

In Memoriam

Venerable Nyanaponika Mahathera
(1901 - 1994)

It is with deep regret that we inform our members and friends of the passing away of our distinguished Patron and Founding President, the Venerable Nyanaponika Mahathera, on 19th October 1994. At the time of his passing the Ven. Nyanaponika had just completed his 57th rains retreat as a member of the Buddhist monastic order.

Despite near blindness, Ven. Nyanaponika had enjoyed remarkably good health through his 93rd birthday on 21st July, which we celebrated joyfully with the release of the BPS edition of //The Vision of Dhamma//, the collection of his essays. In late August, however, the incessant process of aging began to take its toll and his health declined rapidly. He was hospitalized briefly, but in accordance with his wish he was returned to the Forest Hermitage, his residence in the Udawattakele Reserve, where he passed away peacefully in the pre-dawn hour of the 19th October. The cremation was held on 23rd October at the Mahaiyawa Cemetery in Kandy, attended by a large number of religious and civilian dignitaries. The remains are to be interred at the Island Hermitage (Polgasduwa) in Dodanduwa, where Ven. Nyanaponika spent his formative years as a monk.

Born into a Jewish family in Hanau, Germany, in 1901, the future Mahathera became a Buddhist by self-conviction before his 20th year. In 1936 he came to Sri Lanka, where he entered the Sangha as a pupil of the illustrious German elder, Ven. Nyanatiloka Mahathera (1878-1957). Ven. Nyanaponika was one of the three founders of the BPS in 1958 and its long-time Editor (until 1984) and President (until 1988); since 1988 he had been our Patron. It was his sagacious guidance, his overflowing compassion, and his dedication to the Dhamma that transformed the BPS into a major Buddhist publisher bringing the message of the Buddha to more than eighty countries worldwide. His own outstanding writings in English and German, and his devoted service to the Sasana through the BPS, constitute one of the truly monumental contributions to Theravada Buddhism in the twentieth century. All of us at the BPS feel privileged to have benefitted from his wise counsel through the years and are committed to continue his mission by our work of spreading the sublime Dhamma of the All-Enlightened One.

By the immense merits of his life's achievements, may Ven. Nyanaponika be released from all misfortune in his future existences and may he attain the supreme goal of Nibbana, deliverance from all suffering.

A special commemoration volume in honour of Ven. Nyanaponika Mahathera will be issued early next year.