

Receiving the Panca Sila (Five Precepts) in Sri Lanka 1975 from Venerable Narada Maha Thera 50th Anniversary 2025

15 December 2025

Venerable Narada Maha Thera (14 July 1898 – 2 October 1983)

Venerable Narada Maha Thera was born Sumanapala Perera in Kotahena, Colombo Sri Lanka to a middle-class family.

He came into contact with the Most Venerable Pelene Vajiragnana Maha Nayaka Thera at Vajiraramaya [Monastery] in Colombo, through an uncle who was a lay supporter. He was ordained at Vajiraramaya [Monastery] taking the name Narada on his 18th birthday. He received his *upasampada* [higher ordination] two years later. At University College in Colombo, he studied ethics and philosophy. At Vajiraramaya [Monastery] he met Dr. Cassius Perera (later Venerable Kassapa) and they started the Servants of Buddha Society in 1921. Later he himself became the head of Vajiraramaya [Monastery] in Colombo. Venerable Narada with other Bhikkhus (including Venerable Piyadassi Maha Thera whom I met in London) popularized the *bana* style dhamma sermons during the 1960s.

Venerable Narada Maha Thera was known for his discipline, piety, and his role in sharing Buddhism in Sri Lanka and overseas. He passed away in Colombo in 1983. He is internationally famous for his book *The Buddha and His Teachings* which is one of the best introductory books on Theravada Buddhism. His translation of *The Dhammapada* is also seen as clear, and accurate.

Venerable Narada Maha Thera became an international traveller. During Venerable Narada's decades of travel, he visited all continents except Antarctica. He was the first Theravada Buddhist monk to have set foot in recent times in many of the countries he visited.

His first visit abroad was when he was one of the *bhikkhus* [monks] who represented Sri Lanka at the opening ceremony for the new Mulagandhakuti Vihara at Sarnath India in 1929. The opening was attended by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru whom Ven. Narada met for the first time.

In 1934 he was the first Theravada monk to visit Indonesia in centuries. He planted and blessed a bo-sapling from the bodhi tree in Anuradhapura Sri Lanka in the precincts of the famous Borobudur temple on 10 March 1934. He also ordained some *upasakas* [lay Buddhists] as *bhikkhus* [monks]. In June 1959 in Borobudur, he conducted *bhikkhu* [monk] ordinations and established a *sima* for ordinations. The bo-sapling planted by him had grown into a large tree by his visit in 1969.

His first visit to England was in June 1949. He delivered a lecture presided over by Christmas Humphreys (President of The Buddhist Society founded in 1924 and the oldest Buddhist organisation in England). I remember meeting Christmas Humphreys in the 1970s. I have been a member since the mid-1970s and have taught at the Buddhist Society Summer School and given public talks. *Introducing Buddhism* by Venerable Dr Balangoda Ananda Maitreya Mahanayaka Thera Abhidhaja Maharatthaguru Aggamaha Pandita DLitt DLitt (1896-1998) and Jacquetta Gomes Bodhicarini Upasika Jayasili, was originally published by The Buddhist Society London in 1988, to accompany The Buddhist Society's Introducing Buddhism Course, on which I was one of the teachers. (*Introducing Buddhism* has subsequently been published by Buddhist organisations in England, Sri Lanka, Malaysia,

Taiwan, and the USA. *Introducing Buddhism* is available on several websites including Access to Insight, CBE Chinese Buddhist Encyclopedia and Google Books.)

Venerable Narada revisited England in 1954 to become the head of the London Buddhist Vihara [monastery] the first Vihara [monastery] in England. He left after 6 months. My husband ran the bookstall at the London Buddhist Vihara for many years, and I spoke at Festivals and taught at meditation retreats and meditation classes there.

Venerable Narada was a popular monk in Sri Lanka and abroad. The BPS Buddhist Publication Society in Sri Lanka published a *Narada Felicitation Volume* in 1979 “to felicitate him upon the completion of his eighty-first year”. This included a piece on behalf of The World Fellowship of Buddhists by Albert Edirisirisinghe Vice-President. I was staying at his home in Colombo Sri Lanka when his family asked their chauffeur to take me to meet Venerable Narada at Vajiraramaya [Monastery] on 30 July 1975. As Preceptor Venerable Narada Maha Thera gave me the *Panca Sila* [Five Precepts] and the Buddhist name *Upasika* Jayasili [victorious morality]. The role of Preceptor and their relationship with the lay person are very important in Theravada Buddhism. He gave me a picture of himself at Borobudur signed with his name and my new Buddhist name Jayasili. When there was a fire in a block of flats where we were living years later, this picture was one of the items, I took outside to save in case the fire reached our flat. He also gave me signed with *metta* copies of *The Buddha and His Teachings* and his translation of *The Dhammapada*. *The Dhammapada* includes the date 30 July 1975.

I celebrated the 50th anniversary of taking the *Panca Sila* [Five Precepts] in Sri Lanka with Venerable Narada Maha Thera as Preceptor on 30 July 2025. A celebration lunch was held in Kendal for BGKT Buddhist Group of Kendal (Theravada) and Keswick Buddhist Group (Theravada). On 30 July others meditated at home at the same times as me at 7am and 8pm. These times permitted participation by fellow Buddhist practitioners and friends from other countries.

Buddhist Monk Venerable Mahalova Ariyadhamma has taught BGKT Buddhist Group of Kendal (Theravada) for 10 years. This was celebrated with a meeting with the Mayor and Deputy Mayor in March. He led a meeting in Kendal for BGKT on 15 July where he spoke about me and chanted a blessing for me. He tied on white cotton string bracelets made from cotton thread which has been blessed in advance by a Buddhist monk. White represents purity and spirituality in Buddhism. The thread is seen as offering protection to the wearer. Ketumati Buddhist Vihara [monastery] Manchester has had a close relationship with BGKT and Keswick Buddhist Group (Theravada) since 1999. At the end of Ketumati’s Wednesday 6-7pm zoom meeting on 30 July Venerable Mahalova Ariyadhamma chanted a blessing for me. <https://www.ketumati.org/> <https://www.ketumati.org/ketumati-vihara/our-leadership/>
Ven. Mahalova Ariyadhamma Thera: From Sri Lankan Forest to Civic Engagement in England by Bodhicarini Upasika Jayasili Jacquetta Gomes
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