

DISCOURSE  
ON  
DHAMMADĀYĀDA SUTTA

INTRODUCTION TO FIRST EDITION

This is the English translation of Ven. Mahāsi Sayādaw's talk on Dhammadāyāda sutta. The talk was given on the anniversary of the Ovāda and Pūjā (admonition and devotion) day in 1970 and it was repeated on a similar occasion in the following year. The fact that Ven. Sayādaw gave the same talk twice leaves no doubt about the deep significance of the sutta.

In fact, Dhammadāyāda sutta of Majjhima Nikāya is an important teaching of the Buddha that deserves the serious attention of those who adore the Buddha-dhamma. For the substance of the sutta is that as worthy disciples of the Buddha, Bhikkhus should avoid the pursuit of material wealth and seek the heritage of the Dhamma through the practice of the

Eightfold Noble Path. This message of the sutta accords with the basic teachings of the Buddha.

From the Buddhist point of view, the root cause of suffering is desire and so it is necessary for us to overcome desire as much as possible if we want to achieve liberation. This teaching especially concerns the bhikkhus who as dedicated disciples of the Buddha are supposed to have set their heart on Nibbāna. The Buddha founded the Sanghā as a community of men and women who seek inner peace and liberation through non-attachment. The bhikkhus's way of life based on the ideal of non-attachment is familiar to everyone who studies the Vinaya Pitaka, the division for the Pāli Canon that deals with the disciplinary rules for the Buddhist monks.

The bhikkhu is expected to share his daily collection of food with other monks. In the words of the Buddha, "Even if it were his last bit, his last morsel of food, a monk would not enjoy its use without sharing it, if there were anyone to receive it." (Udāna) The hoarding of food is forbidden and so is the possession

of property other than the bare necessities of life. Even so, according to Miss I. B. Horner, an English Pāli scholar who has made a special study of Vinaya Pitaka, some rules relating to the begging bowl "point to a time when communal ownership was more actual than nominal." The Vinaya Pitaka specifies miscellaneous items of property such as Vihāra, bed, chair, vessel, cockery, etc., which belong to the Sanghā and cannot be given to an individual monk either by gift or division.

Of all the material objects of human desire the most alluring is gold which has enslaved many people. The bhikkhu is of course strictly forbidden to possess gold or silver and the Vinaya Pitaka contains detailed instructions for dealing with cases of transgression. If a monk has any piece of gold or silver, he is required to confess his transgression to the assembly of Sangha and forfeit it. The forfeited object is then handed to an *upāsakā* (layman) who may throw it away or purchase for the monks what they are permitted to receive. This the monks may all enjoy except the guilty monk. If there is no *upāsakā* to accept the gold, a trustworthy

monk is officially assigned to discard it. He must see to it that the place where it lies is not to be recognized by any sign.

Professor Oldenberg's comment on the Buddhist Sangha's prohibition against the possession of gold and silver is worthy of note. He says: "By noting so clearly so by this prohibition and by the obedience which it has obtained is it guaranteed that ancient Buddhist Order did really remain free and pure from all hankering after worldly power as well as worldly enjoyment. Never could it have so completely surrendered the possession of gold and therefore all possibility of outer action, had it not been in truth precisely that alone which it professed to be, a community of those who sought for peace and deliverance in separation from everything earthly." ("The Buddha," p. 358)

Of course the Vinaya Pitaka reflects only the way of life in the early Buddhist Sangha. About 200 years after the *parinibbāna* of the Buddha the first schism occurred over the issue of the acceptance of certain kinds of offering from the laity. It is said that

today in Sri Lankā there are landlords among the bhikkhus and even in Burma which prides herself on having preserved the purest Theravāda tradition, the Sangha as a whole is a far cry from the ideal society as envisioned by the Buddha. Nowadays many Buddhist monks are bent on seeking their material welfare rather than on living up to the teaching of the Buddha.

This preoccupation of the monks with the pursuit of material wealth is a matter of grave concern to Ven. Mahāsi Sayādaw as well as to other Buddhists, monks and lay followers alike, who have the welfare of the *Buddha-sāsana* at heart. Hence Ven. Mahāsi Sayādaw's emphasis on the need for the practice of non-attachment in many of his talks. Thus in his discourse on Sallekha Sutta he says: "A bhikkhu should not ask for food, robes or dwelling unless the person who is thus requested happens to be his relative or to have invited him. Neither should he nor other bhikkhus use anything that is received in this way. Asking outright for donations as is being done nowadays is very unbecoming of a bhikkhu. A bhikkhu should not show

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signs or make indirect remarks that would induce a layman to offer food or robes."

In short, a good bhikkhu is a monk who live up to the teaching of the Buddha, thereby making the heritage of the Dhamma (*Dhammadāyāda*) the cornerstone of his way of life. Such a bhikkhu need not bother about food, robes and other necessities of life for he is assured of material comforts in a predominantly Buddhist country like Burma. In fact, it is a matter of common knowledge that lay Buddhists will vie with one another for offering the best food to the monks who are reputed for their moral purity and spiritual attainment.

We believe that the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw's talk on Dhammadāyāda sutta will receive the serious attention of all Buddhists, monks and lay followers alike, who have the welfare of the Buddha Sāsana at heart. It will be appreciated by those who want to understand the Buddha's message and follow his noble teaching for their inner peace and liberation.

Translator