SENIOR RESEARCH OFFICER AT THE NUCLEAR MEDICINE UNIT,  
FACULTY OF MEDICINE, UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA, SRI LANKA)

I got to know Godwin in the early seventies when I had lot of time to associate with friends, that is, before I got married. He was introduced to me by P W Kodituwakku who was a Clinical Psychologist attached to the Peradeniya Medical Faculty (presently a Professor of Clinical Psychology in New Mexico, U.S.A) who described him as a good human being. Good human being he was and we became very friendly (it did not take long for anyone to get friendly with Godwin) and he remained a very close friend for three decades.

At the time I met Godwin he was the Librarian at Senanayake Library, Kandy, where we met occasionally. He was always reading something whenever I went to meet him and he would offer a book to me to take home and read. I was not a member of the Library but I just took the books home that he gave me and most of them I returned after reading. However, when he was about to retire it was noticed that there were quite a number of books missing from the library. He wanted to give the knowledge to whoever sought the knowledge. Maybe that was the criteria he used in changing the system in the library and letting people use the books.

There was one more thing I noticed when I went to meet him in the library. If I was there for more than ten minutes at least two or more people would come and say hello to him. One day a person came and said hello and asked for Rps 10 (in those days Rps 10 was quite an amount) and Godwin promptly gave the money. The man left with a salute. I asked Godwin who that was and he said he was a mental patient! Godwin had a very big spectrum of friends!!

He was a regular visitor at our place after I got married. He usually came after the Psychiatric clinic at Peradeniya hospital. Three young consultant psychiatrists attached to the Department of Psychiatry, Peradeniya Hospital had realized the potential Godwin possessed in healing people with mental problems and sought his services in their clinics. That was usually on Wednesdays when he would have dinner with us and either go home afterwards or spend the night and go home the following morning. He did not eat much, did not count the percentage of alcohol in a drink or whether some meat is inside a curry offered to him and he always washed his plate after eating, which he insisted on doing. Most of the times when he had spent the night at our place he was gone before anyone else got up. He did not want to trouble us as we had to go to work the following day. He was mindful of the difficulties and problems others had and always lived without in anyway troubling their life styles. This could have been the result of constant meditation and awareness. He wanted to be like a shadow not like a heavy cart to a bull!

We used to meet during the eighties in a group to discuss Dhamma. We even formed an association called "Sri Lankan Association of Psychological Research". Our aim was to investigate psychical occurrences. We did some research on these in addition to investigations on rebirth. We used to get down prominent people to give lectures on subjects as diverse as rebirth studies (Ian Stevenson) to music (Premasiri Khemadasa).

## MEMORIAL TRIBUTES TO GODWIN

Godwin was very much for propagation of knowledge. He read widely and could talk about almost any subject including cricket. He had met many of the scholars who have carried out research on Buddhist Psychology and Philosophy. However, his method of living was simple "whenever he was hungry he ate, whenever he felt like going somewhere he went, and when he thought he had worked enough he retired from the job and went to meditate". I wish I could do the same.

Dr Kithsiri Herath,  
Australia

**GREAT GURU GODWIN,  
AS A GENTLE GUIDE ON THE PATH TO LIBERATION  
BY H. B. JAYASINGHE**

(FAMILY PHYSICIAN AND CONSULTANT CLINICAL HYPNOTIST, KANDY, SRI LANKA)

Like a vivid dream, I can still recall my first ever encounter with our great guru Godwin. It was almost 35 years ago when my car stalled amidst a huge traffic jam and a gush of pedestrians crossing the road near the Kandy clock tower. A saintly figure attired in full white suddenly appeared from the crowd with a serene, compassionate smile and inquired in an unbelievably soft and kind tone if I needed any help. Judging from his outward appearance, body language and facial expression, I was more than convinced that he was no ordinary human being. The very next moment he offered a helping hand and the car started. When I turned back to show my gratitude and thank him profusely, to my intense dismay he had already disappeared into the crowd, exactly the way he appeared.

This incident made a tremendous impact in my mind and the non-verbal message he gave me was "*When someone needs a helping hand, voluntarily offer your help expecting nothing in return, not even a word of thanks.*" Although I was genuinely desirous of meeting him, I failed to do so for a couple of years until one day I was introduced to the world famous meditation master Godwin Samararatne at the house of Harilal Wickramaratne. To my great surprise and astonishment I found that he was none other than the person whom I was searching for during last two years. He was attired in the same white clothes, seated on a cushion in meditation posture with the same unique, unassuming, compassionate, serene expression with half closed eyes.

What made him a great meditation master renowned the world over was his remarkable inherent ability to grasp and comprehend the most intricate aspects of the Dhamma, and to convey them in a non-traditional, remarkably lucid, concise, and most effective communicating style. His pleasant mode of presentation of Dhamma with sharp clarity and extreme simplicity but absolute profundity was both astonishing and incomparable. He practised what he preached and preached what could be practised, a rare feature which made him a great teacher of the highest order.

When asked about his unique teaching techniques, Godwin responded with immense humility and gratitude to the Buddha, saying that it was the Buddha's teaching that he was following. This was in obvious contrast to some of the free-thinkers who were well known to preach Buddha's words of wisdom but with no reference, respect or gratitude whatsoever to the Blessed One. When this was pointed out, and our guru's attitude was admired and appreciated, his response was that even great philosophers like J. Krishnamurti showed the utmost gratitude and respect to the Buddha. Endowed with the highest confidence in the Buddha, his advice was to look at the Blessed One in any difficult situation and to find out how he would have responded to that situation.

He was recognized and respected as one of the most able meditation masters in the world **because he was not only a gentle guide but, more importantly, was a genuine follower of the Noble Eightfold Path.**

**Undoubtedly he was one with Right View.** His right view was not simply owing to faith or traditional acceptance or theoretical knowledge of the four noble truths, rebirth, kamma,

and the world beyond, but was due to an experiential understanding achieved by him with factual investigation and evaluation. In addition, he had gathered remarkable experiences with regard to a world beyond the visible one. Near Death Experiences (NDE), Out of Body Experiences (OBE), and Interlife were the other areas that were close to his heart. When he was asked about the significance of the seventh-day almsgiving following someone's death, his explanation was that the 'entity' existing after death tends to feel relieved. Hypnotic regression researchers, too, share this experience.

When inquired about his experiences with extra-celestial beings he narrated how a small illuminated floating object, the size of an orange, regularly approached the meditation centre at Nilambe, late in the evening at the commencement of the meditation session and, at the termination of the session, floated away from the centre.

With regard to instances where human beings were reborn as animals, he responded that Dr. Ian Stevenson had come across a case where a human being was reborn as a rabbit but the case was not reported for want of scientific corroboration. When he was informed about an instance where a human being was reborn as an elephant, in a lighter vein he inquired about the language with which the elephant communicated.

His knowledge and commitment to rebirth research had been enormous, and he was instrumental in organizing the first ever international conference on rebirth with the participation of twelve experts from various disciplines from different parts of the world at the University of Peradeniya in the year 2000, although unfortunately he could not participate in this important event owing to his terminal illness. The proceedings of this conference have been published in his memory as "Trends in Rebirth Research". In his rebirth research work he had come across several cases suggestive of good kamma leading to pleasant results and bad kamma leading to painful and unpleasant results. In whatever discussions held on these fields, his contributions were found to be always significant, pertinent and sometimes startlingly profound, and enlightening. With the extensive experience he gathered over several decades on these phenomena, in close association with world authorities such as Ian Stevenson and K. N. Jayatillake, he not only became one with the Right View but also was equipped with valuable experience to guide others in developing their Right View.

**Unquestionably all his intentions were of the right type, namely intentions of renunciation, good will and harmlessness.** He never claimed ownership of anything in the world and lacked any personal belongings. In fact his life was one of complete renunciation, and had developed to perfection (*Nekkhamma parami*). He did not have a fixed dwelling to live in. Wherever he happened to be at a particular time, that place was considered as home. Whatever he used at a particular moment he used it with utmost care, concern and respect with no feelings of ownership. As a person living in a materialistic society, the extent to which he could renounce was most remarkable. All his material needs were limited to a few items carried in the light sling bag hanging from his shoulder. It invariably contained a book or some reading material on Dhamma or a small gift to be given to someone. He never believed in material gain and found no difference between the toys enjoyed by the children and the material comforts enthralled over by the adults.

Intentions of goodwill were persistently reflected in his kind and gentle words, his unassuming, sincere, soothing smile, his non-verbal refined expressions, his gentle body language, and his friendly deeds. Anger, annoyance or irritability arising out of ill will had never been observed in him by anybody at any time. It is most remarkable to recall several occasions where he continued to remain undisturbed and unperturbed, calm and composed, without the slightest degree of irritation or annoyance even when someone had made intentional attempts to arouse anger in him.

As recommended in the Metta Sutta, he was surprisingly equipped with all those qualities that someone should possess in disseminating loving kindness to others. His remarkable ability to follow every step of the noble eightfold path successfully was observed by many, and the extent to which he was committed to being upright and perfectly upright in pursuing the path was most astonishing. His compliance, gentleness and humility generated from the depths of his heart knew no bounds. He was contented and easily supported and had never been a burden to anybody. He had only a few duties and those, too, were not for his personal glorification or gratification but purely for the welfare of others. His livelihood was unbelievably simple, comparable to that of a true bhikkhu. His senses were observed to be exceptionally well controlled at all times. He was prudent and cautious in all his words and deeds, so that he had been virtuous at all times. His conduct was always composed, cultured, refined and gentle. He was not attached to any relation or family and moved from place to place like a swan in the sky, selflessly relieving the suffering of others all the time. He never pursued the slightest thing for which others would censure him.

His intense selfless love for others, radiating outwards from the depths of his heart as a genuine concern for their well being and happiness, was also most remarkable. His loving kindness appeared to have no boundaries, and had developed to perfection (*Metta parami*). At times some people took undue advantage of this extreme degree of kindness taking it as a weakness. When this was pointed out, he would remain unshaken with his gentle, saintly, serene smile and would recall how Nyanaponika Maha Thera responded to similar situations, quoting him: "I can afford to commit a mistake on the side of loving kindness, but I cannot afford to make a mistake on the side of aversion."

At all times he radiated intentions of harmlessness. His compassion was unique, unreserved, immeasurable, and had been cultivated to the level of perfection. His compassionate concern for others knew no boundaries and he would move from place to place, day and night relieving their suffering. He had the courage to change what could be changed, the patience to bear what could not be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference between the two and remain unworried and unsullied, at all times.

**Whatever he spoke, he did so within the parameters of the Right Speech**, or else he maintained noble silence. Being truthful at all times, with absolutely no deceiving intent, consistently his speech had been one of right speech and he never engaged in falsehood even in jest. He had developed truthfulness as a perfection (*Sacca parami*).

No one ever witnessed him engaging in slanderous speech causing dissension. Whenever there were family disputes or division among friends, he made all attempts to unite them. He was enormously gladdened by concord and rejoiced in unity. His compassionate, kind words always promoted friendship and harmony. He never reacted or retorted. He always responded positively with his characteristic compassionate smile and a soothing kind word. He never spoke harsh words. No one had ever witnessed him scolding, reviling, reproving or degrading anybody angrily with bitter words. Sarcasm or any form of offensive speech had never been observed in him. He never ridiculed anyone or laughed at others, but laughed with others with delightful humour, and unassumingly simple childlike cheerfulness.

Not only did he refrain from gossip but also discouraged and cautioned others from engaging in such speech. Even after his advice, if someone continued to engage in frivolous speech, he would not get offended but instead would cross his arms, close his eyes and remain quiet, or non-verbally would indicate to others to 'switch off' from the conversation and concentrate on their breath.

As a true son of the Buddha, his speech was always found to be truthful, timely, non-spiteful, gentle, and spoken with a good intention. Either he spoke about Dhamma or he observed noble silence.

**His right action with exemplary virtuous life developed to perfection** (*Sila parami*) had been determined by two predominant factors. The first of these being the boundless compassion and loving kindness that were spontaneously generated from the depths of his heart. This automatically promoted right action preventing him from harming living beings or taking their lives. The second factor was the extreme degree of sense control and cautiousness in all his words and deeds which was clearly evident in him as the prerequisite for the dissemination of loving kindness, as mentioned earlier. This was further augmented by the wise consideration, mindfulness and clear comprehension that he persistently practised.

This explains why our guru Godwin skilfully deviated from the customary approach and allowed virtue to evolve spontaneously through loving-kindness and compassion, instead of enforcing virtue as a prerequisite in the practice of meditation. When queried about this, his response was that he, too, recognized the importance of virtue, but if it were to be enforced as a prerequisite to meditation it would not be long lasting, and would not be conducive to spiritual progress. Further it would have been unacceptable to most of the non-Buddhists and would have acted as a barrier. His alternative approach was to allow virtue to evolve spontaneously through the loving-kindness, compassion, wise consideration, mindfulness and clear comprehension that he encouraged. Then it would be more acceptable to people, and the results would be long lasting, and conducive to spiritual progress.

In fact, the latter three factors alone would have been adequate for the purpose. This is indeed in direct conformity with the Buddha's teaching: "When wise consideration (*yoniso manasikara*) prevails, mindfulness and clear comprehension (*sati sampajanna*) will prevail. When mindfulness and clear comprehension prevail, sense control will prevail. When sense control prevails, the three ways of good conduct prevail. When three ways of good conduct prevail, the four foundations of mindfulness prevail. When the four foundations of mindfulness prevail, the seven factors of enlightenment will prevail. When seven factors of enlightenment prevail, Liberation by Supreme Knowledge will prevail." (Anguttara Nikaya, Dasaka Nipata, Yamaka Vagga, sutta 61,62) This clearly demonstrates that his approach was much more rooted in the original teachings than the customary methods, because instead of emphasizing virtue as a prerequisite he emphasized more on the nourishing factors or the factors that lead to virtue. It implies that virtue really develops by nourishing its roots, namely wise consideration, clear comprehension and mindfulness, loving kindness and compassion.

The quotation, "Protecting oneself, one protects others, protecting others, one protects oneself" from the Sedaka Sutta of Satipatthana Samyutta in the Samyutta Nikaya, to which he often made references, adds another dimension to his way of life and his profound teaching techniques. He protected himself from the dangers of samsaric existence by practising the four foundations of mindfulness, and in doing so he obviously posed no harm to others, thus protecting them in turn. He protected others by the development and cultivation of forbearance, non-violence, loving kindness and compassion, and in doing so they obviously posed no harm to him, thus protecting him in turn.

He was **absolutely honest** and his generosity had been developed to the level of perfection (*Dana parami*). When moved by compassion he would give everything in his possession without the slightest thought about himself. There were instants where he had given whatever cash he had in his possession to needy people and was then compelled to come

back by walking because he did not retain even his bus fare with him. 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, but would not bring anything for himself, other than some books.

All those who knew Godwin knew that **he led an unquestionably pure life of chastity**. Since his life was one of complete renunciation, any need to make a decision about **Right Livelihood** never occurred to him. He led an extremely simple life being no burden to anybody, discouraged wrong livelihood and advocated his followers to earn their living in a righteous way.

'Effortless effort', was the term he often used for the development of **Right Effort**. His explanation was that excessive effort would lead to restlessness (worry and flurry) and too little effort would lead to dullness and drowsiness. Therefore his recommendation was to strike a balance. When the five hindrances (sensual desire, ill will, dullness and drowsiness, restlessness and worry and doubt) were present his advice was just to note their presence making no effort to get rid of them and when they are absent, also to note their absence in exactly the same way.

**His predominant practice and teaching was centred round Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration** and was practised as 'moment to moment awareness' or 'choiceless awareness' observing everything occurring in the present moment with no attachment or aversion. The basic object of concentration had been breathing which he referred to as 'our friend'. While watching the breath, his advice was to be choicelessly aware of whatever disturbances or distractions might arise, as well as feelings, thoughts or matters pertaining to Dhamma, and to see them as impermanent, unsatisfactory and not involving a self, with no attachment or aversion. Then to bring the awareness back to the breath again and again, just like bringing back a wandering child again and again in a gentle manner. Although this method (*Sukka vipassaka*) was not meant for achieving any psychic powers, it was one of the direct ways to deliverance, taught by the Buddha and is practised by some of the most venerated contemporary meditation masters. The Buddha had stated that a large majority of the bhikkhus had achieved arahathood by this method although they were void of any psychic powers.

When the Buddha was once asked as to why his disciples were so pleasant looking, with radiating serenity, his response was that it was owing to the fact that they were living in the present moment, without wandering either to the past or to the future. This is the obvious explanation that could be offered to the **extremely pleasant features and the radiating serenity** persistently evident in our guru Godwin, who, as a true disciple of the Buddha, lived in the present moment and based his teaching on the importance of living in the present moment leaving no room for the proliferation of thoughts (*papanca*).

**His tolerance for pain was quite extraordinary**. How he responded to an extremely painful extensive burn injury sustained on his face was most surprising. No ordinary human being would have ever remained as calm and composed with the same serene smile as he did. Like a well instructed noble disciple, he did not sorrow, grieve, or lament; he did not weep and did not become distraught. He would have felt only the bodily feeling, and not a mental one. He would have been struck only with the first dart, and not with the second dart, according to the Buddha's teaching. Whenever he visited someone in excruciating pain he would instruct with immeasurable compassion: "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."

Although he was a living embodiment of all these noble qualities, he never claimed to have achieved any specific status or possess any special powers. He lived an unassumingly simple life amongst the ordinary people, like an ordinary human being. His not so famous saying '*Enlightened people behave like ordinary people and ordinary people try to behave like enlightened people*' may be quite relevant to understand who he really was.

May he attain the bliss of Nibbana.

H. B. Jayasinghe,  
Kandy, Sri Lanka



## **GODWIN SAMARARATNE: A TRUE HERO** **BY ROBERT JORDI**

(SWISS YOGA AND MEDITATION TEACHER)

In 1985, twenty five years ago, Godwin Samararatne was already known in Sri Lanka as a meditation teacher who was living on the top of a hill at Nilambe Meditation Centre. As a result of the recommendation of people who had been to the centre for training in mindfulness, in 1986 I went to this beautiful place and met Godwin for the first time. Immediately I was impressed by the calmness and the smile of this man. I felt at ease and made the intention to stay for a longer period of time at the centre. So I did stay for one entire year at Nilambe after many years of travelling and living in different Ashrams and Buddhist Meditation places.

Godwin's meditation instructions were not complicated. When we were practising in a group in the meditation hall for one and a half hours, Godwin allowed us to practise sitting, standing and walking meditation. He gave very practical guidelines, emphasising the functioning of meditation as a healing and transformation process. In the group discussions in evenings he did not usually give a long talk, but rather answered the questions of the practitioners. He gave us what he called "tools" to assist in our training in mindfulness and loving-kindness.

Sometimes it happened that nobody would raise a question in these periods, but Godwin did not say one word and we would just listen to the silence during the whole period until he concluded the non-discussion with a few words of loving kindness. But if there was a question (about emotions, for example) then Godwin would make the suggestion that we should just accept anger, fear and so on, instead of repressing them.

Here it is worthwhile to point out that Godwin was not just *talking* about this acceptance, for he himself was able to keep an equanimous state of mind not just during meditation periods but continuously, even in any difficult situations. In fact, there was not a single occasion when I saw him reacting with anger, and it seemed that even his humour did not leave him until he passed away. Once, while staying for a planned rest for three days at my home in Bern, on the very first day Godwin got a phone call that he had to leave immediately for teaching on a retreat in Germany (this was because of a mistake by the retreat organisers). Even though Godwin had to rush off for a one day trip again, he was giggling about it. That way, instead of building up tension about the new situation, both of us were giggling.

Unique in his teaching approach, and giving his example by living a noble life, Godwin did work also in Kandy, assisting people in a psychiatric clinic and helping others with their problems. For example, he discussed with couples about dealing with and solving difficulties in their relationship, not to mention his help to many others in need. He did his entire work without asking for money. If people gave a donation, he would not keep the money for himself, but would spend it to reduce any suffering around him - just like a flower spreading its fragrance all around, without expecting anything in return.

Finally, the easiest way to give a summary of Godwin's life is by quoting the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau 250 years ago when he wrote an essay on true heroism. His description of the virtue of heroism helps me to reflect on a quality that Godwin was actually living:

MEMORIAL TRIBUTES TO GODWIN

The true hero "accumulates a great quantity of sublime virtues which are rare in their combination, and even more rare in their expression. More rare because this heroism is uninterested in any personal merit, having as its only aim the happiness of others and receiving their admiration as its only reward."

Robert Jordi,  
Bern, Switzerland

**GODWIN SAMARARATNE:  
A TRIBUTE TO A REMARKABLE MAN  
BY DR P.W. KODITUWAKKU**

(ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR IN THE DEPARTMENT OF PEDIATRICS AND NEUROSCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO, ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO, U.S.A.)

Professor Gunapala Dharmasiri introduced me to Mr. Godwin Samararatne in 1972, a few weeks after I joined the Department of Philosophy at the University of Peradeniya. I vaguely remember our first meeting, which took place in Godwin's office at the Kandy Municipal Library, where he was a librarian. Although I can not recollect what we discussed in this meeting, his captivating smile, polite manner, and sense of humour made lasting impressions in my memory. Until I left Sri Lanka in 1979 for post-graduate studies, Godwin and I met regularly to discuss various topics ranging from Buddhist philosophy to politics in Sri Lanka. Over these 7 years, I got to know Godwin and his family, including his beloved mother, well. I have recalled and arranged my memories of Godwin from this period under the following labels: scholar, Buddhist practitioner, and friend.

**Scholar**

Godwin's desk at the library was always cluttered with stacks of books, which made me wonder if he read all the books that he acquired for the library. I used to call Godwin "the Renaissance man" because he had an encyclopaedic knowledge of a wide range of subjects including literature, philosophy, art, psychology, history, and Buddhism. While Godwin had an intimate knowledge of the Buddha's discourses, he felt comfortable discussing ideas of western philosophers (e.g. Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Camus, and Wittgenstein), psycholinguists (e.g. Chomsky), and anthropologists (e.g. Bateson).

Given that Godwin possessed a mental toolbox filled with conceptual frameworks and ideas from different traditions, he was able to quickly comprehend and assimilate novel concepts. As a young assistant lecturer, lacking confidence in my own reasoning ability, I often sought Godwin's help when I felt that I did not have a firm footing on a philosophical position. I recall that one of my first assignments in the Department of Philosophy was to assist Professor Padmasiri de Silva teach an undergraduate course in philosophical psychology. While preparing for this course, I was fascinated by the force of Gilbert Ryle's argument that the dualistic position of mind-body was based on an erroneous assumption, which he termed category mistake. Ryle illustrates category mistake by means of an example of a foreign student visiting a university. As the student is shown various buildings, libraries, and campuses, the student asks, "But where is the university?" The student's question assumes that the university is of the same logical category as that of library or buildings, which is obviously a mistake. This entails that it is a mistake to talk about the mind as a substance that exists independent of feelings and thoughts etc. I asked Godwin if Ryle's refutation of the dualist position was comparable with the Buddha's rejection of *atta* or self. He brought my attention to the following well-known verse in *Vissuddhi Magga* and discussed at length about similarities and differences between Ryle's analytical and Buddhist introspective methods:

Mere suffering exists, no sufferer is found,  
The deed is, but no doer of the deed is there.

Nirvana is, but not the man that enters it.  
The path is, but no traveller on it is seen.

At the end of this discussion, I was astonished at the extent of Godwin's knowledge of Western and Eastern philosophies despite his lack of formal training in philosophy. Godwin later told me that he developed his interests in philosophy through frequent discussions that he had with the late Professor K.N. Jayatillake, who was one of my mentors.

Godwin was connected with a wide network of local and foreign scholars from different disciplines. Numerous faculty members from the schools of Medicine, Dentistry, Science and Arts in the University of Peradeniya frequently stopped by Godwin's office just to chat with him. He enjoyed these interactions since they allowed him to keep abreast of new developments in different areas of studies. He used to peruse popular journals on science such as *Scientific American* in search of new developments in neuroscience or psychology. I recall that one time Karl Pribram's "holographic brain" theory caught his attention and he talked about it with intense interest. New discoveries in physics and psychology were also of particular interest to Godwin as he was grappling with the question of the relationship between physical and psychological aspects of our existence. I believe that Godwin's interest in the relationship between the physical and psychological aspects of existence was an offshoot of his long-term goal of explaining Buddhist metaphysical concepts such as re-birth and extra-sensory perception. He read with intense interest Arthur Koestler's *The Roots of Coincidence* and Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics* to understand the metaphysical aspects of the universe.

Godwin was extremely generous with his time helping researchers. Numerous post-graduate students and foreign scholars often sought Godwin's assistance when planning and conducting research in the areas of anthropology and Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Having heard of Godwin's extensive knowledge of Sri Lankan culture and his kindness, foreign students from other disciplines also came to Godwin seeking his help. One time a graduate student from an American university sought Godwin's advice on a research project related to art therapy. After joining the Department of Psychiatry in Peradeniya as a trainee clinical psychologist, I embarked on a project of validating a test instrument designed to screen psychological symptoms in patients who visited medical clinics. This project necessitated the establishment of norms for various scales on the test in the general population. Godwin not only helped me find local sites for validating the test, but also walked from house to house in a village near Kandy administering the test to villagers. I have never forgotten this experience.

### **Buddhist Practitioner**

Godwin said that he became interested in Buddhism and spiritual matters very early in his life. As an adult, he actively sought knowledge of Buddhism through extensively reading suttas and seeking advice of scholars such as Professor K.N. Jayatillake and Ven. Nyanaponika. He was well-versed in Buddhist suttas when I met him in 1972. In the early 1970s, Professor K.N. Jayatillake's influence on the interpretation of Buddhist texts was palpable around Peradeniya and Godwin's ideas reflected this influence. Like Professor Jayatillake, Godwin espoused an empirical approach to understanding our existence and to achieve the ultimate goal of Nibbana. This approach also assumes a form of realism in that the phenomena (e.g. physical, biological, moral, etc.) that the Buddha discovered through extra-sensory perception exist independently of sensory experience. Godwin's abiding interest in science and parapsychology indexes Professor Jayatillake's interpretation of Buddhist epistemology.

Godwin represented a seamless blend of Buddhist precept and practice. Godwin devoted himself to teaching and practicing meditation after his retirement from Kandy public library. Even in the early 1970s I considered Godwin to be someone very special, someone who had unique qualities, and someone who had entered the path of purification in a Buddhist sense. During the 7 year period that I was closely associated with Godwin, I never heard him utter a word reflective of anger, unhappiness, or greed. Nor did I witness a behaviour indicating these negative feelings. As mentioned above, he was kind, compassionate, and always willing to help others. He looked happy always, facing events in his life with a serene attitude. He chose to remain single, taking care of his widowed mother. Like any other Sri Lankan mother, Godwin's mother wished he had married and had a family. Whenever his mother raised the question of marriage, Godwin laughed and said, "I haven't found the perfect woman that I am looking for".

Godwin was however a normal human being who experienced normal biological feelings. We had several discussions on Buddhist practice and desires arising from biological roots. One day he talked about a Tibetan exercise in which participants argue without emotions. This suggested that he was interested in decoupling cognitions and emotions. Another discussion I had with him dealt with the Vitikkasantthana Sutta in which the Buddha directly addressed the question of the removal of distracting thoughts. Godwin chuckled to himself when reading the following verse from the sutta: "If evil, unskilful thoughts continue to rise in a bhikkhu in spite of his reflection on the removal of the source of unskilful thoughts, he should with clenched teeth and the tongue pressing on the palate, restrain, subdue and beat down the (evil) mind by the (good) mind". During this discussion, he admitted having experienced sexual thoughts occasionally despite his age (he was then about 46 years old). As Buddha himself advised monks, such thoughts are normal and can be overcome through practice. Unfortunately, I did not see Godwin in his later years and believe that he continued to be very skilful in handling distracting thoughts.

### **Friend**

Godwin was one of my best friends. He treated all human beings with compassion. His social network was ever expanding and he did not hesitate to help anyone who asked for help. He, in fact, helped my transition from philosophy to clinical psychology. I have now drifted further to study biological processes underlying different psychological processes using modern neuro-imaging methods such as functional MRI. I am now in a position to peek inside the brain when one is practising mindfulness meditation. When I formulate my research questions, I still hear Godwin's voice in my head. I feel happy that I was fortunate to have met in my life such a remarkable human being as Godwin.

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## **GODWIN SAMARARATNE: FRIEND AND TEACHER** **BY PAUL KÖPPLER**

(AUSTRIAN MEDITATION TEACHER AND CHAIRMAN OF THE ASSOCIATION OF BUDDHISM IN THE WEST)

I never knew before, and I think I will not know again, a man who could give so much but was, at the same time, so modest and so simple that while being with him I never had the impression of being in touch with a bodhisattva. Yet in reality he was. Wherever he happened to be he was there for others in a way, and everybody got the feeling that he was a good friend. I knew him for about 20 years and he was, indeed, a good friend, a *kalyana-mitta* in the deepest sense. That means a person who by his life gives you an example of what it is to live mindfully.

When I met him for the first time I remember very well that the person who introduced him said that his name meant "god" and "win", and I think he had the perfect name. He was a "win" for everybody and he was pure *metta* (love), one who was loved by gods and humans. I have heard that his mother sometimes called him "Goodwin" and that name is also perfect. He was not a monk but he lived like a monk without belongings, and every year he came with the same clothing, very simple. But he also liked to buy things, but never for himself, always for "his" children, poor children and relatives in Sri Lanka.

He knew a lot about international literature and was well educated, but he very seldom spoke about his own life. Rather, he was very good at listening and asking other people about themselves. I was very impressed by the fact that he was never dogmatic and never claimed to belong to any Buddhist group or tradition. He had no title, no honours, and he did not cling to any Buddhist school. His source was the word of the Buddha especially in the way the Venerable Nyanaponika translated it. It seems that he had found the essence of Buddhist teaching by his own research into his own mind and heart, and I think he had brought this ability to understand the Dhamma from another life into this short life.

Another quality was his sense for joy, for humour. He could smile in such a wonderful way, that just to see it made you smile also. Sometimes, when he told a funny story while giving a Dhamma talk, he would laugh so much that he stopped talking for a while. He also loved children and their laughter and he was never disturbed by them or by animals. In fact I think that nothing at all could disturb him.

One day when he was visiting us we had to cross the border between Austria and Germany and as we had a caravan fully loaded we had to stop and our passports were taken for inspection. Godwin would sometimes make a joke about his "bad visa-kamma". On that occasion he said: "Now we can only practice *metta* for the people working here." And the miracle happened - after half an hour our passports were returned and we were allowed to cross the border without any trouble.

He was a teacher who lived what he talked about, and I never met a person from Asia who understood so well the workings of the western mind. Sometimes he said. "When I tell my people from Sri Lanka how I teach in Germany, they will think I am crazy." For many years I had the great fortune to be his assistant, translator and teacher of body-work during the retreats he gave in Germany. Whenever I sit now alone in front of such groups and try to help people and teach, he is dwelling in my heart and speaking with my tongue.

His talks were always very simple and easy to understand, but deep and profound. He offered us a great variety of "tools", for every situation in daily life. And his whole teaching was about how to integrate Dhamma in daily life, how to work diligently with the material that life gives us. I liked very much his teaching about the "monsters" in us. During a meditation retreat he liked to ask the meditators: "Now, tell me, where are your monsters today? Not here, that's good. But be aware that they will come when you leave. So maybe you can invite them now, to make friends with them."

Another important tool he taught was to encourage people to look deeper, to use awareness to see the characteristics of life and to ask important questions like: "What will last? What can I hold on to? Who is doing this or that? What am I?"

His energy is still here, I feel his gentle presence and hear his words like "Can you hear the birds? Just listen to the birds ... "

I think the right way to remember him is to use the tools given by him to overcome sorrow, anger and fear and to lead a joyful and mindful life.

Paul Köppler,  
Bonn, Germany

**GODWIN SAMARARATNE:  
THE MEDITATION TEACHER WITH A GENTLE TOUCH  
BY U. C. S. PERERA**

Godwin Samararatne was a meditation teacher loved and respected by all who knew him. I met Godwin for the first time at the Matale Municipal library some time in 1959. That meeting was to be the start of a long friendship, which was to last until his death. We were constantly in contact through correspondence and telephone calls whenever he was in Europe, and long conversations when we met. His last letter to me from Sri Lanka is dated 22 February, 2000.

Godwin whetted my interest in religion. He read a lot on religion, philosophy, psychology, extra-sensory perception and novels like those of Colin Wilson, Herman Hess, Albert Camus and those great Russian writers. He was even then when I met him, a meditator. He remained the epitome of the meditator unto his last. I sometimes visited him at his home on the Peradeniya Road, Kandy, on Sundays, and saw how he talked and discussed with numerous friends that dropped in to see him, on subjects varying from politics to religion, letting others, for the most part, do the talking. He did not try to impose his opinion on others. Even in discussing a question of Dhamma, he did not flaunt his knowledge, when the other person was wrong, he tactfully put a counter question that showed their error. He was not judgemental, when others were critical Godwin always pointed out a good quality in the person in question. This he used as an axiom in his Dhamma talks, later, at the Nilambe Meditation Centre - "you should not always give *minuses*, you should also give *plusses*."

**Unaffected**

His pleasing unaffected comportment with his friends, he extended to others he respected. I have seen him with Venerable Nynaponika, Venerable Piyadassi, and with Francis Story. Even with them he had that ease of conversation and a quiet interrogative manner of speech to get them to talk at length on a subject. The late Venerable Seevali was a very close friend of Godwin from his school days at the Dharmaraja College, Kandy. When Venerable Seevali was to be ordained, I accompanied Godwin to the Kanduboda Meditation Centre in Kelaniya, where the ceremony was to take place. And later for his higher ordination we went to the Maliyadeva Forest Meditation Centre, somewhere near Kurunegala. Godwin too, would have liked to have donned the robes of a Buddhist monk but I thought it was because of his love for his mother that he wished to remain a lay meditator. Venerable Seevali later went abroad and died there of a heart ailment. Godwin was deeply saddened by his death. Despite his detached attitude towards life he could be moved by the news of someone's death. Death had taken away his father when he was yet a child, and also his elder brother and his wife, in a tragic accident.

When I was selected for an appointment in Paris, I was hesitating to accept the post for family reasons. When I asked Godwin for his opinion, he said it is better that I go and not regret it later. From Matale, he was transferred to the Kandy Municipal Library and later resigned from there to take charge of the Nilambe Meditation Centre at the request of Mr. M. B. Alahakoon, who constructed the buildings and provided all the material support to the Centre.

Godwin became a popular and much sought after meditation teacher and was invited to conduct retreats at various meditation centres in Europe - Switzerland, Germany, Austria,



Holland and U.K as well as in India, South East Asia, the U.S.A. and in South Africa. Conducting retreats in these places far apart from one another was a physically exhausting exercise, however dedicated he was to the cause. During one of these visits he was able to get a visa to France, to come and stay with me, on his way from Germany to London. I was to meet him at the Gare du Nord Railway Station in Paris.

As scheduled, the train by which he was to come arrived, but Godwin was not in it. I thought he had missed the first train and decided to stay for the second. That, too, arrived, but there was no sign of him. I was worried, not knowing the cause of his delay. But finally, from the third train, to my great relief, I saw the tall figure of Godwin emerging from a compartment, tired and worn out, but still with that unfailing smile on his face. He told me, hardly able to stop laughing, that he had been arrested by the Swiss Frontier Police. The policeman had apparently asked for his visa to Switzerland, through which the train was passing. The policeman spoke only French and Godwin only English, there was no one in the compartment who could help one or the other. He was taken to the police station for further questioning. Godwin kept his broad smile and repeated that he could not understand French. Quite exasperated the policemen took him back to the station and put him on the next train to Paris.

The few days he spent with me in Paris he really enjoyed. There was no getting up early in the morning, or sitting through meditation sessions and giving Dhamma talks. He was relaxed, and played with my baby son. The children took to him very easily and they loved him. We went to Sacrecoeur Church in Montmartre. He was fascinated by the wayside artists painting portraits of those sitting for them. At the cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris, which was almost empty, he thought it a good place in its sacred silence to meditate. We sat down and waited in silence watching the great gothic structure with its beautiful windows.

The day he left us, my wife and I accompanied him to the railway station, from where he was to take the train to London. He said that for every next visit to Europe for retreats, he will come and stay with me for at least a week just to relax (provided of course, I had improved my cooking!). It was never to be as he was unable to get a French visa, however much he tried.

### **Magic Touch**

Later, he told me of an incident in the train to London. He was seated in the train in his characteristic manner, with his arms folded and eyes closed, when someone tapped on his arm. He looked up, and saw the anxious face of a woman. Indicating an aged gentleman seated in a corner seat on the other side opposite to him, she told him that he was her husband and they were travelling to London for treatment to him for his headaches, probably migraine. He had observed Godwin from where he was seated and told her that he was sure, "that man"- indicating Godwin, "can cure my headache", and she asked him whether he could help. Godwin gave his seat to the woman and went and sat by the side of the man, and having spoken to him for a while, told him to take a deep breath and then breath normally, then to inhale conscientiously, saying to himself 'Bud', and exhale conscientiously, saying to himself 'dhow', and asking him to continue, went back to his seat. When he got down at the Victoria Station in London, the old couple came to him, and said with gratitude on their face that man's headache had disappeared.

I attended a few retreats with Godwin at Nilambe. What I liked there was the liberty given to meditators, to meditate at his or her own pace without forcing them to follow a method or a system. Evening discussions were a stimulating deviation from the day's silence and meditation sittings. Godwin did not like making long Dhamma talks on a subject. He allowed

the meditators to talk and selected a subject as the discussions proceeded. The main theme for discussion was 'loving kindness'. This covered the whole aspect of human behaviour, and was cleverly manoeuvred to bring out into open discussion problems among meditators, any acts of indiscipline he had observed during the day, or complaints or abuses of freedom. He often said that the retreats abroad were well organised, and when the time came for his Dhamma talk at the end of the day, he was given a subject, and was provided with an alarm clock to time his talk for one hour. But he said he preferred the disorder at Nilambe, through which more positive results emerged.

Though he was of the Theravada tradition, he sought to accommodate meditators of all traditions in his retreats and introduced what he called 'choiceless awareness', leaving the traditional 'in and out breath' as an object of meditation to those who were comfortable with it.

He stressed the necessity to cultivate 'aleness', during a retreat, and live without creating psychological wounds in oneself, and quoted J. Krishnamurti, "...an innocent mind is a mind which cannot hurt oneself, and therefore is incapable of hurting others."

Though he was happy to be at Nilambe Meditation Centre, which he told me on several occasions, his responsibilities restricted the time he could devote for meditation. In his later years he had the 'habit' of closing his eyes, in the course of a conversation or in listening to someone. Godwin told me an anecdote concerning this 'habit' of his. An American who was meditating with Godwin at Nilambe, had met a meditator from another meditation Centre. Speaking about his teacher, this latter meditator said that his teacher was very clever, and had a third eye and all three are open all the time. The meditator from Nilambe said to him, "Mine too, he is very clever, but he has only two eyes and they are both closed, most of the time".

### **Psychiatrists**

Godwin came to be known not only among Buddhist circles in the West, but also among Western psychiatrists. This was because of his involvement in the field of application of Buddhist meditation for the treatment of psychiatric patients diagnosed as suffering from neurosis. In an interview given to Stephen Coan, a journalist from South Africa, Godwin said "when they come to see me, in the first place I give them an opportunity to speak out....then I try to build up a friendly relationship, and then they describe the neurotic symptoms. I tell them not to consider it as a mental illness, not to consider themselves as different from others....The third thing I try to communicate with them is some aspects of meditation. I encourage them to be their own psychotherapists so to speak - to work with the symptoms and states of mind that seems to affect them."

When he was still working as a librarian, and engaged in investigating into cases of memories of previous lives, he assisted Mr. Amarasiri Weeraratne, who was using hypnosis to study previous life memories by regression of selected subjects. Later on Godwin himself became an adept at it, and successfully regressed several persons.

Godwin's fame went beyond the shores of Sri Lanka. He worked with European psychiatrists of the Jungian school, and with them he was involved in experimental application of Buddhist meditation methods for the treatment of psychiatric patients diagnosed as suffering from neurosis. He assisted Mr. Francis Story, and then Professor K. N. Jayatillake, in rebirth investigations and was later invited by Professor Ian Stevenson, to follow up the cases of rebirth in Sri Lanka which he had included in his well-known book "The evidence for Survival from Claimed Memories of former Incarnations". He was a resident research

assistant to Professor Ian Stevenson of the Department of Behavioural Medicine and Psychiatry of the University of Virginia, and along with Dr. Salwat Pasricha of the Department of Clinical Psychology, National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosis in Bangalore and two others, they jointly published three research papers.

An Indian meditator had once told him that his first name Godwin was too Christian for a Buddhist meditation teacher, and therefore he should change his name to Jayadeva. When he told me this I suggested "Anagarika Jayadeva", but Godwin shrugged it off with a smile.

My attempt has been to describe the man whom we knew as Godwin Samararatne, and the words were easy to find. But to describe the meditator that he was, a being of great spiritual stature, the words are inadequate. Wherever he was he created a fertile void, a pregnant emptiness, around him where all barriers melted away. He infused the environment with gentle compassion, such that his friends became your friends and yours his. That was the inexplicable phenomenon he was. His kindness, selfless benevolence, and genuineness, influenced those he came in contact with and, without exaggeration, they became different, their attitudes changed, there was an irresistible desire to be like him, think like him and act like him. He was generous. He gave, but did not take. He lived simply and carried no baggage. He traversed his chosen path - the path of a Bodhisattva.

May he attain Nibbana.

U.C.S Perera,  
Paris, France

## **GODWIN SAMARARATNE: A TRIBUTE**

### **BY O. R. RAO**

(MEMBER OF THE KRISHNAMURTI FOUNDATION OF INDIA)

I first met Godwin Samararatne in 1978 in Kandy when we as a family were the guests of Mr. Gopal Gandhi (who was the First Secretary of the Indian High Commission in Sri Lanka) and his wife Mrs. Tara Gandhi. Gopal introduced me to Godwin and I met him many times during our two weeks' stay in Kandy. I do not now remember the exact contents of our conversations, but I felt an early rapport with him. He was a tall and rather big made person, but there was a lightness about his being which struck me immediately. An incident I remember was when he took us to the house of one of his relatives (probably one of his brothers') where there were two or three young children of about ten years of age. He immediately fell in with their playful mood and was soon romping about with them on a bit of grassy, sloping ground. The reason why I remember this scene so vividly even now must be that firstly, I am myself not capable of such easy rapport with young children and secondly, that Godwin's 'lightness of being' must have been very evident in this scene.

Other persons too have noted this rapport Godwin had with children. Gopal told me that sometimes when he and Tara had to be away from home for a length of time for some reason, they would leave their two small daughters at home with Godwin for company. Once when they came back they found both the children riding on Godwin's back. He was on all fours on the floor!

Godwin and I must have had some 'philosophical' conversations at that time, and I still have with me some letters and notes relating to these matters, written by Gopal and Godwin. At that time I was much preoccupied with (or I had persuaded myself that I was pre-occupied with) the split between science and spiritual truth, fact and value, 'is' and 'ought' and so on. Scientific materialism and allied philosophies denied that any values-spiritual, aesthetic or ethical-are inherent in the 'objective' structure of the universe. Thus there could be no 'objective' verifiable, ethical or spiritual truths or knowledge, but only 'subjective' value preferences. There could be no 'truth value' in ethics, religion or art. These views led to the rather tiresome and clichéd debates about whether human beings are condemned to live in a meaningless universe and so on.

I had written a long article about these matters and sent Godwin a copy of it when I returned to India. The letters and notes which I have with me now relate to the talks we had had, and to the contents of this essay. The note from Gopal beautifully and succinctly summarizes Godwin's views on these issues. Godwin pointed out that we need not fall into the trap of the objectivist/subjectivist debate couched in the language of empiricist-idealist-critical realist debate, since true ethical impulses have deeper *independent* springs. "The origins of ethics would be in meditational or spiritual experiences which are totally non-objective. Ahimsa for instance is not a subjective value-judgement preference but a system of social ethics which has been abstracted, as it were, from meditation on the truth of suffering." (The words are Gopal Gandhi's conveying the gist of Godwin's views.)

Godwin thus took the question of the 'truth-content' of ethics out of the modern western epistemological debate between Realism, Idealism and Critical Realism and so on, and said that we could and should step out of this debate into a 'fourth position' in which ethical truth is seen as the truth perceived in meditational experiences. In fact he went further and said that the persons who took this step into this 'fourth position' and who could see the truths of

ethics as perceptions in heart-felt existential experience should stop being defensive about the 'truth value' of such perceptions. Godwin pointed out how the Buddha himself gave an example of how such "subjective experiences could be put to the test of verification. Looking for an ideal teacher (which is conceptually a search for non-verifiable attributes) one could make a wise choice by watching the actions of the would-be teacher. One could adopt, with advantage, the methodology of verification. A teacher who by his actions does not convince one of his wisdom or maturity could be rejected. In this instance an objective correlate would have been found and employed in what is essentially a non-objective pursuit".

Though the academically oriented empiricist philosopher might dismiss out of hand such a methodology of 'verification of non-verifiable attributes' as too vague and loose, Godwin's reference to the 'deeper springs' of ethical truths had the ring of truth for me. Implied in this was an assertion that we need to go beyond conceptual searches for truth. Epistemological debates, philosophies of science and metaphysical speculation in general sought to fulfil the human need for truth by constructing structures of conceptual coherence and correspondence with reality. But such conceptual coherence and correspondence as given in science for instance, though pragmatically highly successful in the material realm, leaves us ultimately unsatisfied because we seek a deeper coherence, a wholeness of the entire being, that which used to be known by the old-fashioned word 'wisdom'.

Godwin himself later sent me some notes commenting on the article I had sent him, and referring to the differing views that philosophers of science had on the nature of the scientific method and scientific truth. (I still have these notes with me). He said, "A kind of relativism seems inevitable from the divergent standpoints. We tend to forget this sometimes and venerate the scientific method as if it is absolute in content."

He went on to ask, "What is one to do who wishes to be scientific? Wait till there is agreement among the philosophers of science or accept what seems to confirm one's position and reject the others or dismiss the notion of 'scientific method' as something existing in the minds of philosophers?"

"Are the above positions or any others going to make us wiser by these exercises? What is the way out of this 'net of views'?"

"One has to fully realize the nature of concepts ... the very process of thought itself as a detached observer. (Can scientists be detached observers?) This exercise which can be called meditation should be done without upholding any 'ism' be that 'Buddhism', 'Hinduism', 'Krishnamurtism' (their dhammas are converted into 'isms') Consequently one should realize the difference between concepts and REALITY." (The emphases on certain words in all these quotations are Godwin's).

I have quoted this statement of Godwin made more than thirty years ago, at length because it is a powerful statement which has the ring of truth in it, and was important for me because, being made by a person like Godwin, it opened up the possibility of there being such a thing as spiritual truth. What I understood from this was that if one was watchful and mindful enough, it was possible to look beyond concepts and the distortions they produced in the mind, and to thus directly 'see things as they are'. It was possible to 'wipe the dust from one's eyes'. The person making the statement made the difference between authenticity and a mere claim.

These statements also showed the extent of his grasp of the gist of certain crucial debates in modern Western philosophy, which has important implications for spiritual seekers. Godwin sometimes expressed regret that he had not undergone the discipline of a modern University

education. However, in his case, this, as we know, was no great loss and in fact may have been an advantage in that his mind was never subjected to the deadening influence of examination systems! In fact Godwin's case could be held up as a good illustration of Ananda Coomaraswamy's statement, "It takes four years to get a first class University education and forty years to get over it." Godwin never had to undergo this prolonged 'getting over'. This is in keeping with his 'lightness of being' which every one has noticed. He carried no excess baggage through life-not even theoretical baggage.

Carrying 'excess theoretical baggage' would have meant for him falling into what is called the 'net of views' (*ditthi*) in Buddhism. Godwin was of course fully aware that Buddhism could itself become a *ditthi* as is evident from his remark which I have quoted. He claimed no exclusive right to the truth for Buddhism and in fact was interested in and open to other spiritual teachings. During talks with him I gathered that he had studied the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi and Nisargadatta Maharaj, two important spiritual figures in modern India. This might at first sight be surprising as the language used by these teachers was based mostly on Hindu religious philosophy, but the language in itself was no obstacle for Godwin.

Among all modern spiritual teachings, Godwin was most drawn to those of J. Krishnamurti, of whose talks and writings he made a close study. He had quite a few of Krishnamurti's works added to the library of the Nilambe Meditation Centre. At the invitation of the Krishnamurti Foundation of India, he took part in the Krishnamurti Centenary gathering held in Chennai in 1995. He took an active part in the gathering, leading some dialogue sessions and making many friends. The importance he attached to the teachings of Krishnamurti was shown in the fifteen page account he wrote of this gathering and about the impact that Krishnamurti and his teachings had had on his 'followers'.

In this article he noted how some who were drawn greatly to Krishnamurti's teachings were falling into the trap of making an authority of him-the very trap Krishnamurti had repeatedly warned his listeners about. Godwin was pointing out how, instead of meeting life with their own existential questions, and maintaining an open questioning attitude, followers of spiritual teachers often fall into the trap of making the teachers into an authority figure. This article was meant for publication in Sri Lanka, but I do not know if it was ever published.

Godwin's own approach, one felt, was a fine balance between scepticism and questioning on the one hand, and a firm grounding in deeply felt and experienced existential truth on the other. This attitude is expressed in Buddhism by the quality of being known as 'Shraddha' [Pali: *saddha*] which is 'reasoned faith'. The clearest example of this is given in the Kalama Sutta in which the Buddha tells the Kalamas, who are bewildered and doubtful about the many different teachings advocated by different teachers, that it was good that doubt had arisen in them in a matter that was doubtful, and advises them to be sceptical of all authority-be it that of tradition or of scriptures or of a famous teacher, or even of subtle logic-and to rely only on their own carefully considered experience regarding what is true and beneficial. One felt that Godwin was a perfect example of this kind of 'reasoned faith'.

Another quality which endeared him to many was his ability to let people be themselves. For all his grounding in the truths of his own experience, he never imposed them or himself on others. In conversations he preferred to remain in the background, letting others express themselves, only intervening minimally with his own remarks and questions. His presence was never intrusive but was felt by the quality of his listening, and was all the more effective because of this. It was a kind of 'presence in absence', the quality of having no centre of gravity which others have remarked upon.

Owing to this quality of Godwin's, people felt able not only to discuss so called 'impersonal' philosophical matters with him, but to open up their own personal problems to him and to listen to what he had to say about them. It was this quality of being able to blend the 'personal' and the 'intangible impersonal' in friendship which made him a true 'Kalyanamitra', a spiritual friend, to many people in many parts of the world.

Just as Godwin drew no line of distinction between the 'personal' and the 'impersonal', he made no distinction between the 'worldly' and the 'spiritual' either in regard to persons or to actions. Thus he had among his friends both persons whose interests and professions most people would consider to be very worldly and materialistic, as also persons who were more 'serious minded'. I remember that whenever he visited Chennai, Godwin always paid a visit to one of his friends whose work and interests would be normally considered to be 'mundane', and who also used to tease Godwin about his philosophical and spiritual interests and activities. But Godwin only seemed to enjoy this kind of badinage. For him it was the living person with whom he was talking who mattered and not his profession or ideas. A true example of metta bhavana!

A remark he once made that has remained in my mind relates to the question of sexuality. Godwin said, "I think one can think of oneself as a human being first and as a man or woman after that. I think that that would be a very beautiful way of dealing with one's sexuality."

That statement for me was remarkable in that it opened up an entirely new perspective on the question, which needed to be meditated upon for a long time. Also, although the inseparability of truth and beauty is a well known assertion in philosophy and literature (for example in Platonic philosophy, and in Keats' line, "Truth is beauty and beauty truth") the assertion gains authenticity and comes alive only because of the living authenticity of the person making it.

My last memory and image of him is that of an evening spent over dinner at our house in Chennai in 1998 or 1999. He was on a transit stop-over at the Chennai airport on his way to Bodh Gaya and we were able to bring him home for a couple of hours. My son and I returned him to the airport late at night and that was my last meeting with him.

I had remarked to him at some time that 'there was no celebration of life in Buddhism'. A few days later I got a post card from him saying that he was 'celebrating life' in Bodh Gaya! After that there was one post card with a photograph of a Buddha statue from the place in South Africa where he was giving talks. The letter is not dated, but it must have been on that trip that he contracted his last illness. That was the last communication I had from Godwin.

O. R. Rao  
Chennai, India

## **GODWIN, DEAR FRIEND, DEAR TEACHER**

### **BY DEEPAL SOORIYAARACHCHI**

*Meditation is "Knowing the mind, shaping the mind and freeing the mind"*

*- Godwin Samararatne (quoting Ven Nyanaponika)*

"I did not get my visa, Deepal" These were the first words of Godwin when I met him last. It was at Harilal's house while he was convalescing from his serious illness after returning from South Africa in 2000. He was referring so lightly to the 48 hours he had been unconscious in hospital. Unfortunately for us he got his visa a couple of weeks later leaving only the memories of this gentle human being. To those who knew Godwin this ability to look at life so lightly was nothing unusual.

I first met Godwin in August 1984. His brother, Hector, had arranged for me to spend the night at Godwin's house at Peradeniya so that I could take the bus to go to Colombo the following morning. Godwin offered his room to me and it had barely any space as the whole place was filled with books.

"Deepal, we are having a meditation programme, would you like to join?" Godwin asked. Having said yes we went to Lewella where he was conducting a guided meditation programme. First he allowed us to practice *anapanasati* meditation, or meditation on the in-breath and out-breath. It was not easy. Even before the out-breath was over my mind was somewhere else. Though I sat for meditation hoping to have a soothing, tranquil experience, it was frustrating.

After some time Godwin asked us to share our experiences in a discussion. Next he advised us to watch our thoughts and notice how thoughts come and go. Well, when I started looking at my mind to observe thoughts, nothing came to the surface. So without much effort my mind became silent and tranquil. Godwin advised us to have no expectations about how the meditation should be, and it just happened. I felt this was obviously a very useful piece of advice.

Godwin de-mystified meditation, he removed the "branding" of meditation. That is why he appealed to such a large cross-section of people, from traditional local Buddhists to the wider world of truth seekers across the globe. There were many who would come all the way to Nilambe from far away lands, just to see Godwin. I knew one such young lady from Germany called Sabine. Every year she would come to see him and spend a week or two at Nilambe.

Godwin had helped her to free herself from the pains she had from her childhood memories, and she was ever so grateful to him for that. I can imagine how Godwin would have told her, "... so also please realize that meditation is not always about having pleasant positive experiences. Actually unpleasant experiences do not create any problems for us unless we identify ourselves with them. The real challenge we have is learning how to work with these unpleasant experiences, how to work with physical pain, how to work with mental pain. This is much more important than simply experiencing pleasant positive experiences".

Godwin was so selfless. He never wanted to become "the Guru". He was so humble. Once I visited the BPS auditorium where Godwin was giving a talk. He saw me and asked me to sit closer to him at the front. After speaking a little he introduced me to the audience and asked me to speak, and I remember speaking on the Paramitas - the ten perfections. Such actions



are possible only by someone who has seen for sure the emptiness of the ego, the transient nature of self.

My friend Upul kept asking me to write about Godwin or speak about him, but when I recalled things I realize that I had only a handful of encounters with Godwin, but the impact he has had on me is so profound. In that way he is such a great *kalyana-mitta*, or 'noble friend'. One of his qualities was that he had such a wonderful sense of humour. Once, after a short stay at Nilambe, my wife and I visited his room before leaving. He asked my wife: "Sunethra, did you miss your husband, having to stay away from him the last few days." "Not at all," said my wife. "Deepal, the coming colours are not good," Godwin said, with his usual boundless laughter. (This is a colloquial expression that means things look gloomy for the future.)

Once he was visiting his brother who was staying with his son who lived a few blocks away from me and he dropped in to see me. That day happened to be our wedding anniversary and we were overjoyed to have him as a visitor on this special day. When we told that to Godwin he said "I don't know whether it is good for I am a confirmed bachelor," and out came the laughter.

At Nilambe he used to lead Dhamma discussions in the evenings. Some of these discussions were thought-provoking, depending on the questions that came up. Once he suggested that we talk about meditation. Having suggested the topic, as usual he sat with his eyes closed and hands across his chest and tucked into the sleeves of his shirt. The meditators, too, sat in silence. The time passed by and the candles burnt down, but no one asked any questions, nor did Godwin speak. At the end of the session he said: "Wasn't it a very good discussion on meditation?"

Godwin's approach appealed to people like us who are busy lay-people for he always introduced meditation as a part of life not apart from it. For instance, he used to say " ... at the end of each day it is very good practice to take your mind back and find out how you spent the day. Find out moments when you were conscious, when you were aware, and the moments when you were like a machine. Also, just find out how many times you were angry and also find out times when you were not angry - this is very important. When you do this kind of reviewing, some times you'll be surprised what a good person you have been. This kind of reflection, this kind of reviewing, can bring about a self-transformation in a very natural way because you learn to see more and more inwards rather than outwards".

Godwin used to emphasise the importance of becoming aware of the good moments of the day when the mind was free from agitation and defilements rather than focusing on the negatives, thereby giving them so much importance. This definitely gives one so much confidence to continue on the journey.

About loving kindness meditation he said: "It helps us to forgive ourselves, as I said earlier, to accept our humanness, and when we learn to accept our humanness then we learn to accept the humanness of others. So it helps us to be friendly with ourselves and be friendly to others." Godwin used to bring out loving kindness as an integral part of the practice. He invited meditators to be friendly with their body, thoughts, pains, experiences, and with memories that evoked unpleasant sensations. "So in using loving kindness you relate to the anger in an entirely different way. Rather than beating yourself, rather than giving yourself a minus, rather than suffering and feeling guilty, in a very friendly gentle way, as I have been saying so often, you will find out: 'How did I get angry?' So then we can learn from that anger and we can use that anger for spiritual growth." This is how Godwin defined being friendly.

How simple. How profound. He also encouraged us very much to be friendly to the breath. Comparing the breath to a friend made it such a different experience.

Once I asked Godwin how to deepen my meditation. His simple answer was to just keep observing my mind. He always wanted us to look at meditation as a practice, that is, to experience the journey, rather than think about the destination. In his efforts to make meditation a part of life he used to say: "Whether you are at home, whether you are travelling in a car, whether you are in a place of work, just to know, just to be aware of what is going through your mind and body from moment to moment as far as possible. It is the only way to integrate meditation with our daily life."

The Nilambe time-table is very much a reflection of Godwin's wish to practice meditation as an integral part of daily life. In a way the schedule seems so easy to follow, with hardly the regimental approach that some other centres have. But in that freedom itself lies the responsibility for meditators to make their stay at Nilambe worthwhile. The period of working meditation is a significant experience to lay-persons who have to integrate meditation into life itself.

He encouraged meditators to use every experience in life to practice meditation and thereby to learn. Once, when there was loud noise going on outside during one of the meditation sessions, Godwin said: "Let us listen to that sound. Try to listen to it as if for the first time; otherwise we will consider it as a noise, we will consider it as a disturbance and we might get angry. Then we will suffer as a result of that outside noise. So when we learn to make that the object of meditation we find we can learn from any situation, any experience in life."

Godwin once quoted Ven Nyanaponika who described meditation as "knowing the mind, shaping the mind and freeing the mind." Explaining this very powerful introduction he went on to say: "Knowing the mind is understanding how the mind is working. If we do not know our mind we are really just like machines. Therefore it is extremely important to know and understand how our minds work."

In another occasion Godwin said "Meditation is learning to achieve a mind that is free. So the importance of meditation is learning to achieve a mind that is free, a mind that is happy, a mind that is peaceful, a mind that has loving kindness."

That is exactly what we experienced whenever we had the opportunity to interact with him closely: a person who had a mind that was free, happy, peaceful and that had loving kindness.

Let me end with a diary note I once made at Nilambe:

Dear Godwin,  
A smile so pure  
that comes from the heart.  
At the end of the meditation session  
I open my eyes  
to see you seated  
at the edge of your seat  
with your arms folded  
across your chest.  
In the evening after the offerings

I hear you say  
"Mindfully have your tea."  
You were seated stretched out  
with your mug of tea  
on the side and  
the tea is already cold.

Pausing in between words  
when spoken,  
with so much humour  
and laughter.  
The joy of someone who was free  
from a big ego,  
someone who was poor in spirit.  
Goodbye dear friend, dear teacher.

Deepal Sooriyaarachchi,  
Colombo, Sri Lanka

**LETTER TO GODWIN**  
**BY PAUL VAN HOOYDONCK**

(EHIPASSIKO BUDDHIST CENTRE, ANTWERP, BELGIUM)

Dear Godwin,

It was December 1995. I had just spent 6 months crossing India on a Vespa scooter. In south India I met a Buddhist monk and had long conversations with him. He gave me the address of the Nilambe Buddhist Meditation Centre in Sri Lanka. He said: "Meditation is a way to see clarity in confusion". I thought: "That's what I need. I'll go there, meditate for a week and then I'll see things clearly".

I took an overcrowded bus from Kandy to Nilambe junction and as I climbed the mountain up to the Centre and stopped before the gate, I thought: "If I take one more step, there will be no way back". And so it turned out to be.

I arrived in the dark and was welcomed in the office by a German man called Helmut who is now Bhante Anuruddha and lives in Burma. Once settled in my room I felt something sticky and moist at both of my feet. They were full of blood because of 3 leech-bites.

My journey could begin and it has been going on ever since - for 14 years now. You played a big role on that journey. From the first encounter, your calmness, gentleness, listening abilities and non-judgemental attitude struck me. You were a good listener. You didn't use a lot of words yourself, but you listened with attention and interest.

Often it seemed to me that there was nobody there, residing in your form. Nobody with an opinion on things, a viewpoint, an agenda, just voidness, emptiness, an empty listener.

The evening discussions led by you were attuned to both Sri Lankan and western people seeking psychological support and struggling with a variety of issues. During the years I've known you, thousands of people from all over the world came to seek for your guidance. Personally, your advice helped me to accept things as they were, at the same time clearly pointing to the Dhamma as a standard. I respected you. I loved you - as did many people.

I became more involved in the Centre over the years. I taught yoga, ran the office, gave evening Dhamma-talks. I explored other Buddhist traditions in different parts of Asia and the West, but always returned to the silence, beauty and gentle approach to meditation of Nilambe. In other parts of Asia I had come across "spiritual concentration camps", places where you hardly sleep, geared to a very strict and severe practice. But Nilambe and you yourself stood for "the gentle way".

Then you became sick. When you felt your end was getting nearer, you came to Nilambe to say goodbye to us. You could hardly walk alone or sit up straight without support. I remember your last words: you looked at us and asked:

"Can you make meditation a priority in your lives"?

You know what, Godwin? I did.

In March 2000 I was going down to Kandy, together with Upul. Driving the van, he received a phone call from the hospital. Your situation was critical. We went to see you in the Kandy

General Hospital. Your family was there. I spent a few moments with you alone. When nobody could hear me, I said: "Thank you, my beloved teacher. You are and always will be an example for me." We said goodbye. Later, when I was back in Nilambe, we received the news that you had passed away and I attended your funeral at Lewella, together with many other people.

Many things changed in my life since then: I ordained as a Buddhist monk, founded the "Ehipassiko Buddhist Centre" in Antwerp, Belgium and disrobed 6 months ago. Now, every year I bring a group of Belgian meditators to Nilambe for 1 month.

Now that I am leading a flourishing meditation centre in the West myself, I often think of you as a source of inspiration and guidance. I have had many teachers, but you had the greatest impact on me. Not because of your words, but because of who you were and because of your way of being. You were the embodiment of karuna (compassion) and metta (loving kindness). So, when my good friend, Dennis Candy, asked me to write some words of appreciation about you, I didn't hesitate for one moment. "Remembering Godwin", the perfect title for a book on your teaching.

In the meditation room of the "Ehipassiko Buddhist Centre" in Belgium hangs a picture of you with this text in Dutch:

"Godwin Samararatne, eerste meditatieleraar van het 'Nilambe Meditation Centre' in Sri Lanka. Zonder hem had Ehipassiko nooit bestaan." That translates into English as: "Godwin Samararatne, meditation teacher of the Nilambe Buddhist Meditation Centre in Sri Lanka. Without him, Ehipassiko would never have existed".

Thank you, my kalyana mitra (spiritual friend),

Paul van Hooydonck,  
Ehipassiko Buddhist Centre,  
Antwerp, Belgium

**AFTERWORD:**  
**RECOLLECTIONS OF GODWIN'S LAST DAYS**  
**BY UPUL GAMAGE**

After he returned from his teaching tour in South Africa in February 2000 Godwin could not stay at Nilambe because he was seriously ill. He was invited to stay at the house of his good friends Mr and Mrs Wickramaratne where another of his good friends Dr Jayasinghe was able to frequently visit him. One day I got a call to tell me that Godwin was suddenly much sicker and weaker and he had been taken to Kandy Hospital. Then I went with another long-standing meditator from Nilambe called Paul to see him at the hospital. When we got there he was in a coma and was taken into the Intensive Care Unit that night.

He was there for several days and after many tests the doctors told us that there was no hope for his recovery. Everyone was very disappointed because none of us expected such a quick departure. We felt that our joyful time with Godwin, our spiritual friend and guide, was now going to be over for ever. But suddenly Godwin regained consciousness and everyone was so happy. I was able to stay with him at the hospital, but he was always thinking about my comfort and wanted to arrange a bed for me to sleep on at night, instead of a chair.

While I was with him at the hospital I was able to discuss some interesting spiritual matters with him. I asked him what he had experienced during his coma. I asked this because I had heard many times that people experienced astral travel and meetings with divine spiritual masters when they were in a coma. I also knew that Godwin had been involved in much research into psychic powers, and such events as encounters with spiritual masters in other planes and recollections of previous life experiences. He had also carried out some research into the hypnosis of psychic people who had these experiences, and he had asked me to participate in this. But Godwin told me that he had experienced none of these things during his coma: no astral travel, no meetings with masters, no visual experiences, but he had only vaguely heard some traditional Buddhist chanting.

I told him that most people had given up hope that they would ever be able to see or speak to Godwin again, but now they were very happy that he had come out of his coma. I asked him how he felt about things himself. He told me that he was really disappointed. I felt that disappointment in his voice, too. He explained about this. He said that he had done a lot of research with Professor Ian Stevenson and Professor Haraldson to investigate re-birth. He thought that death was not the end, that life continues after death and he had managed to convince other people of this. But then he said that he did not know what really happens after death. He told me that he had had the great intention to experience death consciously so that he would know what was happening during death and what the next stage was. But he hadn't been able to carry out this investigation because he had been unconscious and he didn't die.

I then asked him what he thought about this experience and how his thinking and way of life were now affected. He answered in a very deep voice: "Upul, this is a very good lesson for me. All the time I encourage others to be aware and to live consciously from moment to moment, and I try to do that myself. Therefore I did not expect to be unconscious and unaware when I was ill. If I live longer I will stop teaching and will intensify my own practice." Then I noticed that after a couple of days Godwin regained his awareness, detachment and equanimity, as before.

After that he was able to return again to the home of his good friends Harilal and Visakha Wickramaratne on Rajapihilla Mawatha. Although not fully recovered, he seemed to be getting better. Before, when people asked about his situation he would respond by asking them how *they* were. Then they would feel too embarrassed to ask for further information about Godwin's own health condition. But if people persisted in asking him for more details, he would say very little.

Once he told a small group of us that he was experiencing a terrible headache, but he could manage because of his awareness. He thought that if someone had such an extreme headache without mindfulness, he or she might go crazy. But none of us could sense that he was experiencing such pain because of his serene expression.

There were so many visitors coming to see him: monks, nuns, local people and foreigners. Some wanted to do chanting, some to give blessings, perform pujas, ceremonies and other rituals. All these were intended as healing therapies to help Godwin. The Wickramaratnes' house was becoming a kind of temple. I could not understand how Visakha managed it all, but I noticed that she was always so friendly to all the visitors. She offered home-made fruit juice drinks to everyone but at the same time, with Harilal's support, she managed to politely maintain Godwin's rest.

Godwin has a niece, Sriyani, and for some of that period Godwin stayed her house, just outside Kandy. From morning to evening the days he stayed there were like public holidays. People seemed to come there in busloads. Godwin wanted everyone to be fed, so they were all invited to have breakfast or lunch with him. Sriyani carried out an unbelievable working meditation to cater for everyone. Later I asked her how she felt about working so hard to prepare tea and meals for such a large number of people coming to visit Godwin. She said that she had enjoyed providing that service as an appreciation of her uncle's immeasurable service to others.

After a while Godwin decided to go to the Nilambe centre for a few days. Perhaps he wanted to see this paradoxical paradise for the last time. I brought him very carefully by van up to the centre. All the residents were happy to see him, but at the same time felt sadness and, perhaps, regret. Some had thoughts like: "Oh, what has happened to our Master? He has so much pain. Because of us he did not care about his own physical health. In a way, we are responsible for his situation."

There were many meditators at the centre at that time, but no one disturbed him, not even the long-term residents. He stayed resting in his room most of the time and after a couple of days I asked him if he would be able to come to the meditation hall to speak with the meditators for a short while. "No" and "cannot" were not in Godwin's vocabulary and he agreed to come for half an hour. I told everyone about this special occasion and they all came to the meditation hall.

There was a deep noble silence in the hall and Godwin walked slowly and carefully to his seat next to the shrine. He gave a short talk about the importance of meditation and then there were a few questions. Someone asked him if he would lead a short loving-kindness meditation. With a kind, gentle smile he replied that he thought that in this situation he should be receiving loving-kindness rather than telling others about it. After a few minutes of silence, he stood up very carefully and went back to his room, while many people bowed down to him.

After a few days at Nilambe, I took him back to the Wickramaratnes' house and a few days later we took him to Kandy hospital for some tests. Visakha, Dr. Janaka and I were talking

casually together and Godwin was joking with us to keep us happy when suddenly he began to have a fit. We held him, but no one could stop the spasms, and he relapsed into a coma again. Eventually one of his doctor friends at Peradeniya Hospital, Dr Dangadeniya arranged for him to be brought there and placed in the Intensive Care Unit where many machines and devices were connected to his body. I was not allowed to stay in the ICU but stayed just outside. The doctor's explained that Godwin's kidneys were no longer functioning and there were other complications as well. They said that even if he recovered he would be suffering a lot, however they would not switch off any of the machines unless his body died. I noticed the graphs on the machines were gradually becoming more and more shallow. I was allowed into the ICU and when I gently touched his head I felt there was so much warmth there.

The next morning on March 22<sup>nd</sup> the doctors told me that it was no longer necessary to keep the machines on. I then phoned his close friends and family and the meditation centre and passed the message on. After that I went to see the hospital director to make the necessary arrangements for Godwin's body to be taken away for the funeral. She told me that Godwin was such a wonderful person. He had donated many things to the hospital for the patients' welfare and used to give counselling to psychiatric patients. He had also been a very good friend of hers.

Visakha Wickramaratne and Felix, one of Godwin's brothers, were the first to come to the hospital, but other friends and relative soon followed. We discussed the funeral arrangements and agreed that Godwin's body should be taken to the Lewella Meditation Centre just outside Kandy for people to view and pay their last respects. Godwin had told us that if he died at Nilambe, the funeral should be held there; if at Harilal and Visakha's house, hold it there; if he died in hospital in Kandy, hold it at the Lewella Centre. He said this because he did not want to stress people with a lot of work for the funeral arrangements - just do it wherever he was, that was his simple message.

After the public viewing and paying last respects the actual funeral was held at Mahaiyawa Cemetery with a large number of people in attendance. We agreed to conduct the funeral in a simple way by practising noble silence. While we were all in deep silence, suddenly someone started speaking in a loud voice. We all opened our eyes and wanted to know what was happening and who was speaking. We saw it was a lay mediation teacher speaking loudly and quickly about everything except Godwin. I realised that people were getting irritated and someone asked me why I was allowing the person to speak like this. I said that no one allowed him to speak, he was doing it voluntarily. Then they suggested that he should be stopped, so I said that was not what we learnt from Godwin. "Let's try to listen to Godwin instead of this speaker. He used to sometimes invite controversial speakers to peaceful discussions so that we could learn from our reactions," I reminded them. So we just sat quietly and personally I think that most people at the funeral were able to listen to Godwin's last silent teaching.

Upul Gamage,  
Nilambe Meditation Centre,  
Sri Lanka.