

Most venerable Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Maha Thera

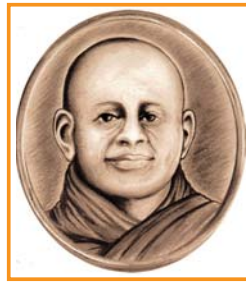
Commemoration of the Founder of Amarapura Nikaya

Message from Agga Maha Panditha Duvuldena Gnanissara Maha Thera - the Uththareethara Mahanayake of the Sri Lanka Amarapura Maha Sangha Sabha



The history of our country shines brightly from the great deeds of the illustrious characters that were born in that country. Among such admirable characters is the Most Venerable Dhamarajadhiraajaguru Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Maha Thera, the founder of the Sri Lanka Amarapura Bhikshu Wansaya. Ending a very unfortunate era in the history of the Buddha Sasana of Sri Lanka, the Most Venerable Welivita Sri Saranankura Maha Thera rescued the Sambuddha Sasana of Sri Lanka that was controlled by various chardattans masquerading as monks. Fifty years after

that great service to the Buddha Sasana, a new monopoly had sprung up and so many divisions had become apparent. When threats became apparent, and the Vinaya regulations and the Dhamma regulations were being blatantly disregarded, the Most Venerable Dhamarajadhiraajaguru Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Maha Thera, a student of the Sangharaja Maha Thera, spearheaded the movement to clean up the Sasana. Because of the steps he fearlessly took disregarding the threats to his life and limb, a new generation of Sangha was established in Sri Lanka. I consider this commemoration of the 175th anniversary of the passing away of the Most Venerable Dhamarajadhiraajaguru Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Maha Thera, as an act of veneration emanating gratitude. May the Most Venerable Maha Thera attain Nibbana!



The 175th commemoration of the Most Venerable Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Maha Thera, the founder of the Amarapura Nikaya of Sri Lanka, will be held today at the B.M.I.C.H., Colombo.

The Most Venerable Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Maha Thera, the founder of the Amarapura Nikaya of Sri Lanka, was born in 1766 at Balapitiya. Our Thera proceeded to Senkadagala accompanying Ven. Bowala Dhammananda Thera, the Chief Sanghanayake of the Low Country, and obtained monkhood under the Most Venerable Sangharaja Welivita Asarana Sarana Saranankura Maha Thera.

When the Samanera Gnanawimala reached the age of Higher Ordination, the Thera handling administration at the Malwatte Vihara refused to give him the Higher Ordination. Samanera Gnanawimala came to the Ambaggalawatte Temple in Balapitiya and occupied himself in religious work. Samanera Gnanawimala admitted several students to monkhood and explained the difficulties in doing religious work without Higher Ordination to his Dayakayas. As a result, the Samanera got the opportunity to proceed to Siam to obtain Higher Ordination there.

In 1798, Samanera Gnanawimala and his group set off by ship and reached Burma as a result of a sudden storm. The Samanera learnt more Dhamma in Burma and received Higher Ordination in 1801 and returned to Sri Lanka in 1802. Performing Higher Ordination in 1806, Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Thera established the Amarapura Nikaya confirming that the Sangha Sasana belongs to everybody without any divisions.

Because of this accomplishment of the Venerable Thera, the monopoly established by a particular party was destroyed, making the Sangha Sasana an inheritance of everybody, keeping the low-country Buddhists in the faith.

The Most Venerable Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Thera gave monkhood to a large number of student monks and did a yeoman service to the national culture of Sri Lanka. The Most Venerable Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Thera passed away on July 8, 1833.

Message from Mr. Ajith De Zoysa
Organizing a program of national scale to commemorate the unparalleled service of the Most Venerable Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Thera is a very timely act.

The yeoman services rendered by the Most Venerable Thera towards the re-instatement of Buddhism corrupted by various influences in Sri Lanka are indelibly stamped in the minds of all Sri Lankan Buddhists. The guidance of the Most Venerable Thera was instrumental in rescuing Buddhists whose minds were wandering towards other religions.

The chain of events leading to the establishment of the Amarapura Nikaya was a reason for great joy for many people of the South of Sri Lanka, with a love for Buddhism. Hence, commemorating the countless services of the Most Venerable Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Thera to the Buddha Sasana is a matter for great delight for all Sri Lankan Buddhists. May the Most Venerable Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Thera attain Nibbana!

Treasurer - Commemoration Foundation and The Chairman, Kalutara Bodhi Trust

Message from Agga Maha Panditha, the Most Venerable Kotugoda Dhamawasa Anunayake Thero - the Chairman of the Sri Lanka Amarapura Maha Sangha Sabha



The commemoration of great Theras who had passed away after doing so much for the upliftment of the Sambuddha Sasana of Sri Lanka is a valuable example for the monks, laymen, the young and the old living in today's society. Among those Theras, the name of the Most Venerable Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Thera takes pride of place.

The greatest service to the Buddha

Sasana of the Most Venerable Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Thera was showing proper directions to the Sinhala, Buddhist people of the Low Country, who had lost their way among the Catholic missionaries and the so-called up-country high caste Sinhala Buddhists.

Commemorating the Most Venerable Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Maha Thera for his yeoman services of peopling the Buddha Sasana and democratically distributing the Dhamma to the masses is the duty and the responsibility of all of us Buddhists that live in Sri Lanka.

Message of the Most Venerable Dr. Brahmanawatte Sewali Anunayake Thera - Chief Secretary - Sri Lanka Amarapura Maha Sangha Sabha



It does not seem that till about 1761, everybody was not able to obtain the blessings of the Sangha Sasana equally. Even touching the Arhat flag by members of castes other than one, is insisted as a matter of great demerit. As advised by Bowala Dhammananda Thera living at that time, his student Welitara Gnanawimalatissa Samanera Thera, proceeded to Burma, studied Buddhism and obtained the Higher Ordination. Overcoming the various obstacles placed on his path by the government officials at that time and

various monks, the Most Venerable Welitara Gnanawimalatissa Maha Thera took steps to grant Higher Ordination to Samaneras belonging to various castes. If it had not been for the Most Venerable Welitara Gnanawimalatissa Maha Thera, the whole of the coastal area of Sri Lanka would have been converted to other religions, under the control of the missionaries. The Sangha generation established by the Most Venerable Maha Thera, dedicated themselves to serve the people, who were helpless till then, building roads, schools and hospitals.

The name of the Thera who made all these possible, the Most Venerable Welitara Gnanawimalatissa Maha Thera, will remain undying, till the Buddha Sasana remains in Sri Lanka. My his name be worshipped with the due honour and rev-

Message from Co-Deputy Chairmen of the Most Venerable Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Thera Commemorative Foundation



It is no secret that devout, disciplined and erudite monks illuminated the unsullied Buddha Sasana of Sri Lanka. And, the Sangha Sasana was protected by the efforts of such monks. Because of the service to the Sasana done by the devout, disciplined and erudite monk the Most Venerable Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Thera, everybody got the opportunity to embrace monkhood and obtain Higher Ordination despite differences in nationalities or castes. No one can demean the task of the most venerable Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Thera. He was a Maha Thera who peopled Buddhism again in the true context of Lord Buddha's preachings.

Because of his unflagging efforts, a new Nikaya came in to being in this country. That is the Amarapura Nikaya. Generations of student monks of the Nikaya established

by the Most Venerable Thera, propagated throughout Sri Lanka and instigated a Buddhist revival in the country. It should be stated that the Buddhist revival launched by the Most Venerable Thera, paved the way for independence for the country. The courage, perseverance and the dedication of the Maha Thera, and the sponsorship of the Buddhist philanthropists of that era, should be remembered with gratitude every day. It is clear that, if the Maha Thera had not come forward at that time, the Low Country Buddhists would all have embraced other religions by now. Remembering his path and protecting it is the bounden duty of all of us.

**Minister Milinda Moragoda
Minister Bandula Gunawardena
Minister Lakshman Yapa Abeywardena
President's Council C R De Silva**

A Most Venerable Thera that should be remembered forever...

The Most Venerable Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Maha Thera, who founded the Sri Lanka Amarapura Maha Nikaya shining a new light on the Sangha Sasana of Sri Lanka overcoming untold hardships and obstacles, ought to be remembered for ever by the Buddhists of Sri Lanka for his services to the Sasana. Hence, it is the duty of all of us to

remember with gratitude the service done to the Buddha Sasana of Sri Lanka by the establishing of the Sri Lanka Amarapura Maha Nikaya by the Most Venerable Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Thera.

**Sumathi Dharmawardena-Attorney at Law
D.C.Thilak Samarasinghe
Co-secretaries**

Message from H.E. the President



I am happy to be issuing this message of greetings for the commemoration of the founder of the Sri Lanka Amarapura Maha Nikaya, the Most Venerable Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Maha Thera. The Buddha Sasana that was gradually being eroded due to foreign invasions was revived by the Most Venerable Welivita Sri Saranankura Sangharaja Maha Thera. The Buddhist revival initiated by the Sangharaja Maha Thera spread throughout Sri Lanka from Kandy, where it was started.

The Most Venerable Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Maha Thera studied Buddhist Philosophy and Pali Language under the Most Venerable Welivita Sri Sangharaja Maha Thera at the Malwatte Maha Vihara, Kandy. The Most Venerable Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Maha Thera who passed away about 175 years ago, took great pains to end the era of the erosion of the cultural values that had

begun with the influence of the Dutch and the English. The Maha Thera untriflingly worked to stop the conversion of Buddhists of coastal areas to other religions.

Then, the Maha Thera proceeded to Myanmar to bring the Higher Ordination to this country and founded the Amarapura Nikaya. In bringing the Higher Ordination to Sri Lanka, the Maha Thera solved the problem of obtaining Higher Ordination facing the monks of the low country.

The Amarapura Nikaya occupies a significant place among the main Nikayas of Sri Lanka. Thousands of monks and temples belonging to the Amarapura Nikaya have spread right throughout the island. I see this commemoration of the immense service to the Buddha Sasana done by the Most Venerable Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Maha Thera as a very important occasion.

May the Most Venerable Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Maha Thera, the founder of the Amarapura Maha Nikaya, who passed away about 175 years ago, attain the Supreme Bliss of Nirvana! My salutations go to every one who values the services to the Buddha Sasana carried out by the Maha Thera.

Mahinda Rajapaksa

Message from the Prime Minister



The Sri Lanka Amarapura Nikaya has provided the necessary Buddhist leadership to the people of Sri Lanka by achieving much progress in various sectors over the past two centuries said Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremarajane in a congratulatory message issued to mark the 175th anniversary of the services rendered by the late Ven. Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Mahanayake Thera who established the Nikaya.

The message said many anti Buddhist movements spread in the coastal areas due to western influence at that time so much so that most people in the low country followed Buddhism in a secret manner. Mudliars who understood the need to change this situation assisted efforts to set a new Sangha generation by sending a Dhammaduta mission to

Myanmar. Accordingly low country bhikkhus studied Vinaya rules in Myanmar and returned to Sri Lanka after obtaining "Upasampada". Ven. Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Thera who was one of the Buddhists who returned with Upasampada made a great impact on the country.

Among them was the opportunity for anyone to enter the order of the Maha Sangha, and receive higher ordination without discrimination, spread of Buddhism throughout the country, establishment of a Sangha generation with a sound knowledge of Pali and Sanskrit, establishment of pirivenas for young Buddhists and publication of Buddhist texts in Sinhala and other oriental languages.

The services rendered by Ven. Sri Gnanawimalatissa Mahanayaka Thera therefore is immortal. May the activities of the Sri Lanka Amarapura Nikaya established by him achieve all success.

Ratnasiri Wickremarajane



Message from Mr. Ajith De Zoysa

Organizing a program of national scale to commemorate the unparalleled service of the Most Venerable Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Thera is a very timely act.

The yeoman services rendered by the Most Venerable Thera towards the re-instatement of Buddhism corrupted by various influences in Sri Lanka are indelibly stamped in the minds of all Sri Lankan Buddhists. The guidance of the Most Venerable Thera was instrumental in rescuing Buddhists whose minds were wandering towards other religions.

The chain of events leading to the establishment of the Amarapura Nikaya was a reason for great joy for many people of the South of Sri Lanka, with a love for Buddhism. Hence, commemorating the countless services of the Most Venerable Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Thera to the Buddha Sasana is a matter for great delight for all Sri Lankan Buddhists. May the Most Venerable Welitara Sri Gnanawimalatissa Thera attain Nibbana!

Treasurer - Commemoration Foundation and The Chairman, Kalutara Bodhi Trust