

# Introducing Songdhammakalyani Monastery

Recorded June, 2015

## Location



Songdhammakalyani Monastery (SDKM) is situated on Petkasem hwy. the major highway leading from Bangkok to the south. One can literally continue on this Highway to the border connecting Thailand to Malaysia and through Malaysia to Singapore.

The temple is on the left, if you come from Bangkok, it is 53 kms. west of Bangkok. By bus, the bus driver will allow you to get off just in front of the temple. The landmark is a huge golden laughing Buddha in front of the temple.



Historically, Ven.Voramai Kabilsingh, the founder of the temple purchased the land from H.M.Indrasakdisachi, Queen of King Rama VI in 1960. The lot is 6 rai (minimum allowable to build a temple) During King Rama VI's reign he had Sanamchan Summer Palace built in the city of Nakhonpathom, just 3 kms. further from the temple. The land in and around the area where the temple is now situated was previous own by the royal members. The lane next to the temple is still called "Trok Wang" which means "the palace lane."

### **Brief Biography of the founder**



*this photo was taken when she was 87*

Ven. Voramai Kabilsingh as she was known by her lay name, was born in 1908 in Rajburi province in central Thailand. She led a very colorful and interesting life. In 1972 she was the only girl scout to travel by bicycle to Singapore, it took her 29 days. She made a standing record that no other women have yet taken the path.

She was a writer, a poet, a novelist apart from being a teacher serving the Thai Government for the first

part of her life. During II world war, she was married to Mr. K. Shatsena, a member of Parliament from Trang in the southern part of Thailand. With this connection, it changed her direction, and she had to stay in the south for a short period of time. When her daughter, Chatsumarn Shatsena was born, she moved back to Bangkok mainly concerned about the quality of education for her child. By accident, she became interested and curious about meditation and became further committed to study Buddhism directly from the texts, the Tripitaka.

She started publishing Buddhist monthly magazine in 1955 and kept on this commitment for 32 years.

She was inspired by the teaching of the Buddha and took her first ordination in 1956 from Chaokhun Prommuni (Vice abbot of Wat Bavorn, a royal temple). Ordination of bhikkhuni was not known in Thailand, 15 years later, in 1971 she went to Taiwan and received full ordination. She became the first Thai woman to have taken this full ordination properly as bhikkhuni.

## Building the temple

Even before bhikkhuni ordination, she was preparing the ground for the temple. The uposatha (main hall) a three storey building with sima boundery took her 10 years to bring it to full completion. This is the most important building as sanghakamma must be performed within sima.

Along with the uposatha, she also built the school for kindergarten up to grade 6 there were some 500 students attending the school. The school was run by Ms. Marndaratna Shatsena for more than 30 years and closed when Ms.Marndaratna Shatsena took her retirement in 2003 during the time of the second abbot, Ven.Dhammananda.

She tried to train young women to become monastics but it was only short lived. Being the only bhikkhuni did not allow her to perform any proper sanghakamma. But she did much work on social welfare, i.e. giving out food, clothing to poor students in rural area. She sponsored more than 100 Buddha statues to send them to temples or Buddhist centers in remote area. Also for some years she arranged regular food offering to 108 monks.

She lived through her peaceful ripe old age of 95 before passing away on June 24,2003, leaving behind her daughter just received full ordination as bhikkhuni to continue the bhikkhuni heritage. It may be said that this temple has an unbroken lineage of bhikkhuni since 1971.

## Second abbot



Asso.Prof.Dr Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, Ven.Voramai's daughter is well prepared to take the responsibility. She received her education in Thailand, India and Canada. She spent 30 years in academic life doing research, teaching and attending conferences at international level. Also she was in TV for 7 years hence being somewhat known to Thai society. This rich social background prepared her to do what she chose to do in the latter part of her life.

She went for her first lower ordination in Sri Lanka in Feb.2001, and returned to Sri Lanka again to receive full ordination in 2003 to become the first Theravada bhikkhuni in Thailand. From then on, she is known by her ordained name,Ven. Dhammananda.

Like her mother, she is truly a trail blazer.

The first year after ordination was difficult with a storm of criticism from Thai society. But the social

media were mostly friendly to the news of ordained woman. She breezed through this particular difficult time by holding on to the teaching of the Buddha, namely “one who practices dhamma will be protected by dhamma”.

She was conscious to fill in the gap that was not possible in her mother’s time.

She went all the way to make sure that she received full training as bhikkhuni to be able to train other samaneris and bhikkhunis after her. She arranged for a proper sima in order for the future sangha to have a proper place to perform the sanghakamma, i.e. ordination, etc.

The first decade of her ordained life, she focused much on educating the mass by bringing out books, brochures, tape cassettes, VDO, etc. so that Thai society is well informed about the rightful heritage of bhikkhunis from the Buddha’s time. She started giving temporary lower ordination to Thai women as a way to spread out the words of the Buddha. These women once disrobed often turned out to be strong supporters of the temple. Women started to join the temple activities and also ordination.

Ven. Dhammananda, has followed closely to the inspiration of the founder. She emphasizes Bodhisattva’s path in her writing, teaching and most important of all, in the way she leads her life.

A dynamic personality, active, alert and witty. She could be direct, very direct at times, yet she radiates with her genuine smile that often disarms her audience. She often moves her audience in tears in the way she relates the stories of old which she re-enacts and makes it so vividly. She puts 100% energy in whatever she is at. A personality you should not miss.

A rare gem in the sangha. You will love her for this unique quality of sincerity.

### **Other buildings in the temple compound**

The Uposatha being the most important, and we have introduced you to it already. It was built during the first abbot's period. We have also a new library where it is used also as classroom. This is situated right behind the Uposatha hall. It was build by Ven.Dhammananda, the second abbot.



Then we have the Medicine Buddha Vihara in the back where visitors frequented to view the largest and beautiful medicine Buddha. The first in Thailand with this large size.



By the end of 2014 we should also have Yasodhara Vihara ready, an all purpose 3-storey building. With a large dining area on the second floor and a large hall to house the 13 statues of Arahat Theris. On the ground floor there is a sufficient space to park 40 cars. We are working on the third floor at present (April 2014)

### **Bodhisattalaya Residential building**



This is Bodhisattalaya, a 3-storey residential building with 20 rooms for double occupancy with attached bathroom, to house 40 nuns at one time.



## **Yasodhara Vihara**

Towards the end of 2012 the old wooden structure which was former school was removed. In its place, now we have Yasodhara Vihara. It took 2 full years to have the building completed, Jan.2013-Dec.2014. the top floor housed the statues of 13 enlightened bhikkhunis in the Buddha's time. A large hall to accommodate up to 300 people. There is also a space to be used as exhibition hall.

The second floor is used as dining area and kitchen. The 2 rooms on the western end is used for meeting room. On Sunday afternoon it is converted into a clinic to provide for health care for the community. The service was opened only June 31,2015.

The ground floor is used as parking lot, the space is available to park 40 cars. There is also front desk and book store to welcome visitors.

### **Temple Philosophy**

The members of the temple are known as sangha members, they are bhikkhunis, sikkhamanas and samaneris . They are conscious of their responsibilities:

1. Strengthening Buddhist teaching within one's committed life.
2. Working for the development of others.
3. Creating work,
4. Creating system to sustain both works and sangha members
5. .Creating a strong sangha.

## **The Sangha**



Sangha means community, here we mean community of nuns of various levels. We have 3 levels in our temple. The fully ordained are the bhikkhunis, there are 7 of them, all of them received their full ordination from Sri Lanka. On Buddhist days they wear bright saffron robes distinguishing them from the rest.

The second levels are sikkhamanas, there are also 5 of them, they are novices going through intensive 2-year training to become bhikkhunis. They sit next in line from bhikkhunis. And the last category are the samaneris. Right now we have two new comer going through training as novices.

During vassa of 2015 we will have 5 more bhikkhunis from India to join us for Sumalee training course.

On full moon and dark moon, the bhikkhuni sangha will attend to receiving instruction from senior monk. Then they return to recite the Patimokkha, (the monastic rules). This takes up their whole afternoon.

### **Meal times**



We have 2 meals a day, breakfast at 7.15 AM, lunch at 11.15 AM

If you are lay, you might request light evening meal at 6 PM.

### **Going for Almsround**

At least 3 Sangha members go out for alms round on Sunday and Wan Pra (Buddhist day). They start out early at 6 AM as visitors you may like to follow them. The walk is one hour.

### **Library**



The library is open from 8 AM to 5 PM we have both Eng. And Thai books.

Foreigners can enjoy reading the books, with only one request, to put them back where you pick them up from. Please do not take the books out of the library.

You may like to have certain books photo copied, approach the front desk for arrangement and payment.

## Community time



This is a requirement for everyone staying at our temple, whether as a guest or regular member. We spend 1 hr. together doing cleaning, raking, etc. We consider this time spent together as equalizer. It is a beautiful way of giving, best kind of giving is to give up our ego, our holding on to illusive self.

## Dress code

You are living in a temple, therefore cover yourself properly. Skin tight would not be comfortable for sitting in the shrine room when you come up for morning and evening chanting. It will be ideal if you can wear white, if not, then it is also acceptable.

## Note

If you remember that you come to the temple to practice, and the first note for practice is to look inward, yourself, for improvement. Looking outward, you can end up only criticizing others.

We wish that you have a pleasant and productive stay in this unique space primarily for women.

## For donation

Siam Commercial Bank,  
Saving acc. "Songdhammakalyani fund",  
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