

Exhortations

by
The Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw
of
Burma



Translated by
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First published for the 50th Anniversary
of the
Buddha Sāsanānuggaha Organization
for a Golden Jubilee
Memorial Journal in 1999

New Edition
Edited by
Bhikkhu Pesala
October 2019
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Editor's Foreword

About The Mahāsi Tradition

The Most Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw was invited to Rangoon by the former Prime Minister of Burma, U Nu, to be the teacher at a new meditation centre donated by Sir U Thwin, a wealthy philanthropist.

From December 1949 the Sayādaw started teaching the method of insight meditation that pays attention to the four elements, which he had learnt from his teacher, Mingun Jetavan Sayādaw. This method later became world-famous as the Mahāsi meditation method, which advocates contemplation of the element of motion in the movements of the abdomen. The contemplation of abdominal movements is the starting point for the practice, but the meditator soon learns that he or she must be mindful of many other things too. In short, one must be mindful of each and every activity of the body and mind, throughout the while day, without a break.

In the early years, meditators had to practise from 3:00 a.m. until 11:00 p.m., but the Sayādaw later allowed a maximum of six hours sleep out of compassion for those with more defilements and less energy. The Sayādaw always followed the monastic discipline strictly, and, as his exhortations show, he expected his disciples to follow suit. Every year his disciples would gather from all over Burma to listen to his exhortation. This annual assembly continues after his death, with tape recordings of the Sayādaw's teaching, and sermons by his leading disciples.

Below are two of the Sayādaw's annual exhortations here so that everyone can know about the purity and excellence of the Mahāsi tradition. I first edited these for publication in the Golden Jubilee Memorial Journal published for the 50th Anniversary of the Buddha Sāsanānuggaha Organization while I was staying in Rangoon.

This latest edition translates some more Pāli terms.

Bhikkhu Pesala
October 2019

Exhortation

by

Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw

at the

23rd Annual Assembly of His Disciples

Translated by U Sunanda

First, I would like to express my satisfaction to see so many meditation instructors, administrators and devotees from meditation centres throughout the country. I am very glad to see your unwavering and united effort in making this Annual Assembly a great success. I would like to greet you with my warmest blessings for your health, prosperity, security and freedom from all suffering. Now I will give my admonishment to the meditation instructors and senior administrators of the meditation centres, as I have done in previous years. I will deal with seven matters:

1. Strict observance of the Vinaya
2. Profound reverence for the Dhamma
3. Correctness of the method
4. Perpetuation of the centres
5. Co-operation and co-ordination
6. Next Year's programme
7. Advice on teaching

Strict Observance of the Vinaya

*“Vinaya nāma buddha sāsanaṃ āyu,
vinaye ṭhite sāsanaṃ ṭhitaṃ hoti.”*

As expressed in the Commentary, the Vinaya is the ‘life’ of the Buddha’s dispensation. The dispensation is alive only when the Vinaya prevails, and prevalence of the Vinaya depends on those who observe and practise it strictly. That is why everyone who reveres and cares for the preservation of the dispensation should observe the Vinaya most respectfully, and should also urge his followers and close associates to do the same. The Lord Buddha exhorted his disciples to observe the Vinaya strictly as follows:

“Idha bhikkhave bhikkhu silavā hoti, pāṭimokkha saṃvara-saṃvuto viharati, ācāragocara sampanno, aṇumattesu vajjesu bhayadassāvī, samādāya sikkhamati sikkhāpadesu.” (Vism.15)

In this dispensation a bhikkhu must observe strict morality (*sīla*), that is *Pāṭimokkha Sīla*. The meaning of ‘*Pāṭimokkha*’ is that those who strictly comply with it can escape the dangers of rebirth in the lower realms (*apāya*): the animal world, the ghost world, the demon world, and hell. In brief, that means abstaining from committing unwholesome deeds and from speaking unwholesome words. Moreover, to safeguard *Pāṭimokkha Sīla* one must possess noble moral conduct and proper resort (*ācāragocara sampanno*). This is a very wide subject — for a detailed explanation one can refer to the ‘*Visuddhimagga Silaniddesa*’ (p.16, M.57 etc.) I hope that you are all well-versed in it.

Then, to observe the *Pāṭimokkha* fully and wholeheartedly one must see fear in the slightest fault (*aṇumattesu vajjesu bhayadassāvī*). There are seven classes of offence that a bhikkhu can fall into. Out of these seven, offences of wrong-doing (*dukkhaṭṭa*) and wrong-speech (*dubhāsita*) are the least serious. However, even these minor and apparently unimportant rules can send one to the four lower worlds if breached intentionally. So, realising the danger of suffering in the realms of misery (*apāya*), one should strive to be totally free from even the slightest misconduct.

“Saddhāsadhano hiso Pāṭimokkha saṃvaro” — *Pāṭimokkha Sīla* is to be fulfilled with strong faith. It would not be too much of a burden to observe for those who have strong faith. As you have all practised Satipaṭṭhāna meditation, you must all have strong faith. So, with unwavering determination you should all most humbly observe the Vinaya discipline strictly. Nowadays, most bhikkhus are getting lax in observing the codes of conduct regarding the proper wearing of the robes, restraining the eyes, using money, dealing with lay supporters and so forth. As the most senior responsible persons in meditation centres you should all most earnestly observe all of the Vinaya rules, without exception. The Buddha exhorted, “*Aṇumattesu vajjesu bhayadassāvī*” — seeing fear in the slightest fault, which can result in abominable suffering. Whatever the Buddha exhorted should be regarded as moral directive. I remind you again to observe the Vinaya discipline most earnestly yourselves and also to urge your subordinates to do the same.

In this main meditation centre of Rangoon, you can all see that we observe the Vinaya discipline to our utmost and we also try to fulfil the virtues of fewness of wishes (*appiccho*), contentment (*santutthi*) and destruction of defilements (*sallekha*) as much as we can by abstaining from smoking, betel-chewing and other such frivolous and degrading habits. By such abstinence we gain more time for the noble practice of study (*pariyatti*) and practice (*paṭipatti*), and we gain the respect of our devotees.

I am very glad to hear that some of the branch meditation centres are also following the same tradition. So, I most ardently wish that you may all be able to observe the strict Vinaya discipline and also practice the faith-inspiring virtues (*pasādika*) of gracious and amiable conduct, resulting in worthwhile benefits for you all and for the dispensation of the practice (*paṭipatti sāsaṇa*).

Profound Reverence for the Dhamma

What are the things to revere? They are none other than mindfulness, concentration and wisdom, which you attain by practising Satipaṭṭhāna Vipassanā. You must all practise yourselves whenever you have the chance, and also urge and instigate others to practise by inspirational teaching. It is most important that since you are all urging others to practise, there must be no negligence on your part.

Correctness of the Method

People come to practise mindfulness meditation in your centre with full confidence in you. So it is vital that meditation instructors should teach, instruct and guide the meditators precisely and fully to enable them to attain concentration and insight. You must instruct them correctly in the Mahāsi meditation method in accordance with the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta to attain the seven purifications (*visuddhi*) and the sixteen insight knowledges (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*) from analytical knowledge of mind and matter (*nāmarūpa-pariccheda-ñāṇa*) to reflective knowledge (*paccavekkhaṇa-ñāṇa*), by contemplating the physical and mental phenomena at the moment of their occurrence.

I have heard that some branch centres are teaching all kinds of meditation methods, though they named their centres as Mahāsi meditation centres. That is very unscrupulous. I would like to warn them through you, that as the name indicates, they should teach the precise and correct Mahāsi meditation method only. I would also like

to convey my advice for them to scrutinise and assess the progress or otherwise of their meditators closely and carefully in accordance with the sermon on the progress of insight meditation, and to give methodical guidance correctly and precisely.

Perpetuation of the Centres

I refer to the perpetuation of those centres, of which you are all in charge. One day we are all going to pass away. At that time the meditation centre can continue functioning properly only if the chief disciple is able to maintain the master's qualities in the Mahāsi tradition. If he is unqualified and incompetent, or irresponsible and negligent, the centre will just degenerate to the status of an ordinary monastery.

It is vital that all of you should choose subordinates, assistants and chief disciples on the basis of reverence for the Dhamma. You should choose only those individuals who have actually practised satipaṭṭhāna meditation to a satisfactory stage, and those who revere the Dhamma and have good ethical and moral conduct. Take great care not to accept in your centre those persons who do not revere the Dhamma, who are negligent or irresponsible with aggressive conduct for any reason. If necessary, you can send them to the main centre in Rangoon for the requisite training.

Co-operation and Co-ordination

The main purpose of holding these Annual Assemblies at this centre is to give you all the opportunity to co-operate and co-ordinate. I started teaching Satipaṭṭhāna Vipassanā at this centre on the full-moon day of Nattaw 1311 BE (4th December 1949). Since the very first anniversary in 1950, the Annual Assembly has been held here every year to instill the spirit of co-operation and co-ordination among the responsible individuals, in promoting and propagating the dispensation of the practice.

I would like to express my appreciation for your sincerity and loyalty in making this annual gathering a success by your united efforts. I regard it as an expression of your reverence for the Dhamma and respect for your elders.

“Abhiṇhaṃ sannipata bahula samaggā sannipatissanti.”

In accordance with the Lord Buddha's admonishment, frequent meetings, regular assemblies and united efforts in co-operation and co-ordination are the sure way to success and progress. In those areas where there are more than one centre, you should co-operate and co-ordinate to work together in mutual respect and friendliness. You should all welcome and encourage whoever teaches the Dhamma if it is in accordance with the correct Satipaṭṭhāna Vipassanā method. No matter who works for it, if it is for the promotion and propagation of the dispensation of the practice (*paṭipatti sāsaṇa*) in the correct way, you should all co-operate with them.

Another warning I want to give you is not to have too much attachment for dwellings, relatives, material property, and supporters. Here in our centre, I do not encourage offering of dwellings for personal ownership. I always direct the donors to offer to the Saṅgha for common use by the meditators. None of the buildings in this centre are my own personal property. So I have no property, no burden and no inheritance to worry about. I hope that all of you will follow this example of non-attachment, and thus have fewer problems and more time to devote to the progress of the Dhamma in a tranquil atmosphere.

Next Year's Programme

To make the most of your precious time and talent, I intend to include Dhamma recitation in thirty minute sessions by you all, taken in turn. We will start three days before the actual anniversary day. Recitation of suttas from the Pāli Canon with brief Burmese translations by meditation lecturers and teachers in the mornings and afternoons. Major sermons will be given by selected famous teachers (*Dhammakathikā*) every evening. A detailed programme will be drawn up and prescribed by the authorities after due consultation with various senior persons. Suggestions and advice are welcome.

Advice on Teaching

Finally we come to the subject of teaching. It is for you to give suggestions on the most beneficial points in regard to the teaching of the Dhamma. I would just like to give some outlines for you to discuss.

1. Teaching by you as meditation masters should mainly be confined to the subject of mindfulness meditation, precisely in accordance with the original texts of the Pāli Tipiṭaka.
2. Avoid the melodious recitation of Pāli stanzas.
3. Do not use comical, imaginary, or frivolous tales and stories just to attract the lay audience.
4. As you are under the patronage of the Mahāsi Meditation Centre, give teachings and instructions according to the Mahāsi meditation method.
5. Take care to avoid statements, expressions or criticisms that are detrimental to others.

In conclusion, I wish that all of you may be able to practise morality, concentration and wisdom to the fullest extent, and urge and assist your devotees and disciples to do the same. May all of you, by striving for the promotion and propagation of the dispensation, attain the noble bliss of nibbāna and final deliverance from suffering in the shortest and easiest way.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

Exhortation

by

Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw

at the

27th Annual Assembly of His Disciples

Translated by Daw Mya Tin

*“Dhammo have rakkhati dhammacāri, Dhammo suciṇṇo
sukhamāvahati, Esānisaṃso dhamme suciṇṇe, Na duggati
gacchati dhammacāri.”*

Dhammo: virtuous conduct; **dhammacāri**: one who practises the dhamma; have: indeed **rakkhati**: takes care of, guards.

- Dhamma takes care of the person who practises it. It does not take care of the person who does not practise it; it only takes care of the person who practises it.

Suciṇṇo: properly practised; **dhammo**; **sukham**: happiness, well-being; **āvahati**: brings

- Properly practised, Dhamma brings happiness to the person who practises it.

Dhammacāri: one who practises the dhamma; **duggati**: bad destination, miserable realms; **nagacchati**: does not go, is not reborn; **esa**: this; **dhamme suciṇṇe**: properly practised dhamma, virtuous conduct; **anisaṃso**: benefit

- One who practises the Dhamma properly does not go to bad destinations.

Virtuous conduct comprises morality, (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*). Performing good deeds is moral conduct. If one performs good deeds, the practice of those good deeds takes care of the person who performs them. It enables one to have one’s wishes fulfilled. It also protects one from being reborn in bad destinations. This is the benefit of well practised Dhamma. So, good conduct is very important.

Usually, we only have a few who come here to observe the Uposatha precepts. Today, we have a bigger audience since we also have the annual meeting here. This being so, I shall have to say what is usually said on such occasions — what I have said all along.

Factors for Harmony

The Buddha Sāsānānuggaha Organization was set up to promote the Sāsana. Sir U Thwin was the founder. After the death of U Thwin, others performed their respective duties. To work together in harmony, a good character is essential. There are four factors, called the Saṅgahadhamma, which enable one to work in harmony with others: generosity (*dāna*), polite and pleasant speech (*piyavācā*), benevolence (*atthacariya*), and impartiality (*samānattā*).

Dāna means what is given out of charity. As a matter of fact, this Organization does not need such donations. In other organizations, if the members donate to the organisation they will become more intimate and the organisation will become more united. This organization is not so much in need of such donations.

Piyavācā means pleasant speech. That is very much needed. One must learn to speak kind and pleasant words. This is very important everywhere and always. If you should speak offensive words that jar on the sensibilities of others, even the goodwill of an intimate friend will be destroyed. This virtue is indispensable. Everyone young and old alike, should reflect whether their words are pleasant or not; it is crucial that what one says should be pleasant.

Atthacariya means benevolence. One should work for the welfare of others. When there is anything to be done for others, you should help them if you can, in both words and deed. *Atthacariya* means that one must do things for the welfare of others. In the Buddha Sāsānānuggaha Organization, the important thing is to perform your major and minor religious duties. If you just enrol yourself as a member and do nothing, it will not be proper. It will only be well and good if you do what you can; it is not proper if you do not do anything. This point is also vital. It is what I have always stressed. One must do things that are beneficial. For example, in this meditation centre we have a committee called "*Hitesi*" which is fairly well known. The leaders of this committee work together in harmony and every one of them works hard, and of course, they have done a very good job, so that committee makes good progress. If every one of the committee and ordinary members of our organization were to perform their individual duties like them, the Buddha Sāsānānuggaha Organization also would make much progress in respect of the promotion of the dispensation. If one intends to become

a member of this organization, it would be better first to consider whether one would be able to properly discharge one's duties or not, and become a member only if one can do one's duty well. Once you become a member of this organization, it is very important that you discharge your duties well.

Samānattā means impartiality. This means to treat others as one's equal. If you act scornfully towards people, assuming them to be people of no consequence, that will destroy the harmony. However high your position may be, you must treat others as your equal. That is important. In the Saṅgha too, if senior monks, having the idea that they are senior, talk impolitely to other monks, those who were spoken to thus will resent it, and this will cause much friction and disunity among the monks. That is why, when talking to others one must talk respectfully and politely. Even to a young member of the Saṅgha one should talk politely. You may address him thus: "Venerable, where have you come from?" You must not say: "Hey you, where have you come from?" This is not polite. Do not use such terms as "min" and "ngar" (which are intimate, but for monks deemed to be rather rude forms of "you" and "I"). You must speak respectfully to the young and the old in a manner suitable for each of them. This is *Samānattā*, the fourth Saṅgahadhamma. It is very important that one should behave in accordance with these four factors of Saṅgahadhamma, which lead to harmony.

Then there is the additional fact that a religious organization should not be like a political organization. In a religious organization one should behave differently. Religious affairs are not the same as economic affairs. In religious affairs, it is necessary for people who are willing and able to contribute their services to confer in harmony and act as a team. As for politics, it also concerns economics. By being engaged in politics one may be appointed in certain positions, one may get certain privileges and also gain good business opportunities. In such a situation, in keeping with the traditions of the mundane world, there will be keen competition for privileges. People will naturally try to get supporters and authority to strengthen their position. That is the way it is done. However, in religious matters it is not proper to act like this. Such things will lead to the arising of cliques and rivalry among members of the Sāsanānuggaha Organization, which will be very harmful to the sense of harmony. From the point

of view of the dispensation it is very detrimental. Of course, from the mundane point of view, people may compete as much as their resources allow them, but from the religious point of view, forming cliques and trying to get the upper hand is not good. You cannot say that it is commendable. I warn you not to entertain such thoughts.

Six Virtues of a Leader

Therefore, I will repeat the six virtues of a leader (*nāyaka*) that I have often mentioned before.

The first virtue is tolerance (*khamā*). This is the most important of the six. It is not good to be intolerant. One must be tolerant, then things will turn out smoothly.

The second virtue is manly vigour or energy (*uṭṭhāna*), one should be energetic and play an active role in doing things.

Thirdly, comes vigilance or wakefulness (*jāgariya*). One should be vigilant, or always on the alert.

Fourth is distribution or sharing (*saṃvibhāga*), i.e. sharing things with others. As I have said earlier, this is not so necessary in this organisation.

Fifthly, there is compassion or sympathy (*dayā*). One should have sympathy and kindness towards others. One should do whatever is necessary out of sympathy for the young and the unfortunate. As regards those are equal or superior to oneself, one should exercise good-will towards them.

The last virtue is having foresight (*ikkhanā*). A person in a responsible position should be able to foresee what will happen if something is done, or what benefits can be gained by doing something else. The person not taking direct responsibility will only give advice. Such recommendations should be accepted by the responsible person after careful consideration. It is not proper to keep on rejecting the suggestions of others.

In conclusion, to those who would become members of the Sāsanānuggaha Organization, I should like to advise them to seriously carry out their respective duties in accordance with these six virtues of a leader and the four factors of the Saṅgha Dhamma. It is important that all of you should work with a firm resolve so that the Buddha's dispensation may prosper. Just being a member without anything to show by way of services, etc. would not be proper, it would be proper only if there is something to show. I therefore

ferently wish that the dispensation may prosper and progress, as a result of both old and new members working together in harmony, thinking only of the Dhamma, untainted by any trace of politics. May the members succeed in working for the promotion and dissemination of the Buddha's teaching — just as I have fervently hoped for.

