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two states, Palestine and Israel. It is a warm peace between two equals enjoying mutually beneficial economic and social cooperation. Despite the brutal repression of Palestinians over the last four decades, I believe when Israel sees Palestinians as equals, and not as a subjugated people upon whom it can impose its will, such a vision can come true. Indeed it must. Palestinians are ready to end the conflict. We are ready to sit down now with any Israeli leader, regardless of his history, to negotiate freedom for the Palestinians, a complete end of the occupation, security for Israel and creative solutions to the plight of the refugees while respecting

Israel's demographic concerns. But we will only sit down as equals and not as supplicants; as partners, not as subjects; as seekers of a just and peaceful solution, not as a defeated nation grateful for whatever scraps are thrown our way. For despite Israel's overwhelming military advantage, we possess something even greater: the power of justice.

*Yasir Arafat was elected president of the Palestinian Authority in 1996 and is also chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization.*



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## REMEMBERING ALEX GUNASEKERA

Gananath Obeyesekere

I was saddened to hear of the recent death of Alex (U.A.) Gunasekera. In the early sixties when we were young lecturers at Peradeniya Alex, Sarathchandra and I were close friends. We were a kind of trio, all three interested at the time in varied aspects of Sinhala society and traveled to many areas of the Western and Southern provinces to study communal and exorcistic rituals. Alex also helped Sarathchandra in his research on folk theatre and me in my work on the Goddess Pattini. He was a great companion and those who knew him will remember his wonderful witticisms and his hearty full-throated laughter. He was an enormously erudite person not only in the field of anthropology but also in the Indic literature in which he was nurtured. His research speciality was the Kandyan period social organization and over the years he amassed a large amount of material both from Sinhala sources and from the colonial archives. But he was a perfectionist unable to put down in writing what he had so painstakingly garnered.

Alex studied oriental languages in the University of Ceylon at Colombo, worked for many years as the ethnologist of the Colombo Museum and published many important articles in the Museum journal, *Spolia Zeylanica*. He combined his knowledge of Indic languages with social anthropology when he studied that subject at Oxford with one of the giants of the disciplines Sir E.E. Evans Pritchard who was both his teacher and friend. He returned to Sri Lanka with a Master's degree and in addition to his museum responsibilities he was also a visiting lecturer in Sociology at Peradeniya during the late sixties and early seventies. Senior scholars in sociology and social anthropology such as S. J. Tambiah and Ralph Pieris were his friends. There were also many others no doubt within and outside of academia. Alex was a caring teacher who became friends with his students some of whom are now senior professors and lecturers at Peradeniya and Vidyodaya where he also taught for some time. He resigned from Vidyodaya and went to live in Oxford where he lectured at the Oxford Polytechnic (now a University) till his retirement a few years ago. He was a very close friend of the late Lalith Atulathmudali, whom he knew at Oxford. Politics, however, was not his forte and while he was loyal to his political friends he was distressed with the degradation of the nation's political life and its drastic turn to political violence that resulted, among other things, in Atulathmudali's tragic death, an event that affected him deeply.

Alex suffered a serious stroke in his apartment at Oxford but he recovered after some time owing to his fortitude and his creative use of Buddhist meditation. At Oxford his friend, the Buddhist scholar, Richard Gombrich and his wife Sanjukta, were a source of support. I met him many times in England when visiting there and always when he came to Sri Lanka. The first stroke did not get him down; he spoke to me of his plans to publish his massive collection of documents on the social organization of the late Kandyan kingdom. But this was not to be; he had another, a more serious stroke, over a year ago when he was in Sri Lanka. He was bedridden and paralyzed, unable to speak. I found it traumatic to see him in that state; the vibrant being whom I knew so well, now helpless and perhaps unable to recognize people. Seeing him in that state is one of those nightmares I have to live with; and it must be especially so for the loved ones who cared for him through those long days and nights. Alex's illness ought to make us realize that there comes a time when death must be welcomed; there is a time to live and a time to die. And because that strong voice and infectious laughter has been stilled and because Alex left an uncompleted project I can only hope that some younger scholar will recover his research material and write it up as a living tribute to him.

I do not think Alex was a conventionally religious person. Yet, like many other intellectuals of his generation, such as his friend Sarathchandra, he strongly identified himself with the tolerant and compassionate world view of the Buddhist doctrinal tradition. I cannot imagine him comfortable with religious platitudes. Yet, Sri Lankan convention demands that when one writes an obituary of a friend, a fellow scholar and rare human being one must say something about death and what might lie beyond. Now that death has laid his cold hand on him I can only hope that any *prarthanas* that Alex made while he was living be realized in whatever afterlife that he wished for himself. And may his son and daughter and his grandchildren, in their differing ways, be inspired in their own lives by Alex's legacy as a scholar, a thinker and a Buddhist humanist. For, as the female sage Diotima said in Plato's *Symposium*, there is one way in which we human beings might be permitted a form of immortality, irrespective of our formal and sometimes irreconcilable religious beliefs and that is in the continuity of our lives in those of our descendants and in those whom we have loved and cared for.

