

“Article published in “For You” magazine – Feb 2009 issue”



**The Chief Monk of Singapore
(with Judiciary powers)
Ven. Dr Kotawila Dhammakeerti Sri
Pemaloka Nayaka Thera
Abbot of Aaloka Buddhist Center (Singapore)**

Ven Dr Kotawila Dhammakeerti Sri Pemaloka Nayaka Thera's appointment on October 26th 2008 went well with a ceremony at the Ancient Malwattu Raja Maha Vihara Chapter House, Kandy where all important events are held. He was officially presented his award of his appointment and conferred the title of “Dhammakeerti Sri Ratanapala” by the Most Ven. Maha Nayaka Thera and Most Ven. Anunayaka Theras and the Maha Sangha Council of Siam Maha Nikaya Kandy, Sri Lanka.

This is indeed an excellent and well deserved recognition, befitting of a scholar monk who left his homeland right after his higher ordination at age 22 years old to do his Buddhist missionary work in Malaysia and Singapore.



He had spent some years in Malaysia at Maha Vihara Buddhist Temple, KL and is instrumental in many initiatives that he has helped started; the Missionary Training Institute, First Buddhist Youth Leadership training program and founder of Young Buddhist Association, Malaysia (YBAM). He is the Vice-President, an executive member of Asian Conference on Religion and Peace (ACRC), Asian Buddhist Congress (ABC), World Buddhist Sangha Council (WBSC) Taipei, World Fellowship of Buddhist (WFB) Bangkok, a Buddhist Chaplain in U.K and a member of the Singapore Buddhist Federation. He also initiated to form the World Fellowship of Buddhist Youth (WFBY), a founder and Director of the National Buddhist Youth Council, Sri Lanka approved as an NGO.

Looking through his huge album of photographs taken these 47 years of his works, it shows the illustrious and famous heads of states, ministers from UK, America, Asia and members of the British royal family, the HH Dalai Lama and others that he has come into contact with and become friends. He is a monk that has touch lots of people's lives. A helpful, resourceful, kind person, well respected not only in his homeland but in this part of Asia, compassionate and humble.

He has garnered lots of valuable experiences through his travels and working side by side with his two very well respected late mentors; the former Chief monk of Malaysia and Singapore Dr K Sri Dhammananda in K/L at Maha Vihara Buddhist Temple, and in Singapore with the late Ven. Mahaveera of Mangala Vihara.

Between them, a bond had been strongly etched and friendship steadfastly forged with years together and was their wishes to have him take over their respective temples. I asked him; “Bhante..how you feel today towards these people who deprived you of your rightful places to enable you to continue your missionary work according to your late mentor's wishes?” He paused and looked afar, then turned to me and suddenly he smiled and said “Don't Worry”. Words of profound wisdom dawn on me that the powers of the Triple Gems will prevail – very definitely one day.

Everyone who knew him, knows that Bhante is a gentle, very soft spoken person, but in this instance, I saw great tenacity of his strength and wisdom that through all these 47 years of his lifelong missionary work, he must have experienced many obstacles and yet, he will always tells you “Don't Worry”.

A scholar monk who has obtained his Ph.D in Buddhism and other religions and now a permanent resident in Singapore, he knows that this is his lifelong commitment as a Buddhist missionary and he knows that he has taken the right path, and to settle in Singapore.

At this moment, he is waiting for a suitable place to settle in as his own temple in Singapore to further provide a better place for his devotees.

He spend his days in Aaloka Buddhist Center (S) on the rented 2nd level of no. 11 Lor 22 Geylang, writing another book, giving lessons, administering blessing service at homes/offices, during the New Year and Lunar New Year, providing Buddhist funeral chanting and advices, organising annual pilgrimage trips to India and Sri Lanka etc. The center conducts Dhamma classes for adult (YMBA syllabus) and children, Pali sutta chanting classes, group Dhamma discussion and Buddhist activities like Vesak, Kathina (robe offering) for all devotees. Meditation classes will soon happen at a suitable place.

He has written Buddhist books for children published in English, Sinhalese, Japanese & Chinese. His book on The Buddha, His Life And Historical Survey of Early Buddhism has been used as a text book by students taking their diploma, other degrees in colleges and Universities. His latest publication is on the historical account of The Ancient Maha Vihara Traditions. The memoir of his life will soon be in print.

Below is a candid conversation with Dr K.D. Sri Pemaloka Nayaka Thera:

Interviewer : Bhante, What is your message to the world today ? What do you think makes a good Buddhist?

Bhante : The Buddha symbolizes the flower of humanity. Though he is no longer around in this world physically, his fragrance of purity is strong in all our Buddhist "hearts" (mind). A Buddha's appearance in the world is rare and sacred. His teachings, the Dhamma means peace, freedom and happiness for all beings. However, today, the world has changed, bewilderment and fears greets you almost everyday with death, bomb, quakes, murder, financial crisis. This is the reality of life and is exactly what the Buddha has told you. In this uncertainty of life, I really like to see all our Buddhists are united and work together to develop harmony and peaceful co-existence with each other. On my own experience, I've seen great development of Buddhism not only in the western world and USA but back in India and Asia. It is already a great force on earth. Unity is strength in diversity. King Asoka, the most cruel and greatest ruler became a most loving, compassionate person after his self-conversion to Buddhism. Everyone appreciates that Buddhism has its unique qualities. Its doors are always open for you to "come and see ". Instead of fighting for territorial expansion, one should emulate King Asoka who had striven for peaceful expansionism.

Interviewer : Bhante, do you have any regrets now ? And What are your wishes ?

Bhante : It is my duty and responsibility of a monk to serve the community. This is the first lesson that the Buddha has taught us 2600 years ago. Along with personal development, member of the Sangha are trained to serve in community. I have seen the world and understand thoroughly the different types of people. My visits to many countries, east, west, Asia, Africa, America and Canada and the knowledge of its culture and conditions enables me to understand people well. For years I have been associating with London Buddhist Vihara while I was studying in Lancaster University. Many times the head of the Vihara Ven. Dr Saddhatissa has asked me to take charge of the Vihara. I could not fulfill his wishes for the simple reason that two of my teachers needed me back to help them. I do not have any regrets in my life as I have always try my best to be sincere and humble in carrying out my duties.

On my wishes - I do not have any particular personal wish but I have often thought of settling in a peaceful country. I have chosen Singapore and happy to be here. Further, I wanted to establish a proper Theravada Buddhist Temple. I had several opportunities before, but my sincere apologies, I had to turn down the offers as my two late mentors had then already entrusted me their temples. When the time has come for me to fulfil my late mentor's last wishes, the ignorant people thinks they could do things their own way and prevented me to fulfil my mentors' last wishes.

I wanted a temple to practice the Noble Teachings of the Buddha without prejudice and restrictions. I always hope one of the good hearted benefactors in this country would come forward and assist us. This is my wish for the future.

SADHU! SADHU! SADHU!