



# BUDDHIST POEMS

An Anthology of

Ancient & Contemporary Poems

Ven. Ayya M. Vimala Königsberg

Foreword by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi

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## FOREWORD

Ayya Vimala is a Buddhist nun with a remarkable background. She was born in the German city of Königsberg/East Prussia (now Kaliningrad-Russia), famous as the home city of the philosopher Immanuel Kant. She was born two years before the end of the Second World War, escaped with the last ship, and suffered from the poverty that afflicted many East Prussian refugees, before post-war reconstruction gained momentum.

As one of her occupations, after studying at the Music High School/Conservatory, she started a career as an Opera Chorus Singer, as classical music was important to her.

The first time she heard the word “Buddha” was when she was only nineteen. Then, in course of time, her first direct connection and practice was with Japanese Soto-Zen in 1968. Being in her mid-twenties, she developed more interest in Buddhist studies, which she first pursued through the practice of Zen meditation, perhaps because it corresponded best with her Japanese ancestry. But in her mid-thirties, having in the meantime also devoted herself to Yoga studies, she gave up the music career, (but not composing poems) as it did not leave any time for meditation and Yoga, which she felt by now more important. But soon after her fortieth birthday, her life underwent a dramatic change. In Dec.1983, she made a trip to Sri Lanka, the island-nation off the southern tip of India which for many centuries had been a stronghold of Theravada Buddhism.

She had read that there was an elder German monk named Ven. Nyanaponika Mahathero living in Sri Lanka, and she was determined to meet him.

Ven. Nyanaponika had lived in Sri Lanka since 1936 and was widely regarded as one of the world's most authoritative interpreters of Buddhism. Since he was from her home country, and had even lived in Königsberg himself during his youth, she felt a special affinity with him. When she finally arrived at Ven. Nyanaponika's

Forest Hermitage, she felt that she had finally come home and immediately recognized Ven. Nyanaponika as her teacher. Over the next years, she returned several times, not only to spend time with him, but to dedicate herself to more intensive Dhamma studies.

Each time she came, she adopted more of the monastic lifestyle, leading to the wish to follow in her teacher's footsteps. First, she received the Anagarika precepts. In March 1992, she received the Samaneri precepts at the Tunpane Temple, Malwatte MahaViharaya.

In 1992, on the way to Japan from California, friends suggested she make a stopover in Hawaii, which is halfway in between. She felt such a deep connection there, that she returned annually for a season, also to follow a personal commitment, and became a resident of the state and an active and prominent member of Honolulu's Buddhist Community.

While living an active outward life, Ven. Ayya Vimala has also pursued her inner life: as a meditator yogi, a mystic, a keen student of the Buddhist texts, and a writer. This little book brings to light one of her hidden talents, that of a poet. Throughout the centuries, Buddhist disciples have composed poetry, as found in such early texts of the Pali Canon as the Theragatha and Therigatha.

Now, as Buddhism has arrived in the West, those inspired to express their insight and emotions in verse will continue this ancient Buddhist tradition. Ayya Vimala is one who belongs to this group. To her task of writing poetry, she brings not only her deep commitment and engagement with Buddhism, but a sensitive mind shaped by her profound meditation inside.

I welcome this collection of poems as a small testament to the ability of the Dhamma to stir the hearts of those who adopt it as the basis for their lives and seek to express their wisdom in memorable words and imagery.

Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi

## Introduction

Two events gave me the idea to write a book on Buddhist Poems. In this case, an Anthology of Ancient Buddhist Poems, known as “Therigatha”, which are well known in Theravada countries, such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Burma, but, unfortunately, not well-known in the West. Part II contains selected Poems titled “Contemporary Poems” written by myself from as early as 1973.

One day, while exploring a beautiful square in downtown Honolulu, with little waterfalls, palm trees and benches to rest, I found a little bookstore. While walking in the bookstore, I came to the section of Religion and Philosophy and saw several small, beautiful, soft-cover books of English and American Poems. All the soft covers had exceptionally nice designs. And then one morning, after listening to the news on the radio, my attention came to the announcement of the Writers’ Almanac of the Poetry Foundation.

I acknowledge with thanks the Pali Text Society, Oxford, for their permission to use excerpts from their beautiful and valuable book *Poems of Early Buddhist Nuns (Therigatha)* translated by Mrs. C. A. F. Rhys Davids, of which I selected some of the Psalms of the Elder Nuns.

I would also like to express my appreciation and thanks to my friend from Nepal, Amjol Shrestha. We attended several classes together at the University of Manoa, Honolulu, while he was working on his. His valuable suggestions and Aloha support for a first formatting of this book was very much appreciated.





PART I

An

ANTHOLOGY

of

ANCIENT

BUDDHIST POEMS

Therīgatha



SABBADANAMDHAMMA  
DANAMJINATI  
The Gift of Dhamma  
Excels All Other Gifts



## A BHIKKHUNI OF NAME UNKNOWN

*Sleep softly, little Sturdy, take thy rest  
At ease, wrapt in the robe thyself hast made.  
Stilled are the passions that would rage within,  
Withered as potherbs in the oven dried.*

How was she reborn?

Long ago, a certain daughter of one of the clans became a fervent believer in the teaching of the Buddha Konagamana and entertained him hospitably. She had an arbour made with boughs, a draped ceiling, and a sanded floor, and did him honor with flowers and perfumes. And all her life doing meritorious acts, she was reborn among the gods, and then again among men when Kassapa was Buddha, under whom she renounced the world. Reborn again in heaven till this Buddha-dispensation, she was finally born in a great nobleman's family at Vesali. From the sturdy build of her body they called her Sturdykin. She became the devoted wife of a young noble. When the Master came to Vesali, she was convinced by his teaching, and became a lay-disciple. Anon, hearing the Great Pajapati the Elder, preaching the Doctrine, the wish arose in her to leave the world, and she told this to her husband. He would not consent; so she went on performing her duties, reflecting on the sweetness of the doctrine, and living devoted to insight. Then one day in the kitchen, while the curry was cooking, a mighty flame of fire shot up, and burnt all the food with much crackling. She, watching it, made it a basis for rapt meditation on the utter impermanence of all things. Thereby she was established in the Fruition of the Path of No-Return. Thenceforth, she wore no more jewels and ornaments. When her husband asked her the reason, she told him how incapable she felt of living a domestic life. So he brought her, as Visakha brought Dhammadina with a large following, to Great Pajapati the Gotamid,

and said: 'Let the reverend Theri give her ordination', and Pajapati did so.

She showed her the Master, and the Master, emphasizing, as was his custom, the visible basis whereby she had attained, spoke the verse above.

Now, when she had attained Arahantship, the Sister repeated that verse in her exultation, wherefore this verse became her verse.





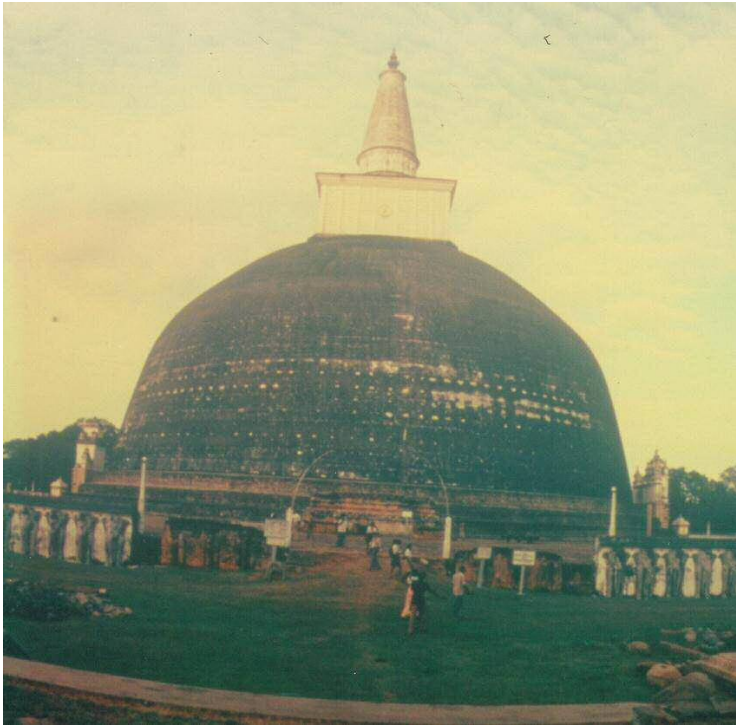


## DHAMMA

Having made her resolve under former Buddhas, and heaping up merit in this and that state of becoming was, in this Buddha-dispensation, born in a respectable family at Savatthi. Given in marriage to a suitable husband, she became converted and desired to leave the world, but her husband would not consent. So she waited till after his death, and then entered the Order. One day, returning to the Vihara from seeking alms, she lost her balance and fell. Making just that her base of insight, she won Arahantship with thorough knowledge of the Norm in form and in meaning.

And, triumphing, she uttered this verse:

*Far had I wandered for my daily food:  
Weary with shaking limbs I reached my rest,  
Leaning upon my staff, when even there  
I fell to earth. Lo! All the misery  
Besetting this poor mortal frame lay bare  
To inward vision. Prone the body lay:  
The heart of me rose up in liberty.*



## DMAMMADINNA

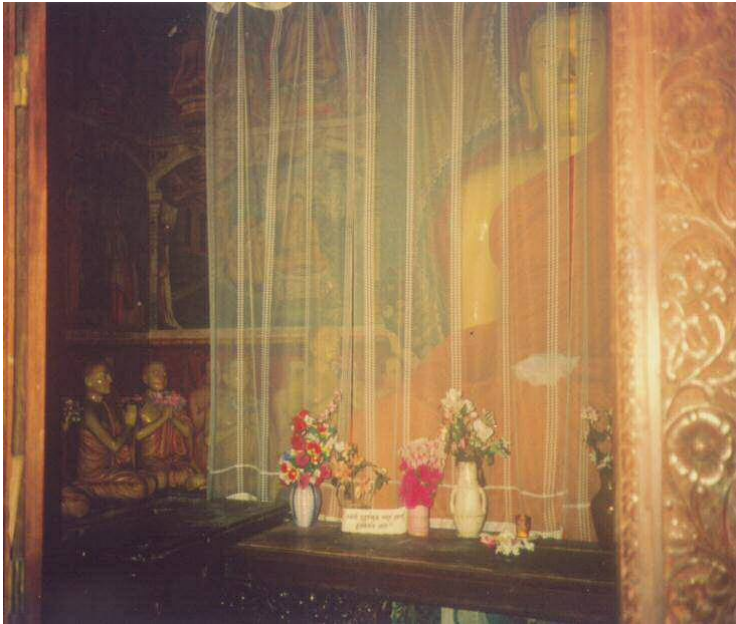
Now, she, in the time when Padumuttara was Buddha, lived at Hamsavati in a state of servitude; and because she ministered and did honour to one of the chief apostles when he rose from his cataleptic trance, she was reborn in heaven and so on, among Gods and men, till Phussa was Buddha. Then she worked merit by doubling the gift prescribed by her husband to the Master's half-brothers while they were staying in a servant's house. And when Kassapa was Buddha, she came to birth in the house of Kiki, King of Kasi, as one of the Seven Sisters, his daughters, and for 20,000 years lived a holy life. ... Finally, in this Buddha-dispensation, she was reborn of a clansman's family at Rajagaha and became the wife of Visakha, a leading citizen. Now, one day, her husband went to hear the Master teaching and became One-who-returns-no-more. When he came home, Dhammadinna met him as he went up the stairs; but he leant not on her outstretched hand, nor spoke to her at supper. And she asked: "Dear sir, why did you not take my hand? Why do you not talk to me? Have I done anything amiss?" "Tis for no fault in you, Dhammadinna; but from to touch a women or take pleasure doctrine now borne in upon me. Do you according as you wish, even going back to your family." "Nay, dear sir. I will make no such going back. Suffer me to leave the World." "It is well, Dhammadinna," replied Visakha, and he sent her to the Bhikkhunis in a golden palanquin. Admitted to the Order, she shortly after asked permission of her teachers to go into retreat, Saying:

“Mothers, my heart hath no delight in a place of crowds; I would go into a village abode. • The Bhikkhunis brought her tither, and while there, because in her past lives she had subjugated the complexities of thought, word, and deed, she soon attained Arahantship, together with thorough mastery of the form and Meaning of the Dhamma.

Thereupon she thought: “Now have I reached the summit. What shall I do here any longer? I will even go to Rajagaha and worship the Master, and many of my kinsfolk will, through me, acquire merit. • So she returned with her Bhikkhunis. Then, Visakha hearing of her return, curious to know why she came, interviewed her with questions on the Khandhas and the like. And Dhammadinna answered every question as one might cut a lotus-stalk with a knife, and finally referred her to the Master. The Master praised her great wisdom, as it is told in the Lesser Vedalla (Miscellany) Sutta, and ranked her foremost among the Sisters who could preach. But it was while she was dwelling in the country, and, while yet in the lowest path, was acquiring insight to reach the highest, that she uttered her verse:

*In whom desire to reach the final rest  
Is born suffusing all the mind of her,  
Whose heart by lure of sense-desire no more  
Is held, Bound Upstream: so shall she be called.*





## DANTIKA

She, too, having made her resolve under former Buddhas, and in this and that rebirth heaping up good of age-enduring efficacy, was born, when the world was empty of a Buddha, as a fairy by the river Candabhaga. Sporting one day with the fairies, and straying awhile, she saw a Silent Buddha seated at the foot of a tree, and adored him in faith with flower-offerings. For this she was reborn among gods and men, and, finally, in this Buddha-era, at Savatthi in the house of the King's chaplain-brahmin. Come to years of discretion, she became a lay-believer in the Jeta Grove (College), and, later, entered the order under Great Pajapati the Gotamid. And one day, while staying at Rajagaha she ascended the Vulture's Peak, after her meal, and while resting, she saw that which she tells of in her verse, whereby she won Arahantship, with thorough grasp of the Norm in form and meaning. And afterwards, thrilled with happiness at the thought of her attainment, she exulted thus:

*Coming from noonday-rest on Vulture's Peak,  
I saw an elephant, his bathe performed,  
Forth from the river issue.  
And a man, taking his goad,  
Bade the great creature stretch his foot:  
'Give me thy foot!'  
The elephant obeyed,  
And to his neck the driver sprang.  
I saw the untamed tamed, I saw him bent  
To master's will; and marking inwardly,  
I passed into the forest depths and there  
In faith I trained and ordered all my heart.*





## SUMANGALA'S MOTHER

She, too, having made her resolve under former Buddhas, and heaping up good in this rebirth and that, was born under this Buddha-dispensation in a poor family at Savatthi and was married to a rush-plaiter. Her first-born was a son, come for the last time to birth, who grew up to become the Elder Sumangala and an Arahant. And her name not becoming known, she was called in the Pali text a certain unknown Theri and is known as Sumangala's mother.

She became a Bhikkhuni and one day, while reflecting on all she had suffered as a lay-woman, she was much affected, and, her insight quickening, she attained Arahantship, with thorough knowledge of the form and meaning of the Dhamma.

Thereupon she exclaimed:

*O woman well set free! How free am I,  
How thoroughly free from kitchen drudgery!  
Me stained and squalid' mong my cooking-pots  
My brutal husband ranked as even less  
Than the sunshades he sitting weaves always.  
Purged now of all my former lust and hate,  
I dwell, musing at ease beneath the shade  
Of spreading boughs - O, but 'tis well with me!*



## CITTA

She, too, having made her resolve under former Buddhas, and heaping up good of age-enduring efficacy in this rebirth and that, was born in the 94th aeon as a fairy. She worshipped with offering of flowers a Silent (Pacceka) Buddha. And after many other births among men and gods, she was, in this Buddha-dispensation, born at Rajagaha in the family of a leading burgess. When she had come to years of discretion she heard the Master teaching at the gate of Rajagaha and, becoming a believer, she was ordained by the Great Pajapati the Gotamid. And at length, in her old age, when she had climbed the Vulture's Peak, and had done the exercises of a recluse, her insight expanded, and she won to Arahantship.

Reflecting thereon, she gave utterance as follows:

*Though I be suffering and weak, and all  
My youthful spring be gone, yet have I climbed,  
Leaning upon my staff, the mountain crest.  
    Thrown from my shoulder hangs my  
        cloak, o'er-turned  
My little bowl. So 'gainst the rock I lean  
And prop this self of me, and break away  
The wildering gloom that long had closed me in.*

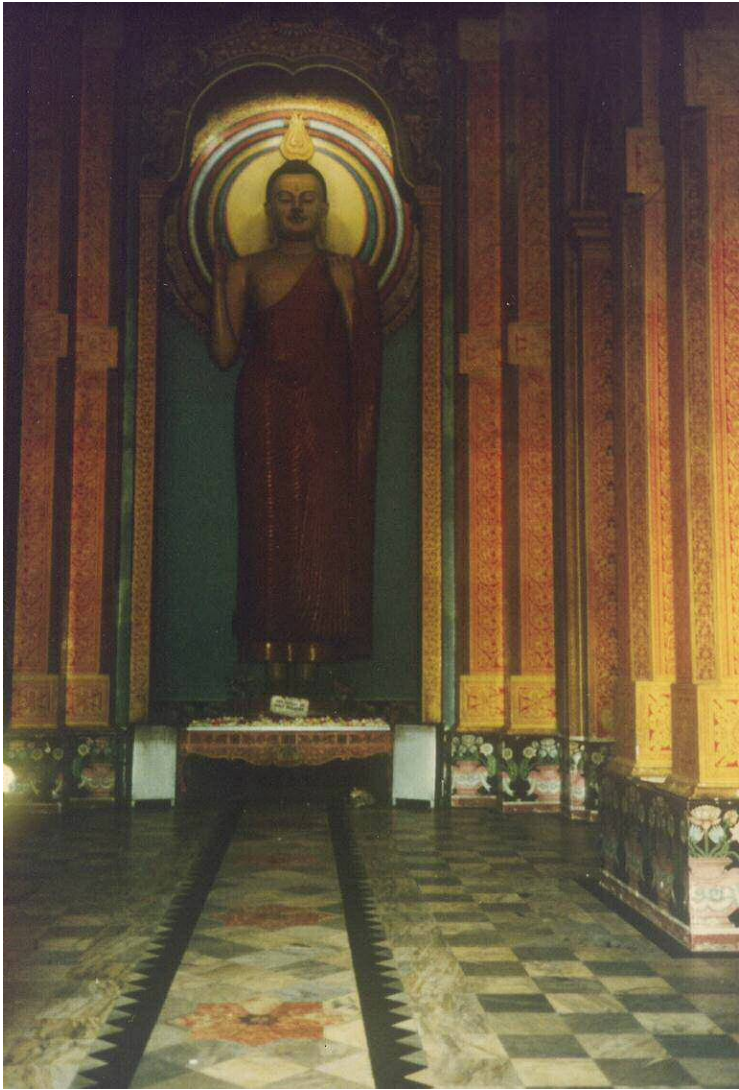


## MITTA

Born in the time of Vipassi Buddha of a noble family, and become a lady of his father's court, she won meritorious karma by bestowing food and precious raiment on an Arahant Elder Sister. Born finally, in this Buddha-dispensation, in the princely family of the Sakiyas, at Kapilavatthu, she left the world together with Great Pajapati the Gotamid and, going through the requisite training for insight, not long after she won Arahantship.

Reflecting thereon, joy and gladness stirred her to say:

*On full-moon day and on the fifteenth day,  
And eke the eighth of either half the month,  
I kept the feast; I kept the precepts eight,  
The extra fast, enamoured of the gods,  
And fain to dwell in homes celestial.  
To-day one meal, head shaved, a yellow robe-  
Enough for me. I want no heaven of gods.  
Heart's pain, heart's pining, have I trained away.*



## ABHAYA'S MOTHER

Heaping up merit under former Buddhas, she, in the time of Tissa Buddha, saw him going round for alms, and with glad heart took his bowl and placed in it a spoonful of food. Reborn for that among gods and among men, she was born also for that in this Buddha-dispensation, and became the town belle of Ujjeni, by name Padumavati. And King Bimbisara (of Magadha) heard of her, and expressed to his chaplain the wish to see her. By the power of his spells, the chaplain summoned a Yakkha who, by his might, brought the King to Ujjeni. And when she afterwards sent word to the King that she was with a child by him, he sent back word, saying: "If it be a son, let me see him when he is grown. • And she bore a son and called him Abhaya.

When he was seven years old she told him who was his father, and sent him to Bimbisara. The King loved the boy, and let him grow up with the boys of his court. His conversion and ordination is told in the Psalms of the Elders. 34

And, later on, his mother heard her son preach the Dhamma, and she, too, left the world and afterwards attained Arahantship, with thorough grasp of the Dhamma in form and meaning.

She thereupon repeated the verse wherewith her son had admonished her, and added her own thereto:

*Upward from sole of foot, O mother dear,  
Downward from crown of hair this body see.  
Is't not impure, the evil-smelling thing?  
This have I pondered, meditating still,  
Till every throb of lust is rooted out.  
Expunged is all the fever of desire.  
Cool am I now and calm -*







ဒါ မိန့်က ဝိပဿနာ ဝုဋ္ဌာန် ကို  
တော်ဝင်အဖို့ မိန့် ဝိပဿနာ

## SAMA

She, too, having made her resolve under former Buddhas, and heaping up good of age-enduring efficacy in this and that state of becoming, being reborn in fortunate conditions, took birth, in this Buddha-dispensation, at Kosambi in the family of an eminent burgess. When her dear friend, the lay-disciple Samavati died, she, in her distress, left the world. But being unable to subdue her grief for her friend, she was unable to grasp the Ariyan Way. Now, while she was seated in the sitting-room, listening to Elder Ananda preaching, she was established in insight, and, on the seventh day after, attained Arahantship, with thorough grasp of the Dhamma in form and meaning.

And reflecting on what she had won, she expressed it in this psalm:

*Four times, nay, five, I sallied from my cell,  
And roamed afield to find the peace of mind  
I sought in vain, and governance of thoughts  
I could not bring into captivity.*

*To me, even to me, on that eighth day  
It came: all craving ousted from my heart.  
'Mid many sore afflictions, I had wrought  
With passionate endeavor, and had won!  
Craving was dead, and the Lord's will was done.*



## ANOTHER UTTAMA

She, too, having made her resolve under former Buddhas, and heaping up good of age-enduring efficacy in this and that rebirth, was born, in the time of Vipassi Buddha, as a domestic servant, at Bandhumati. One day, seeing an Arahant of the Master's Order seeking alms, she gladly offered him three sweet cakes. Through this reborn to happiness, she finally came to birth in this Buddha-era, in the family of an eminent Brahmin in the country of Kosala. Come to years of discretion, she heard the Master preach while touring in the country, and leaving the world, she soon won Arahantship, together with thorough grasp of the norm and in meaning.

And reflecting thereon, she exulted thus:

*The Seven Factors of the Awakened mind,  
Seven Ways whereby we may Nibbana win,  
All, all have I developed and made ripe,  
Even according to the Buddha's word.  
Fulfilled is heart's desire: I win the Void,  
I win the Signless! Buddha's daughter I,  
Born of his mouth, his blessed word, I stand,  
And all the sense-desires that fetter gods,  
That hinder men, are wholly riven off.  
Abolished is the infinite round of births.  
Becoming cometh ne'er again for me.*





## SUKKA

She, too, having fared in the past as the foregoing Theris was born in a clansman's house. Come to years of discretion, she went with lay-women disciples to the Vihara, and heard the Master preach. Becoming a believer, she left the world and became learned, proficient in the doctrine, and a ready speaker. Leading for centuries a religious life, she yet died a worldling at heart and was reborn in the heaven of bliss. Again, when Vipassi was Buddha, and again when Vessabhu was Buddha, she kept the precepts, and was learned and proficient in doctrine.

Again, when Kakusandha was Buddha, and yet again when Konagamana was Buddha, she took Orders, and was pure in conduct, learned, and a preacher. At length, she was in this Buddha-era reborn at Rajagaha, in the family of an eminent burgess, and called Sukka (bright, lustrous, "Lucy"). Come to years of discretion, she found faith in the Master at her own home, and became a lay-disciple. But later, when she heard Dammadonna preach, she was thrilled with emotion and renounced the world under her. And performing the exercises for insight, she not long after attained Arahantship, together with thorough grasp of the Norm in form and meaning.

Thereupon, attended by 500 Bhikkhunis, she became a great preacher. And one day, when they had been into Rajagaha for alms, and had returned and dined, they entered the Bhikkhunis' settlement, and Sukka, with a great company seated around her, taught the 42 doctrines in such wise that she seemed to be giving them sweet mead to drink and sprinkling them with ambrosia. And they all listened to her rapt, motionless, intent. Thereupon the spirit of the tree that stood at the end of the Sisters' terrace was inspired by her teaching, and went out to Rajagaha, walking about the ways and the squares proclaiming her excellence, and saying:

*What would ye men of Rajagaha have?  
What have ye done? That mute and idle here  
Ye lie about, as if bemused with wine,  
Nor wait upon Sukka, while she reveals  
The precious gospel by the Buddha taught.  
The wise in heart, methinks, were fain no quaff  
That life's elixir, once won never lost,  
What welleth ever up in her sweet words,  
E'en as the wayfarer welcomes the rain.*

And hearing what the tree-spirit said, the people were excited, and came to the Sister and listened attentively.

At a later period, when the Sister, at the end of her life, was completing her Nibbana and wished to show how the system she had taught led to salvation, she declared her (attainment of) wisdom thus:

*O Child of light! By light of truth set free  
From cravings dire, firm, self-possessed, serene,  
Bear to this end thy last incarnate frame  
For thou hast conquered Mara and his host.*





PART II  
CONTEMPORARY  
BUDDHIST  
POEMS



## *FIRST INSIGHT<sup>1</sup>*

*As flowers  
Bloom and fade Away  
The life on earth  
Just does the same.*



After returning to Germany from my first visit to Sri Lanka in 1983, I discovered by chance on TV a series called “World Religion,” and that day it was on Buddhism. Can anyone imagine my happiness to see and to hear that Sri Lanka was included? But then I got more excited and happy because the scenery moved to Kandy. Well, not just Kandy, but up to the jungle-like Forest Reserve to the Hermitage, where my just found great admired and respected teacher was living. And there, he was sitting in front of the Hermitage, giving a talk to the interviewer.

Then the scenery moved to a Temple, showing a Singhalese Bhikkhu approaching a little open stone-shrine, and after paying respect, he started a short recitation. While listening to each word of his chant, tears filled my eyes. Although I could not understand the entire recitation, as it was in the Pali language, I could understand the first two words “Pujemibuddham.” I was very greatly moved. As one can imagine, the impressive recitation deeply imprinted my mind. I was able to repeat the first two lines right away:

*Pujemibuddhamkusumena'nena,*  
The Buddha I revere with varied flowers  
*punnenametenacahotumokkham.*  
By this, my merit, may there be Release

Not too long after, I received a little chanting booklet and was wondering whether I could find this stanza among those many Vandana chantings. Luckily, I could.

The whole stanza had four lines, the last two lines similarly expressed the meaning of my first poem written ten years earlier:

*Pupphammilayatiyathaidamme,*  
Even as this flower fades away  
*Kayo tathayativinasabhavam.*  
So will my body be destroyed.

It will be with great happiness to listen again to the chanting on my next visit.

## MEIN FREUND DER MOND

*Mein Mond von Enoshima  
kehr ich zu dir zurück.  
du leuchtest mir so mild,  
mein Herz auf Lotusblättern  
durch die Lüfte schwingt,  
Nur du verstehst mein Sehnen  
wiegst mich in schönem Traum;  
schenk mir dein rosa Licht*



## MY FRIEND THE MOON

*My moon of Enoshima  
you shine on me so gently  
that my heart soars through the air,  
born on lotus petals;  
Only you understand my yearning,  
rocking me in a lovely dream.  
Grant me your rose-pink light,  
when I return to you.*

Translated by Prof. M. O. Walshe





## SWEET BIRDS

*I like to be a Bamboo  
Beloved by all the gods,  
To be a nest  
For sweet little birds  
So pleasing with their songs (1979)*



*Ich möchte gern ein Bambus  
Sein,  
geliebt von allen Göttern;  
Gewiegt von Wind  
Im Sonnenschein  
und Nestplatz  
Für die Vögel sein*



## PROPHETIC VISION

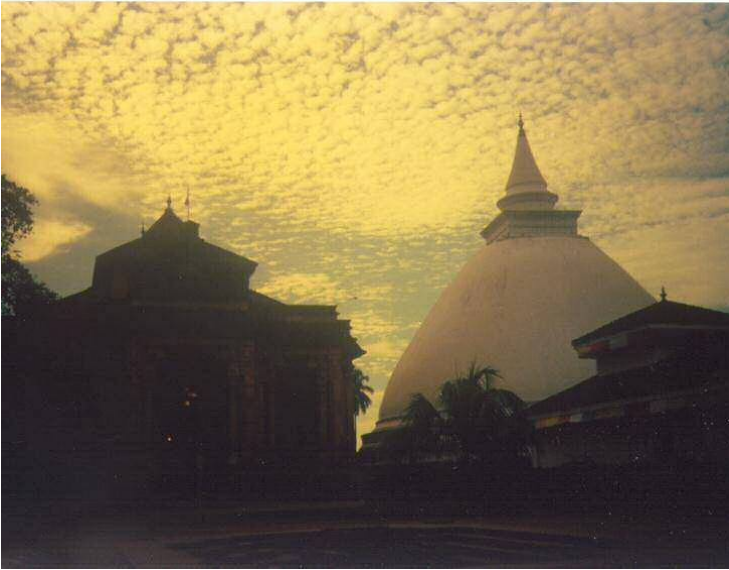
*My soul was crying  
Is there no relief  
From all this pain and grief,  
No place in heaven  
An Angel would tell?  
I heard of Tara  
She has many names  
KuanYin and Avalokitesvara.  
She showed me her face,  
Consoling my heart,  
The Dhamma came  
For rescue.*





## A VOICE FROM HEAVEN

*With the ear divine  
I heard a voice from heaven  
with comforting words.  
And as I waited with patience  
For the time to come,  
It was the glorious Dhamma  
A teacher great would tell.*



## SPRING-AUTUMN

*Oh tender green leaf  
So soft like silk  
Shining by the sunrays light  
Let us enjoy  
The days of spring -  
One, two breath  
Autumn is so near (1984)*



## BLISS

*Alone, but not lonely  
that is bliss  
having no wishes  
that is bliss  
no attachment and desire;  
with no fear of death,  
tasted is the deathless  
amatam tam vijanatam*

## FOREST SOLITUDE<sup>2</sup>

*Beloved place of quietness  
Embraced are you  
In gratitude.  
Absorbed in Samadhi  
Only Dhamma yet  
Is there.  
Heaven's gate is open  
And bliss been tasted well.  
Mindful in the lotus  
Praise to the teacher dear,  
I tell.*

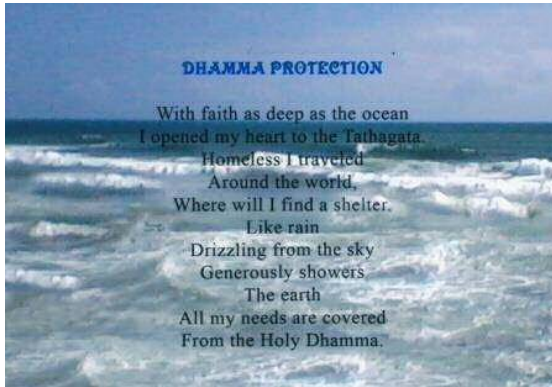


In ancient India it was a custom for Sadhus-Recluses to live and to meditate in the mountains, like the Himalayas. My teacher's Hermitage was not in the Himalayas, but in a Jungle-like forest where I enjoyed the solitude and received his precious teachings.

One night this poem came into my mind and I was happy to express with it my great veneration.

## DHAMMA PROTECTION

*With faith as deep as the ocean  
I opened my heart to the Tathagata.  
Homeless I traveled  
Around the world,  
Where will I find a shelter.  
Like rain  
Drizzling from the sky  
Generously showers  
The earth  
All my needs are covered  
From the Holy Dhamma.*



Some visible fruits of faith occurred to me when a very kind Japanese lady, whom I met many times at the same bus stop, spontaneously offered me a blanket for the cold nights. In another instance, while I was pondering how to protect my sensitive joints when riding the cold air-conditioned buses, a young lady sitting next to me on a bench unexpectedly offered me her bright orange shawl which I gladly accepted and gave her my blessings.



## HOLY BO-TREE

*Oh Holy Bo-Tree  
I bow my head In love.  
Memories of olden times brings joy  
Deep in my heart.  
Protected under your leaves  
I sit in bhavana  
And taste the sweetness Of Nibbana.*

While visiting a Sri Lankan Temple in Los Angeles, a Thai family, who happened to be a member of that temple, invited me to stay at their house. We arrived at a nice large house with a beautiful garden. After some time the lady of the house asked me, whether I've seen the Bo-Tree in her garden, which I had to deny. As the garden, I must say, was not kept well, I didn't walk around it yet. But that news of course prompted me to do so. Looking around, I couldn't find the Bo-tree but finally discovered with some shock a little Bo-tree in a middle size pot. The soil was completely dried out and the leaves dirty, full of dust. To see the Bo-Tree in such a condition filled my eyes with tears. I went to my room, took my little face towel, and my little Japanese rice bowl, filled it with water, and went to clean each single leaf. After I had finished, I sat down and wrote this poem.

Just having finished writing my poem, the doorbell rang and three Theros from the Sri Lankan Temple came for a visit. I thought how wonderful, and read with much pleasure to them the poem which found their appreciation.

27-12-1990 - Los Angeles

## LOST AND FOUND

*Pine trees gave shade  
to my walking meditation  
some people observed  
with wonder*

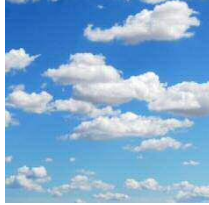
*Pine trees gave shade  
to walk back to my hut  
two strangers run and call me  
what have you lost  
what have you lost  
we can give some help  
they don't understand  
that nothing was lost  
only Buddho was found*



Spain, ca 1989



## ONLY A DREAM



*Awakening from a dream  
yet not awake  
nor in sleep  
I woke up and saw the  
countless dreams  
the last dries all the tears.*

*August 1995*

PART III  
MY  
PILGRIMAGE



## MY PILGRIMAGE

*I'm there - but I'm not there  
I'm not there - but I'm there:  
embraced with lumen divine  
and melodies from Bodhi leaves*

The first two lines of this poem seems to be a puzzle which the story will reveal in time.

My desire to visit India did bring me instead to an island which lies at the very southern tip of India–Sri Lanka.

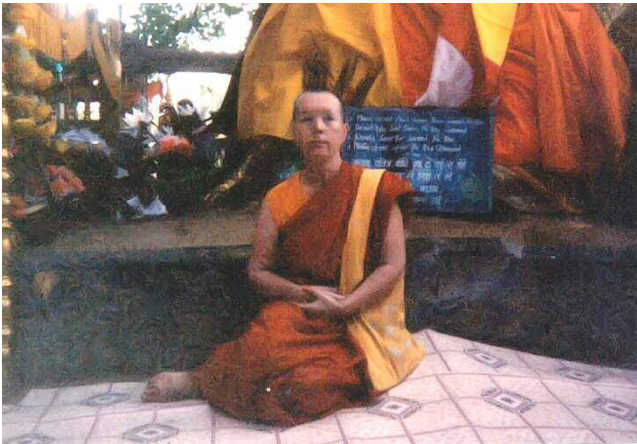
In a bookstore I had found to my surprise a great selection of books of which one found my immediate interest, showing a monk (bhikkhu) under a large umbrella. (Did something happen unconsciously in my mind?) Looking through the book I came to two pages showing an elder monk (Mahathero) who was of German origin, which was unimaginable to me. Arriving on the Island, I could almost only think about how and when to meet the Venerable Mahathero. And so finally standing in front of his Hermitage, could there have been anything else to expect than to follow his footsteps.

Many were the times I spent in Kandy to study the Dhamma and the people I met were kind and helpful in many ways.

Finally, after many years of waiting, it was time not only to visit India, but to make my pilgrimage, and from Sri Lanka it's just a big step over the ocean away.

To visit the Holy places Bodh Gaya and Sarnath, I felt that for this special occasion a new robe was needed. One special shop selling fine cotton had even material from India! Well, I knew where to go, where to get the special stitching done: a devoted tailor lady, who had offered several times her service in her shop, yet, the lady was not there, she went herself on pilgrimage to India. Only a few days after the ladies had finished my robe for which I had actually left an old one as a sample for the size, she returned and was happy surprised to see me. When she saw the new robe she told me something most wonderful someone ever could tell me: “because I haven't heard from you a long time, although I'm sure you wrote some greetings, but as we know mail sometimes get lost here, I thought how about to take your robe with me to Bodh Gaya and offer it to the Buddha, wrapping it around the Bodhi Tree.” Even by writing this now so many years later, tears of emotion fill my eyes.

Now being myself in Bodh Gaya, I looked with wonder at the Bodhi Tree, with so many robes wrapped around.



## THE LOTUS

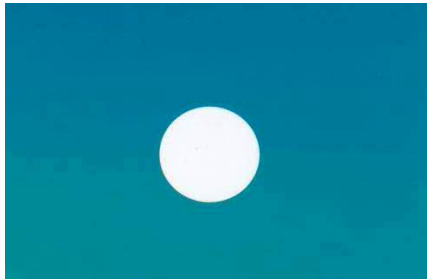


*Each step that I walk  
I walk with a smile  
Each step that I walk  
metta arise.  
Each step that I walk  
The dhamma shines  
the lotus thus  
will always be mine.*

16-10-2000 / 4.00 p.m.

*THE SILENCE, THE VOID*

*I will sit in silence  
and listen to the voice within  
I will sit in silence  
and listen to the void*



## SWEET SHARING MOMENT

*Kalu, Kalu,  
My sweet little black cat  
I shared with you my dana  
At Malwattu Vihara.  
You did not forget me  
As I did do;  
A few days later  
When I came again  
You came to thank me  
In a most beautiful way;  
You gave me a kiss  
And bowed your head,  
How can I ever forget?*

Awaiting my next visit to Sri Lanka, not only to be with my dear venerable teacher again, but also looking forward to learn how to chant at least some of the important Pali stanzas. As best would be from a native Thero. So I went to a famous Temple, known to me from several visits. But who could speak English? So I asked my way around to the house appointed at the end of the Temple complex. Lucky as I am, the Venerable monk was there and most kindly we started right away. He said, "I can see it is very essential to you," and kindly made further appointments.

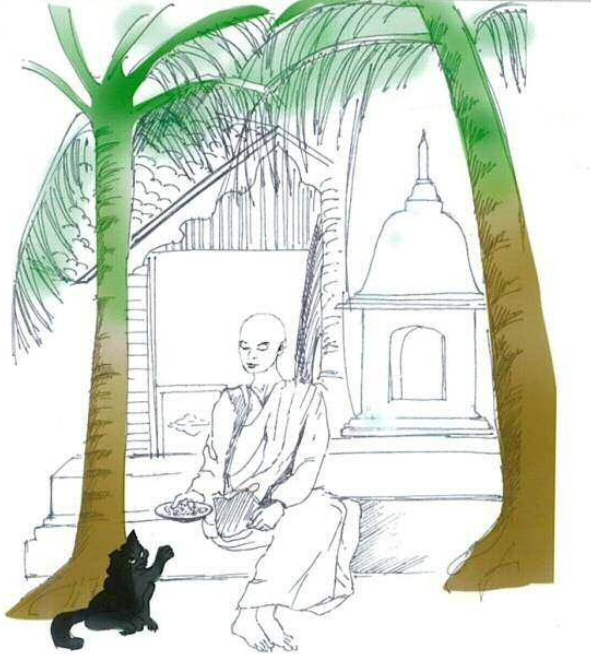
It was not only a pleasure to listen to his Pali stanza pronunciation but also we had fun because some of the pronunciations had not been easy for me.

One morning it got a little late so he invited me to stay and offered me dana. Suddenly, as almost from nowhere, a beautiful black cat appeared. Of course, I shared with her my meal. About a week later while waiting for the lesson to start, suddenly the cat was



there, giving me cat kisses and moved her head around my legs, as that is the way cats say “Thank you.” Although I visited many more times the same place, I sadly never saw the beautiful cat again.

One might start to think, was the cat real or a manifestation of a deva or bodhisattva to see my compassion?



POYA-DAY KOAN

*Travel a hundred thousand miles  
Without expenses.*

25-4-1994

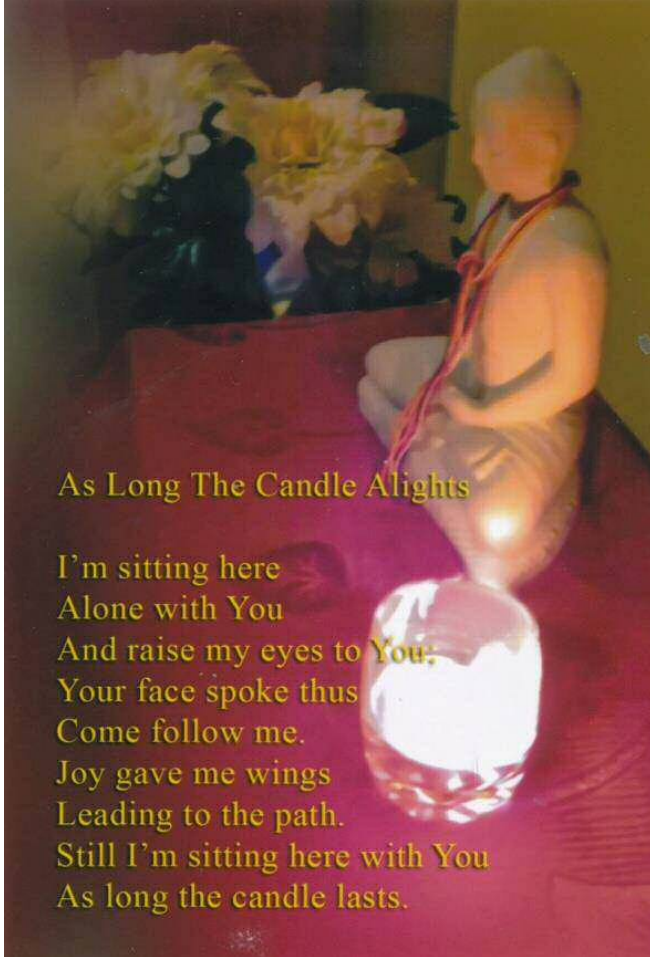
SUN OVER BEACH

*When I walk on the beach  
I get sunburned  
When I stretch out my arm  
The sun is cooling.*

## *SOLANG DIE KERZE BRENNT*

*Zu Deinen Füßen sitz ich hier  
Und schau empor zu Dir;  
Dein Antlitz spricht  
Und sagt zu mir  
Ach komm und folge mir.  
Mit Freude ich die Schritte tat  
Zum Ziele sie geführt.  
Nun sitz ich hier allein mit Dir  
Solang die Kerz' noch brennt.*

*8 July 2009 / 22-20*



As Long The Candle Alights

I'm sitting here  
Alone with You  
And raise my eyes to You;  
Your face spoke thus  
Come follow me.  
Joy gave me wings  
Leading to the path.  
Still I'm sitting here with You  
As long the candle lasts.

## NOTES

### 1 “First Insight”

#### *ERSTE EINSICHT*

*Wie die Blume  
blüht und welkt  
vergeht  
das Leben  
auf der Welt.*

This poem was originally written in German in 1973 and later translated into English.

### 2 “Forest Solitude”

#### *WALDEINSAMKEIT*

*Geliebter Ort der Stille  
Umarmt seist Du  
in Dank.  
Versunken in Samadhi  
Nur Dhamma ist noch da.  
Der Himmel ist erschlossen  
Die Seligkeit geschmeckt,  
Gepriesen sei der Lehrer  
im Lotus eingedenk.*

This is the second poem that was originally written in German in 1988. All other poems were written in English.

The drawing of the poem, "Sweet Sharing Moment", was kindly offered by Prof. Arindam Chakrabarti of the Dept. of Philosophy at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

The photos were taken by the author.



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## GLOSSARY

Arahant	the Holy One
Arahantship	Fruition of Holiness
Buddha	the Enlightened One
Bhikkhu	monk
Bhikkhuni	nun
Bhavana	meditation
Bodhi	Awakening/Enlightenment
Bo-Tree	Bodhi-Tree
Dana	meal offering
Dhamma	doctrine/teaching of the Buddha
Dhammadinna	name of a nun
Gotami	the clan to which the Buddha and the Sakiyans belonged
Karma (kamma)	wholesome and unwholesome actions
Kapilavatthu	chief town of the Sakiyan tribe
Kosala	ancient country
Kosambi	capital of ancient Vamsa near Allahabad at the famous Yamuna river
Licchavi	a tribe in ancient Vajji republic
Magadha	ancient kingdom
Nibbana (Nirvana)	Freedom; deliverance from all future rebirth
Pali text	Pali language: ancient Magadhi
Precepts	Pali: sila: morality, virtue, disciplinary code
Rajagaha	capital of the ancient kingdom of Magadha
Sakiyas	people of the Sakiyans belonging to the Gotamid clan
Savatthi	capital of Kosala
Tathagata	an epithet of the Buddha
Thero	elder monk
Theri	elder nun
Ujjeni	ancient town



Vandana	Homage
Vesali	town near Patna
Visakha	name of a nun
Yakka	ghost-ogre
Yamuna	one of the famous rivers

Glossary terms are from my monk friend, Ven. S. Dhammika's book *Middle Land-Middle Way, a Pilgrim's Guide to the Buddha's India*, published by Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka.

## APPENDIX

Rainer Maria RILKE (1875-1927), one of the great and admired German Poets, who also studied Literature, History, Art and Philosophy. He wrote three poems on the Buddha.

The following is the one I selected to include in this book given in the original German language.

### BUDDHA

*Schon von fernefuehlt der fremdescheue  
Pilger, wiees golden von ihmtraeuft,  
SoalshaettenReichevollerReue  
IhreHeimlichkeitenaufgehaeuft.*

*Abernaeherkommendwirderr  
vor der HoheiddieserAugenbraun:  
denn das sindnichtihretrinkgeschirre  
und die OhrgehaengeihrerFraun.*

*Wuessteinerdennzusagen, welche  
Dinge eingeschmolzenwurden, um  
DiesesBild auf diesemBlumenkelche*

*aufzurichten: stummer, ruhiggelber  
alseingoldenes und rundherum  
auch den Raumberuehrendwiesichselber.*

(from RECLAMS Universal-Bibliothek:  
Rainer Maria Rilke, Gedichte; with permission)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Ayya Mie Vimala (Yogini, Mystosoph, and Poet) was born in 1943 in Königsberg, East-Prussia (the city of the German philosopher E. Kant). The first time she heard the word "Buddha" was when she was only nineteen. Then, in the course of time, her first direct connection and practice was with Japanese Soto-Zen in 1968. But in December 1983, on a visit to Sri Lanka, she became a follower of Theravada Buddhism under the late German scholar-monk, Ven. Nyanaponika Mahathero and became his disciple, continuously visiting Kandy at his Hermitage to deepen her Dhamma study. She received Anagarika precepts and in 1992 Samaneri precepts at the Thumpane Temple, Malwathu Maha Viharaya.

She spent a period of time abroad at Palma de Mallorca in Spain, Los Angeles, USA, and Mt. Hiei, Kyoto, Japan. Since 1996 she regularly visited the winter seasons in Honolulu Hawai'i. Since 2001 she became a Board Member of the Hawai'i Association of International Buddhists, Honolulu.

She is affiliated with the Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka and is a Life-member of the Maha Bodhi Society, Colombo, Sri Lanka. After almost eighteen years in Hawai'i, most of the time, she returned to Kandy in October 2013 to pursue the study of Pali. Although the study of Pali has still a long way to go, as the same time working on several manuscripts to complete.

By the same author:

*Marananussati: Contemplation on Death*

*Mary Mikahala Foster – The Noble Hawai'ian Lady*

*German Buddhist Scholars in the Field of Pali Buddhism and Sanskrit*



