



## Ven. Ayya Mie Vimala

17 August 1943 – 3 January 2023

By Ken and Visakha Kawasaki

We first met Ven. Ayya Mie Vimala in Japan about thirty years ago. It was a pleasant surprise to meet her again shortly after we moved to Sri Lanka in 2005. While she was studying Pali at Peradeniya University, we met her frequently at Queens Hotel for tea and at Malwatte Rest House, where she often stayed. At one point, she rented a house near us, and we attended the house blessing.

In April 2021, she informed us that she was planning to return to Sri Lanka from Hawaii. From a comment in one of her messages, we realized that she was confused about Sri Lankan visa requirements. There were only a few days until her departure, so we quickly helped her make an application online. Then, in the middle of her journey, she discovered that one of her flights had been discontinued, and she had to return to Hawaii. That entailed emergency phone calls to Hawaii to reopen her apartment and several days work purchasing a new ticket, as well as rearranging her hotel reservation in Colombo. With her friend David's help everything worked out smoothly, and, after her required quarantine, she came to Kandy to stay with us for a month before returning to Colombo.

In August 2022, she asked us to help her "proofread" her book, *German Scholars in the Field of Pali Buddhism and Sanskrit Indology*. She had begun compiling the data for this book quite a few years before, and it had been typed by Nalin, who, at that time, was with Buddhist Publication Society. The printing was being done by Kaveen at Champa Store in Kandy. She sent us the file and came to Kandy to work with Kaveen. She gave us the only copy which had been printed, and explained the mistakes to be corrected. After that, all of our work was done via phone calls, text messages, and emails. Ken quickly realized that, in addition to proofreading, the book needed a great deal of formatting before it could be published. He showed her his plan, and she was pleased. She gave him an almost free hand to design the pages, but he frequently consulted with her.

In November, she informed us that the illness that had been bothering her even before her return to Sri Lanka was, in fact, pancreatic cancer. We had suspected this, but had not discussed it with her. This was the impetus for Ken to spend as much time as possible on completing the book. By the beginning of December, he had formatted the entire manuscript and sent it to Kaveen, who printed one copy and sent it to Ven. Vimala in Colombo. Unfortunately, there was a computer glitch in the font, and the formatting was lost in that copy. She was able, however, to read the text and to explain all mistakes and changes. We solved the problem with the fonts, and Ken sent the new file to Kaveen a few days before Christmas. Ven. Vimala had to get away from Colombo to avoid the noise of the holidays in Colombo, so she came to Kandy and checked into the Queens Hotel.

Ken visited her there a few days after Christmas and was surprised at how thin she had become. Her body seemed skeletal, but her legs were so swollen that she could hardly walk.

He presented her with two jars of blueberry jam which she needed for her diet, and they made final arrangements for Kaveen to print two more copies of the book from the new file for her to check. He agreed to deliver them to the hotel.

On December 31, Ven. Vimala called us and said that she had to go to Lakeside Seventh Day Adventist Hospital to get an injection for pain. We suggested she request an ambulance from the hotel reception, which we assume she did. Over the next few days, we tried calling, but got no answer. On the morning of January 3, we received a phone call from the manager of Queens Hotel informing us that Ven. Vimala had passed away. Later, we learned that she had, indeed, gone to Lakeside Hospital, but had returned that day to the hotel. At some point, her condition had worsened, and she was taken to Kandy Hospital, where she died. We immediately contacted the German Embassy to inform them. Next, we called our friend, Indrajith, a member of the Kandy Tourist Police. Indrajith also spoke with the Embassy, and, in coordination with the Embassy, personally handled all of the “red tape” in Kandy.

We also sent a message to mutual friends, to many Buddhist Groups in Germany, and to her friend in Hawaii, informing them of her death and asking whether anyone knew of any of her relatives. There were many responses and a great deal of assistance, but no one could identify any family members.

It took two weeks for the Embassy to locate her son who was still living in Germany. He, however, was not in a position to handle her affairs, so the Embassy was preparing to authorize Ken to take responsibility. This, however, was not as simple as we imagined. On January 17, Indrajith and Ken spent many hours in the Kandy courthouse filling out forms with a lawyer and presenting the case before a judge. After a preliminary hearing in the morning, the judge declared that he needed to review the case in more detail and asked them to return in the afternoon. They finally cleared that hurdle, but it was too late to apply for the post mortem at Kandy Hospital.

The next morning at nine o’clock Ken and Indrajith began making arrangements for the funeral service and cremation at Mahaiyawa Cemetery. This meant several trips across Kandy to retrieve and file the necessary documents. Then there were many visits to Kandy Hospital, to apply for the post mortem and to pay the fee. They had thought that this would be completed by about eleven o’clock and the the post mortem completed shortly after noon. It was not until noon, however, that Ken was finally asked to identify the body. Thus, they repeatedly had to notify the mourners that the service at Mahaiyawa was being delayed.

At about two o’clock, they were informed that the post mortem had been completed and that the body could be removed. There was another lengthy wait at the hospital mortuary, but, at last, the corpse was loaded in the hearse and taken to the nearby “Flower House” where Ven. Pasasda, a Swiss-German bhikkhuni, was waiting to assist with the preparation of the body for the funeral. She had brought a robe for this purpose and everything was done very respectfully. Ken paid the funeral home for the coffin and their services.

At about four o'clock, the coffin was placed in the hearse, and everyone proceeded to Mahaiyawa. When we arrived, another service was taking place in the hall, so we waited for another thirty minutes. During this time, Indrajith's associate, Disanayake, continued taking Ken's official statement for the police record, and Ken signed it.

When we were called in for the service, we found the body, wrapped in a maroon robe, lying on a beautiful saffron bier. Ken presented two photos, one of Ven. Vimala herself and another of her teacher, Ven. Nyanaponika Thera. This photograph from a German magazine had originally inspired Ven. Vimala to meet him forty years ago.

Two bhikkhus from Malwatte MahaVihara gave the precepts and refuges and recited Paritta, while we held a ceremonial red cloth and poured water. The senior bhikkhu also presented a short eulogy and teaching in English.. Also attending, in addition to Ven. Pasada, the two Tourist Policeman, Indrajith and Disanayake, and Ken, were Sylvia, Indrajith's Austrian wife; their daughter; Ven. Pasada's friend, Malani, the wife of the chief dayaka of Mirigama Vihara Kanda Aranya; Mr. Dhammada from Buddhist Publication Society; Prof. Premasiri from Peradeniya University; Ashoka, our driver; and one or two others.

From the funeral hall, we expected to accompany the body to the crematorium, so we were surprised when the coffin was instead carried to a gravesite on the hillside. In whispers, we were told that, in Sri Lanka, cremation of a deceased foreigner is not permitted unless there is a prepared formal statement with that instruction by the deceased. This is to cover any complaint or inquiry from a relative abroad. We were further surprised in that, for the entire day, we had been led to believe that the body was going to be cremated. As a footnote, we wonder whether the agreements we have signed and which have been accepted by the Faculty of Medicine of Peradeniya University for our bodies to be donated for medical research are legally binding. We will have them reviewed by a lawyer to be sure.

Included on the following pages are photos of the funeral service and interment. Here are links to two videos which Indrajith sent to us.

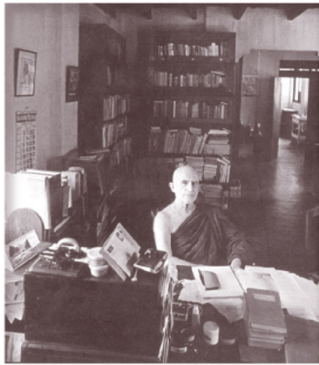
1. The preparation of the body at the Flower House  
<https://www.brelief.org/vimala/preparation.mp4>
2. The interment at Mahaiyawa Cemetery  
<https://www.brelief.org/vimala/interment.mp4>

Here is the link to an Appreciation of Ven. Ayya Vimala by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, which has been sent to all the English newspapers in Sri Lanka.

[https://www.brelief.org/vimala/Ayya\\_Vimala\\_Appreciation.pdf](https://www.brelief.org/vimala/Ayya_Vimala_Appreciation.pdf)



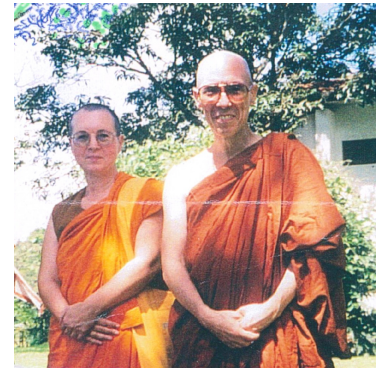
**Here are some photos from her collection.**



This is the photo of Ven. Nyanaponika Mahathero in the forest Hermitage which inspired Ven. Vimala to meet him.



Ven. Nyanaponika Mahathero and Ven. Vimala in front of the Forest Hermitage



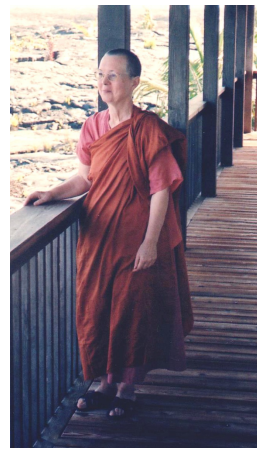
Ven. Vimala and Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi



Dr. Hellmuth Hecker and Ven. Vimala



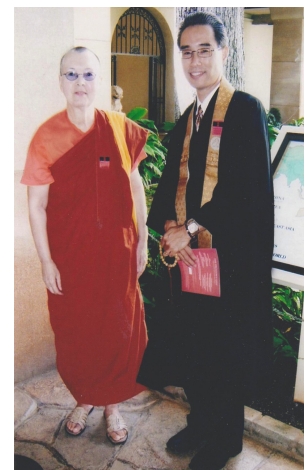
Ven. Vimala at the MahaBodhi MahaVihara in Bodhi Gaya



With cherry blossoms at a Japanese temple

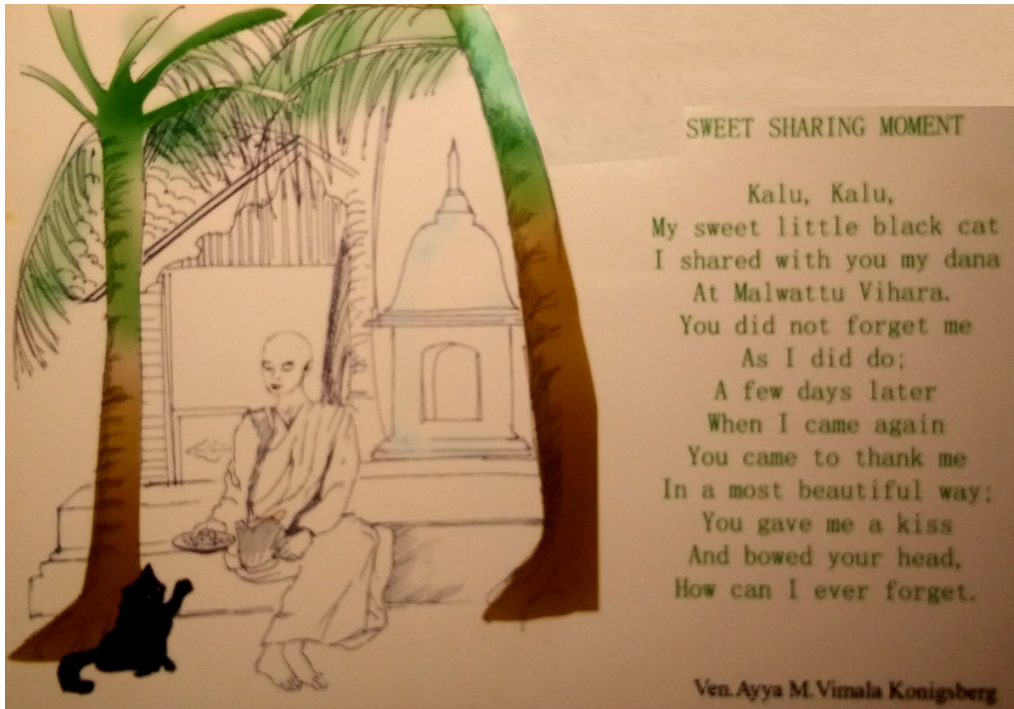


Ringling the bell at a temple in Kyoto, perhaps at New Year's



Three photos of Ven. Vimala in Hawaii. The center photo was taken at a service for Mary Mikahala Foster in December 2019.





Ven. Vimala sent us this charming card while she was staying at Malwatte Rest House.

### Photos from the Funeral and Interment





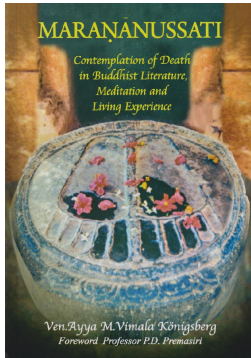








## Books by Ven. Ayya Mie Vimila

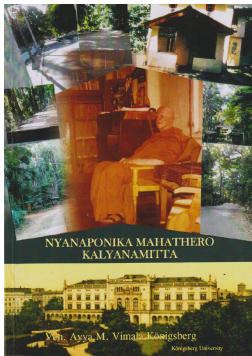


### **Maranānussati: Contemplation of Death in Buddhist Literature, Meditation and Living Experience**

Ven. Ayya Vimala has made a commendable effort to put together some striking instances and stories of various traditions on the nature of death and dying. One rarely finds in the extant literature on Buddhist teachings an attempt to collect the scattered references with the Pali Canon on the subject of death. (From the Foreword by Prof. P. D. Premasiri)

Vijitha Yapa, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2018, ISBN: 978-955-665-371-7

These three books were written for free distribution. The first two were printed in limited editions but are no longer available. PDF editions of all three will be available for download at <https://www.brelief.org/vimala/books.html>



### **Nyanaponika Mahathero Kalyanamitta**

A personal memoir by Ven. Vimala and a brief biography of her venerable teacher, written on the twenty–fifth anniversary of his death.

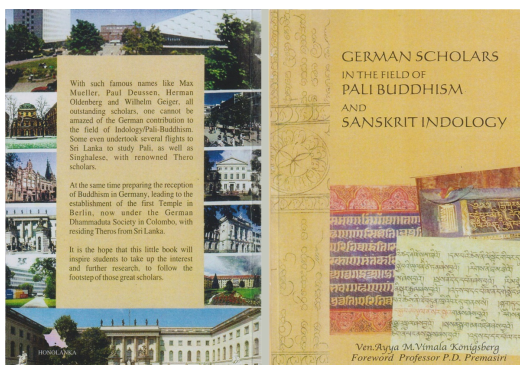
The text includes “A Farewell Note by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, Reflecting Six Years of Passing.”

Many illustrations and photos



### **Mary Mikahala Foster: The Noble Hawaiian Lady and Anagarika Dharmapala**

An introduction to the Hawaiian Princess who sponsored Dharmapala in his revival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and his struggle to restore the Mahabodhi MahaVihara to Buddhist control.



### **German Scholars in the Field of Pali Buddhism and Sanskrit Indology**

A directory with brief descriptions of German and European scholars from the seventeenth century to the present.