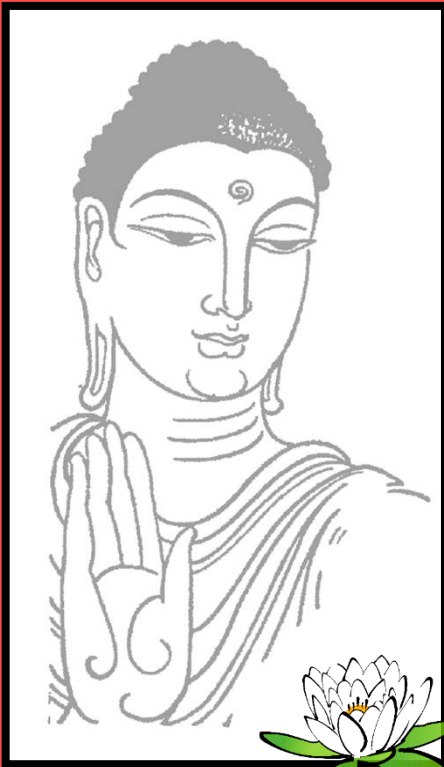




Buddhist & Pāli College of Singapore Alumni (BPCA) - Quarterly E-Bulletin

July to September 2019



To avoid all evil, to cultivate good, and to cleanse one's mind - this is the teaching of the Buddhas

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Our Activities!

The BPCA organised a trip to Borobudur in May, held previews in May and July for the Diploma course which will start in October, and conducted a three-month memorial service in September for our most beloved Principal Bhante Gnanarama. Our graduates also made a trip to Sri Lanka in August 2019 to attend the convocation ceremony. Here is a recap of these activities.

Trip to Borobudur, Jogja and Dieng, Indonesia, 20-24 May 2019

After circling Yogyakarta Adisucipto Airport for some 45 minutes, our Silkair flight landed safely to the delight of everyone on board. Immigration and custom clearance were quick.

Our local guide, Mr Frenky, met and guided us through transfers from mini-buses to our luxury air-con coach. We learnt that this transfer would happen again as the city roads were not able to accommodate the big coach. After all, Yogyakarta or Jogja as it is popularly known, was an ancient city known as Mataram of the 13th century CE.

I was looking forward to re-visiting Borobudur – the largest Buddhist monument in South East Asia. After a hearty lunch, we set off.



Borobudur trip led by Bhante Seelananda, BPC Vice Principal

"Boro" means 'A place of dwelling' while "budor" means 'in the hill'. This monument is named after the nearby village where it stands. During the 8th century CE, the kings of the Sailendra Dynasty, who followed the Mahayana Tradition had it constructed. With three square platforms as the foundations, it is topped by three circular platforms all built with volcanic blocks. Besides 504 Buddha statues, there are 2,672 relief panels built onto the walls. The platforms signifying the different realms of our samsaric existence: Kamaloka, Rupaloka and Arupaloka. At the top platform is a big stupa surrounded by 72 smaller perforated stupas. Jataka tales from the Lalitavistara Sutra, a Mahayana text, depict the stories of the Bodhisattva past lives. The reliefs are richly enhanced with details of devas, birds, animals, trees, flowers and worship of the Bodhisatta. Personally, I find the stone reliefs to be Brahmanism-inspired, with many similarities to those found in Ajanta (5th century CE) and other Indian temples of similar periods.

A relief panel which I found interesting for being "out of place" depicted a sailing ship with a crew member clinging onto a pole, supposedly to look out for land or other sea vessels. Mr Frenky explained that the ship was representative of the spice trade Indonesia had with foreign countries.



The world's largest Buddhist temple – Borobudur Temple, Yogyakarta, Central Java Indonesia

The next day, we left the hotel at 4.30 am to return to Borobudur to watch the sun-rise at 5.45 am. A short morning puja was conducted by Bhante Seelananda after which each went to find the best place to view the sun-rise. Though I did not find the sun-rise spectacular, I appreciated the beautiful silhouettes of the stupas in the pre-dawn lights. With the surrounding tree-filled hills, pre-dawn and dawn, is at best, the most appropriate time to view Borobudur. The grand old dame of a monument is a beautiful sight to behold, hauntingly serene and tranquil.



Sunrise, Borobudur

That afternoon, we changed to mini-buses to travel to the Dieng plateaus. Vegetables and rice are grown on terrace hill slopes while vegetables are grown on the plains. The specialty of this area is the potato which is huge and used mainly in "potato fries". Cool weather in the highlands supports a flourishing agricultural industry.

Our Activities!



Prambanan Hindu Temple Complex, Yogyakarta

Day Three morning saw everyone enthusiastically looking forward to a visit to the traditional local market in Jogja city. Many left the market beaming and hands filled with purchases of local handicrafts, weaved baskets, cashews, keropoks, spices, etc. A later visit to a shop selling batik was also well patronized by the women-folks.

On the fourth day, we visited the museum dedicated to Mount Merapi, an active volcano. We were going to view the actual volcano at a designated site opposite the volcano. Travelling on rough dirt tracks, eight 4x4 wheelers took us to the site. The ride was totally dusty, bone rattling and absolutely fun for us city-dwellers. The view was postcard-perfect. Though everyone was covered in sweat and dust, I am sure, every single person enjoyed the exhilarating bumpy rides through sparsely populated bush land.



Mount Merapi (Mountain of Fire) – the most active volcano in Indonesia



Mount Merapi lava tour in the 4x4 wheel jeeps

We were rewarded with a delicious Javanese buffet dinner at a restaurant in a beautiful garden full of flowers and shrubs. My favourite was the chendol made with fresh coconut milk, sugar and chinchow. Yummy! 😊

The day ended, not with resting tired legs, but for most, a trip to Malioboro Street – the local equivalent of our Orchard Road – to visit the malls and do more shopping.

Leaving Jogja the next day to return to Singapore, many had “extra” bags filled with not only local delicacies of kueh lapis, bakpia, snacks, batiks clothes, weaved baskets and but also wonderful memories of a short and sweet trip.

The travelling companions I spoke with all said they enjoyed the trip and are looking forward to the next one. Cheers!

*Contributor: Sister Jasmine Tan
Photo Credit: Brother Patrick Lim*

Recruitment Drive for Diploma in Buddhism Course, 8 May, 19 May, 20 July and 28 July 2019

With the Diploma course opened up for application from 15 July to 31 August 2019, BPCA embarked on a recruitment drive with three course preview sessions led by Sister Gillian Ang, as well as a BPC information booth at the Vesak Day Celebration at Mangala Vihara (Buddhist Temple) [MV] led by Sister Lynn Choy.

The first course preview session was held on 8 May 2019, 7.00 pm to 7.30 pm. Thanks to Sister Jasmine Tan for the facilitation, Sister Gillian Ang and some BPCA members met up with some 30 participants of the 18th intake of the Introduction to Buddhism Course, and shared with them personal experiences in taking up the Diploma course and the challenges overcome, as well as an introspection of the knowledge gained. The BPCA members encouraged the participants to attend the detailed preview sessions to be held on 20 July 2019 (Saturday) at MV or 28 July 2019 (Sunday) at Poh Ming Tse Temple (PMT), or to proceed to enroll in the course. The participants raised questions enthusiastically on the syllabus, fees payable, examination preparations, results required to be conferred the Diploma, ease of learning the Pāli language, etc. They also asked about the flexibility to attend classes at either MV or PMT depending on their availability. To facilitate the registration of interest, Brother Patrick Lim came equipped with a QR code for their use.

Our Activities!



Diploma course preview with the participants of the Introduction to Buddhism Course

The two detailed preview sessions were held on 20 and 28 July 2019 at MV and PMT respectively, both from 2.00 pm to 4.00 pm. The sessions were well attended by 35 and 22 members of the public respectively. The questions raised were diverse – from the ideological differences between Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism to whether Buddhists had any dietary restrictions over beef. There were also the usual concerns about the ability to keep up with the classes and prepare for the examinations amidst hectic work and personal commitments. Some, who had limited exposure to Buddhism, asked about the pre-qualification or preparation study required for enrolment to the Diploma course, and some asked about the profiles of the lecturers of the Buddhist and Pali College. There was also curiosity over the past students' considerations in choosing between MV and PMT as the class venue, and the academic progression after attaining the Diploma qualification.



Diploma course preview with the public on 20 July 2019 at MV



Diploma course preview with the public on 28 July 2019 at PMT

On the other hand, the BPC information booth was buzzing from 9.00 am to 3.30 pm on 19 May 2019 at the Vesak Day Celebration at MV. The public picked up books for free or asked about the course offerings, in particular the 19th intake for the Introduction to Buddhism Course (24 July to 25 September 2019) and the Diploma in Buddhism 2019-2020. Many expressed interest and signed up for the courses and/or the preview sessions.



*Dr Lim Ah Swan (second from left), Chairman of MV Management Committee, visiting the BPC information booth
Photo Credit: Sister Lee Mee Yin*



*BPC Information Booth at Vesak Day Celebration at MV
Photo Credit: Sister Lee Mee Yin*

The BPCA is grateful to MV and PMT for the venue sponsorship and logistic support in its conducting of the three Diploma course preview sessions and the setting up of the information booth at the Vesak Day Celebration.

The enrolment to the Diploma course has since closed, and the classes will start on 6 October 2019 (Sunday) and 8 October 2019 (Tuesday) at MV and PMT respectively. We wish all the students enrolled a fruitful learning and wisdom gaining experience. Sādhu, Sādhu, Sādhu!

Kataṃ ca sukataṃ seyyo Yaṃ katvā nānutappati

Better it is to do a good deed, after doing which one does not grieve.

Convocation Trip to Colombo, Sri Lanka, 17-25 August 2019

The deadly suicide bombing on Easter Sunday, 21 April 2019 in the commercial capital Colombo of Sri Lanka did not deter our two batches of six graduates from the Bachelor of Arts in Buddhist Studies 2017 and 2018 from attending the 9D8N convocation trip to Sri Lanka held from 17 to 25 August 2019. They left at 9.45 am on 17 August 2019 for a 4-hour flight to Colombo.



Bhante Seelananda and the delegation at Changi International Airport on 17 August 2019

Upon arrival at Colombo at 11.35 am (Singapore is 2.5 hours ahead of Sri Lanka), the delegation bought local currency Sri Lanka rupee and mobile phone cards in the airport. After lunch, they travelled 4.5 hours by coach to Anuradhapura – a World Heritage site and one of the ancient capitals of Sri Lanka famous for its well preserved ruins of an ancient Sinhala civilization in the 2nd and 3rd century BCE.

On the second day, the delegation donned white like the locals and visited the ruins which comprised three classes of buildings, viz.:

- Dagobas, or stupa which are bell-shaped white masses of masonry, some dating back to the 3rd century BCE, with relic chambers;
- Monastic buildings with magnificent sculptures and beautiful moonstone carvings; and
- Pokunas, which are tanks for bathing or supply of drinking water – a testament of the superb irrigation system of this ancient city.



Ruwanmeliseya – the tallest Dagobas in Sri Lanka

There is also the Sri Maha Bodhi in the Mahamewuna Garden. It is the oldest historically documented tree on earth (over 2,200 years old) and brought as a sapling of the tree under which Buddha had attained enlightenment. The delegation walked on the designated footpath around the holy tree.



Sri Maha Bodhi

The delegation also visited Brazen Palace, Ruwanweli Seya, Samadhi Buddha sculpture, Isurumuniya rock temple, Thuparama (which houses Buddha's right collarbone), Ratnaprasada, Mahasena's Palace, Abayagiri, Jetevanaramaya, Kuttam Pokuna and Mihintale Raja Maha Vihara.



Jetevanaramaya in the ruins of Jetavana monastery



Kuttam Pokuna, once a bathing pool for monks

Our Activities!



*Mihintale Raja
Maha Viharaya*

The third day was sightseeing at Polonnaruwa Ancient Capital in Habarana, which is a city in the Anuradhapura District. Polonnaruwa, a medieval city and a UNESCO World Heritage site, rose to fame as the capital (10th to 12th century AD) after the decline of Anuradhapura. The entire landscape was punctuated by huge man-made reservoirs, the most famous of which was the Parakrama Samudra (Sea of Parakrama), larger in size than the Colombo harbour. The monuments were well preserved and gave clear evidence of the place's glorious past. The highlights of the visit were the Royal Palace complex, including the King's Palace and Audience Hall



Polonnaruwa



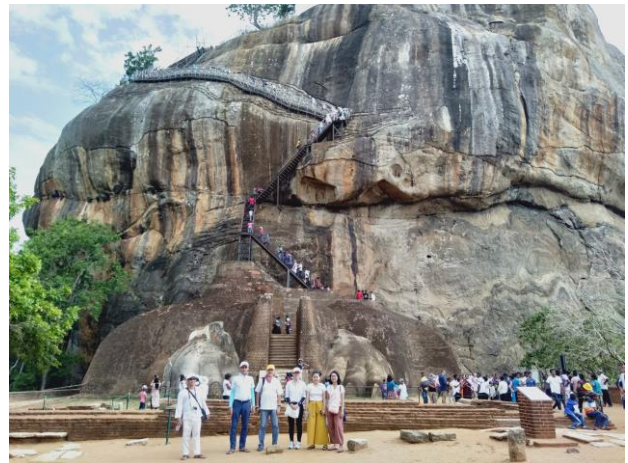
King's Council Chamber

After lunch, the delegation visited the spectacular Gal Viharaya complex which has four massive images of Buddha, cut from a single slab of granite – a highlight of ancient Sri Lankan rock carving.



Gal Viharaya

After transfer to Sigiriya, the delegation went to climb the Sigiriya Rock Fortress, yet another UNESCO World Heritage site. The summit had the remains of the handsome royal citadel and several caves for meditation, audience platforms and baths.



Sigiriya Rock Fortress

On Day Four, the delegation visited Dambulla Rock Cave Temple. As the interior of the caves was under renovation, the delegation took photographs outside the temple. En route to Kandy, the delegation visited an herb garden and filled up their shopping bags!



Dambulla Rock Cave Temple

Our Activities!

After travelling for 2.5 hours by coach, the delegation arrived at Kandy, which is a large city in central Sri Lanka and surrounded by mountains hosting tea plantations and biodiverse rainforests. At the heart of the city is the scenic Bogambara Lake (Kandy Lake). The delegation spent time in the market square near Sri Dalada Maligawa (Temple of the Tooth) to enjoy more shopping and bargaining with the vendors for deals at one third of asking price. Thereafter, they headed to Sri Dalada Maligawa for puja at 6.30 pm. After the puja, they entered into the relic chamber for a close look of the relic casket.

On the fifth day, the delegation travelled some 2.5 hours on coach to Nuwara Eliya, affectionately known as "Little England", which has a picturesque landscape and temperate climate at an altitude of 1,868 metres. They had lunch at a restaurant which offered a close-up view of waterfalls with the lower tributaries feeding into three lakes nested in a valley. They also visited Damro Labookellie Tea Factory and Plantation, and sampled local tea.



Lunch with a close-up view of waterfalls.

On Day Six, the delegation spent five hours on the road to Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka. The rest of the day was free and easy, as the delegation needed to refresh and wake up early on the following day for the convocation ceremony organised by the Buddhist and Pali University (BPU) of Sri Lanka.

On Day Seven, the delegation arrived at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall at 8.00 am.



(L-R) Brother Tan Swee Hin Victor, Brother Zaw Min Tun, Sister Lau Lee Hua, Sister Zhao Qing Yun@Ma Thwe Thwe, Sister Phyu Phyu Htant, Brother Kyaw Kyaw Naing

Given the sheer number of graduates at the various academic levels of the university, the convocation ceremony was divided into morning and afternoon sessions. It was solemn and well executed. When their names were called, the delegation members went on stage to receive their certificates humbly.



Congratulations for the achievements!

After the ceremony, the delegation had lunch with Venerable Professor Gallele Sumanasiri Thero, Vice Chancellor of BPU and Bhante Seelananda. They warmly invited the Vice Chancellor to attend the BPC graduation ceremony scheduled on 27 October 2019.

After lunch, the delegation visited the world's largest Buddhist bookstore and bought some books. They also visited the late Bhante Gnanarama's monastery, and saw the paper-crafted Buddha statue for his birthday displayed in his bookshelf.



Sri Sambuddhathva Jayanthi Mandiraya

On the eighth day, the delegation went for a city tour of Colombo, including a visit to the BPU campus.





Statue of BPU's Founder, Venerable Walpola Rāhula



BPU's Campus Gate

After lunch, the delegation visited Bhante Seelananda's monastery and his teacher's monastery. They were fortunate to have met and received blessings from Bhante Seelananda's teacher. They took part in puja at 6.00 pm before they had dinner and proceeded to the airport for the return flight.



Ayubowan to Bhante Seelananda's Teacher

On Day Nine, the return flight left Colombo at 1.50 am, and landed safely at the Singapore Changi International Airport at 9.00 am. Home sweet home!

*Contributor: Brother Kyaw Kyaw Naing
Sister Phyu Phyu Htant
Photo Credit: Brother Kyaw Kyaw Naing*

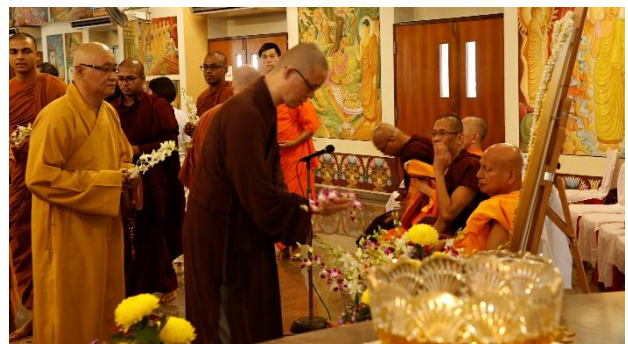
Three-Month Memorial Service of Dr Pategama Gnanarama Anu-Nayaka Maha Thera, 7 September 2019

On 7 September 2019 (Saturday) at 10.00 am, Mangala Vihara (Buddhist Temple) [MV] and BPCA jointly organised the three-month memorial service of the late Bhante Gnanarama at MV. The service was well attended by some 100 participants who were the Sangha members of Myanmar, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand, invited guests, BPC lecturers and staff, and BPCA members.



Three-month memorial service of late Bhante Gnanarama

The service started by taking the three refuges and observance of the five precepts lead by Most Venerable Dr B. Dhammaratana Maha Nayaka Thero, Buddhist Library. Thereafter, he offered flowers to the Buddha image. Next up was the flower offerings to the late Bhante Gnanarama's portrait by Most Venerable Dr G. Uditā Maha Nayaka Thero, Shangha members and devotee representatives.



Flower offerings to the late Bhante Gnanarama's portrait

Our Activities!



Flower offering by Brother Jotiya Thomas Wong, President of Ti-Sarana Buddhist Association

After a warm welcome speech by Venerable Pupule Seelananda Thero, Ag Principal of BPC, there were speeches delivered by Most Venerable U. Cittara Thero, MV Chief Resident Monk; Most Venerable Dr R Gnanaseeha Thero, Samadhi Buddhist Society; Most Venerable Phrakhru Sophon Buddhikun, 1st Vice President of Thai Sangha Samatca; Venerable Chuan Guan, Advisor to NTU Buddhist Society and etc.; and Dr Lim Ah Swan, Chairman of MV Management Committee. All of them remembered fondly the late Bhante Gnanarama as an accomplished Buddhist scholar who had displayed great compassion, humility and patience to others. They hoped that BPC would keep up its good work in propagating Buddhist knowledge and uphold the great efforts and hard work put in by its late Founding Principal.



Preparing the puja requisites

At the Mangala Hall, Most Venerable K. Ratanananda Maha Thero recited the Pāli formula to kick-start the Mahāsaṅghika Dāna. BPC lecturers served food and drinks respectfully to the Shangha members.



Speech by Most Venerable U. Cittara Thero, MV Resident Monk

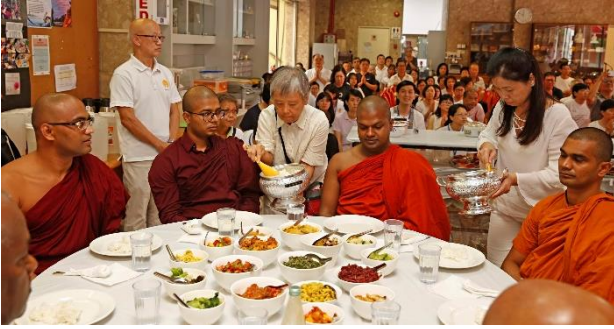


Speech by Most Venerable Phrakhru Sophon Buddhikun, First Vice President of Thai Sangha Samatca



The puja started with the offering of requisites, followed by chanting led by Sister Lynn Choy. After the puja, the Shangha members proceeded to the Mangala Hall for the Mahāsaṅghika Dāna.

Our Activities!



Mahāsaṅghika Dāna

As the Sangha members were eating, the lay disciples were served buffet lunch. Many of them were past and present BPC students, whom the late Bhante Gnanarama had touched their lives and inspired them to seek the Buddhist path.



Buffet lunch for the lay disciples

After the Mahāsaṅghika Dāna, MV and BPCA offered requisites to the Sangha members.

To ease the great sense of loss among the BPC lecturers, staff and past and present students, Dr Lim Ah Swan unveiled and put up the late Bhante Gnanarama's portrait at the Mangala Hall, above the doorway leading to the BPC Teachers' Office at Level 2. This would also help the BPC community to remember the immeasurable contributions made by our most beloved Founding Principal, the late Bhante Gnanarama and continue to be inspired by him.



Dr Lim Ah Swan putting up the late Bhante Gnanarama's portrait

The three-month memorial service of the late Bhante Gnanarama was brought to a close after the transference of merits by Venerable Dr R. Chanda Wimala Thero, followed by an acknowledgement by Brother Kovida Jebsons Chia, BPCA Chairman.



Transference of merits by Venerable Dr R. Chanda Wimala Thero

Photo Credit: Brother Patrick Lim

Activities Line-Up

BPC will hold a ceremony on 27 October 2019 (Sunday) at Mangala Vihara (Buddhist Temple) [MV] to mark the graduation of its recent batches of M.A., B.A. and Diploma classes. Also, as the Diploma students head down to the MV's Chew Quee Neo Hall for the examinations in October 2019 and the B.A. and M.A. students doing likewise in December 2019, **BPCA would like to wish each and every one of you all the very best!**

Schedule	Activity	How to Apply
6 Oct 2019 (Sunday)	Classes commence for Diploma in Buddhism at Mangala Vihara (Buddhist Temple)	Registration closed.
8 Oct 2019 (Tuesday)	Classes commence for Diploma in Buddhism at Poh Ming Tse Temple	Registration closed.
19-21 October 2019 (Saturday to Monday)	Examinations for Diploma in Buddhism at Chew Quee Neo Hall, Level 2, Mangala Vihara (Buddhist Temple), 30 Jalan Eunos, Singapore 419495	Students of the Diploma classes 2018-2019.
27 October 2019 (Sunday)	BPC Graduation Ceremony at Mangala Vihara (Buddhist Temple), 30 Jalan Eunos, Singapore 419495	Exclusively for the family members and graduates of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M.A. in Buddhist Studies 2017 • B.A. in Buddhist Studies 2017 and 2018; and • Diploma in Buddhism 2016/17 and 2017/18
2-12 December 2019 (Monday to Thursday)	Examinations for GAQ, B.A.1, B.A.2 and M.A. students at Mangala Vihara (Buddhist Temple), 30 Jalan Eunos, Singapore 419495	
1-6 February 2020 (Saturday to Thursday)	6D5N tour to Sukhothai, Chiangmai and Chiangrai, Thailand	To be advised.

Closing Remarks

If you like what you have read in this issue of e-bulletin, have any suggestions or feedback for the BPCA committee to do better, or would like to come forward to make a difference to our BPC community, please feel free to drop us an email at bpca2017sg@gmail.com.

We look forward to hearing from you soon!

Om̐dhū, Om̐dhū, Om̐dhū!