

'Sunday Dhamma Talk' on Radio Thailand

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By Ven. Phra Anil Dhammasakiyo



Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhassa.

Homage to the Blessed One, the Worthy One, the Rightly Self-awakened One.

Dīghāyuko bhavatu sanghapatī suvaddhano

Khemī sukhī ca akutobhayupaddavo atho

Pāletu sabbaganamīdha pitāva atrajanti.

With the power of the excellent Triple Gem, may His Holiness Somdet Phra Nyanasamvara, the Supreme Patriarch (Suvaddhana), be blessed with longevity, good health, happiness, and distant from all kinds of dangers. May all Buddhists be protected by him, like a father protects his children.

Good morning and welcome to the Radio Thailand Sunday 'Dhamma Talk.' I am Venerable Phra Anil Dhammasakiyo of Mahamakut Buddhist University and Wat Bovornnives Viharn, your host for this morning's Dhamma Talk. This is a weekend Dhamma sermon brought to you by Radio Thailand to keep you remind and reflect upon your spirituality based on teachings of the Lord Buddha in the chaotic modern life.

Today, for the increase of awareness and wisdom and in celebration of the 95th birthday of His Holiness Somdet Phra Nyanasamvara, the Supreme Patriarch of Kingdom of Thailand, which is on the coming 3rd of October, I shall present here with a brief biography of His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch and his teachings of Dhamma as a dhammic tribute to His Holiness.

A jubilant 95th birthday celebration is on its way under the Royal patronage of His Majesty King Bhumibol at Wat Bovornnives Viharn, His Holiness' residential monastery. The celebration is taking place from the first to the third of October Common Era 2008.

Indeed, the 3rd of October is another significant day for Thai Buddhists as it is the auspicious birthday of His Holiness Somdet Phra Nyanasamvara, the Supreme Patriarch of Kingdom of Thailand. It is, therefore, the moment of joy and an occasion for Thai Buddhists, both clergies and lay, to pay their respect and dedicate good wishes upon him, wishing him a good health, longevity, happiness and happy birthday according to custom. This year His Holiness is accomplishing his enriching 95th birthday and entering his fresh 96th year for even greater success and fruitful life to come. Out of 19 Supreme Patriarchs of Ratankosin Period of Thailand, the current Supreme Patriarch, His Holiness Somdet Phra Nyanasamvara is the most long lived Supreme Patriarch.

His Holiness Somdet Phra Nyanasamvara who is the 19th Supreme Patriarch of the Kingdom of Thailand was born in Kanchanaburi province. He was named 'Chareon' which means 'prosperous.'

As a child, young Chareon loved to imitate monk activities in his childish playing such as using palm leaves as a ceremonial fan. The local temple Wat Devasangharam in Kanchanburi played a key role in his early life; his aunt Heng often took him to the temple and when he was eight Chareon entered the temple school. At age 14, young Charoen was ordained as a novice at Wat Devasangharam his native town temple where he stayed for the coming year.

His brother recalls of His Holiness that young Chareon was overwhelmingly influenced by the mural painting of Buddha's life on the temple walls which greatly stimulate the boy's imagination. During that period his preceptor Luang Pho Dee or Phra Khru Adulayasamanakit used an ancient method to familiarize the novice with the Dhamma reciting each evening, verses from the sermon known as the Seven Noble Wealth until the boy could memories them by heart. Recognizing the novice's exceptional abilities his preceptor decided to send him for further studies to the well reputed temple school of Wat Saneha in Nakhon Pathom.

It was here that His Holiness furthered his Pali studies. Since His Holiness excels in his studies, it was decided to send him to the famous temple school at Wat Bovornnives in Bangkok, the most important centre of the Dhammayut activities and traditionally link to the royal family. When he was 20, His Holiness returned to the Kanchanaburi where he was ordained as a Bhikkhu of Mahanikaya Order, during that same year he was then re-ordained as a Dhammayut monk in Wat Bovornnives Viharn. In a way, His Holiness is indeed a unique Supreme Patriarch as he has been ordained in both institutions of Mahanikaya and Dhammayut of Thailand.

Along his life, His Holiness began to focus his entire concentration on three major aspects: Learning, Teaching and Meditating.

As for learning, after perfecting his Pali and Sanskrit, he proved to be the keen student of various languages such as English, French, Chinese and even German. With this unique ability, His Holiness has more access of information than other monks. Not only he loves to read and study Canonical books in Pali but he compares them with other Canons of other Buddhist schools and new information as well as modern science. This puts him in a very unique position of understanding the dhamma as truly a 'timeless' teachings and its application suit to modern scientific world.

As for teaching, His Holiness is infatigable preacher who teaches with compassion and aims for clear comprehension of listeners. His teaching indeed touches audiences' hearts. He explains dhamma in a very simple and clear language. Of course, not just as a theory or philosophy, but something which is applicable in our daily life.

As for meditating, apart from his secular and religious proficiency His Holiness is always keenly interested in meditation and concentration practices until he is well known among meditation masters as one of the great meditation masters of Thailand but he is better in a sense that he can equally maneuver very demanding responsibilities of governing Thai Sangha as a whole as well as his inner development of meditational skill. He is indeed a very few meditation master available in the heart of Bangkok metropolitan city.

His Holiness has devoted much effort to educate both clerics and lay people in the tenants of Buddhism. Indeed, he has educated the public on Buddhism ever since he was a Pali scholar. He has also taught the Buddhist Scriptures as a Dhamma scholar, even becoming a director of the Wat Bovornnives Viharn Institute and later played a great role in founding first ever Buddhist University of Thailand, the Mahamakut Buddhist University where Buddhism and modern sciences meet in harmony as a means of educating modern Buddhist clergies to be well versed both in Buddhism and secular subjects which are not against Buddhist doctrines. So that monks in Thailand can be a great source of resource of Thailand both in the field of development of the country and spirituality.

His installation as abbot of Wat Bovoranives Viharn in 1961 brought him many responsibilities. As part of his role as a preceptor there, he taught monks and novices academically and spiritual training. In addition, not limiting his teaching to those in monkhood, he also taught lay Buddhists by teaching and guiding meditation twice a week.

When he was a young monk he always visit many forest meditation centres in north and north-east of Thailand. Following the Lord Buddha's saying: 'Even when one is in a town one can make oneself feeling that one is in a forest alone then your mind will be peaceful.' Accordingly, one of the first task that His Holiness undertook after became abbot of the Wat Bovoranives Viharn was to undertake numerous renovation on the temple grounds but most importantly His Holiness instigated a massive botanical refurbishing.

Later the burden of the ecclesiastical administrative duties was so great he was unable to spare his time to enter forest meditation centres as before. Therefore, His Holiness creates his own forest-like seclusion in his own shelter in the city because he is of the view that one should practice meditation and concentration wherever one dwells by creating forest-like seclusion in one's mind.

It was at those years that steady ascend of His Holiness to higher and higher rank began. Between 1961 and 1963 His Holiness was elected to be a member of Supreme Sangha Council and to head the Mahamakut Buddhist University.

In addition to normal ecclesiastical responsibilities, His Holiness was chosen to perform many special tasks of the country. For example, His Holiness was chosen to be the supervisor for His Majesty the King while His Majesty ordained as a Buddhist monk in 1956. His Holiness taught His Majesty the King about Buddhist doctrines throughout the period of monkhood. Similarly, His Holiness was assistant preceptor and teacher for His Royal Highness Crown Prince when His Royal Highness ordained as a Buddhist monk in 1978.

Because of great accomplishments throughout his life, in 1972, the special ecclesiastical title of Somdet Phra Nyanasamvara which was not given to any Buddhist monk for 150 years was bestowed upon to His Holiness by His Majesty King Bhumibol.

And later when he was 75, His Holiness Somdet Phra Nyanasamvara was elevated to the rank to the Supreme Patriarch as the 19th Supreme Patriarch of Kingdom of Thailand. His Holiness has been successfully supervised the Order and Thai Buddhist community since then and this year it is his 19th year as the Sangharaja or the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand and enriching 95th birthday.

We read in the Pali Canon that soon after the Lord Buddha had proclaimed the Dhamma to his first 60 disciples, the Buddha decided to send them out to disseminate his teachings saying: 'Go forth Oh Bhikkhus! for the good of many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, benefit and happiness of gods and men.'

Following the very path shown by the Enlightened One, His Holiness went on to many trips abroad spreading the Dhamma in words and deeds like preaching and setting up numerous monasteries. A particular highlight was his official journey to Nepal in 1985 and to China in 1993. In Nepal, His Holiness assisted the Nepalese Sangha by reestablishing a custom of Theravada ordination in the land of the Buddha. His official trip to People's Republic of China is indeed a historic as he is the first Thai Supreme Patriarch to be officially invited to visit and precede official Buddhist nexus between two countries in the government level with the initiation of the Chinese government itself.

Moreover, as a part of manifestation of 'for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, benefit and happiness of men' His Holiness has initiated and supported an impressive number of constructions and restorations of well over 100 schools, hospital and temples.

His Holiness loves to study. Besides studying the Buddha's teaching in Pali, he also studied other languages when he had an opportunity. As mentioned above, he is fluent in spoken and written English, which has enabled him access to worldly academic knowledge apart from Buddhism. Therefore, his writing not only reflects his knowledge of Buddhist theory and insight into practical Buddhism, but also incorporates and applies up to date knowledge in explaining Buddhism to his contemporary Buddhist citizens, to make them clearly understand the meaning and points in Buddhist teaching.

Early onwards His Holiness recognizes the power of mass media to promote the Dhamma. Using at first the print media later regular broadcast and ultimately even TV and interactive media. His Holiness made sure that the good words of Dhamma were disseminated every possible way.

As a prolific writer, His Holiness manages to write and publish over 150 publications and books on all aspects of Buddhism. For example, as a souvenir for his 95th birthday this year, the birthday celebration committee at Wat Bovornnives Vihara publishes His Holiness' teachings an writing in four books namely สวรรค์ ในคำสอนของพระพุทธศาสนา 'Heaven in Buddhist teaching,' นรกในคำสอนของพระพุทธศาสนา 'Hell in Buddhist teaching,' หายใจให้เป็นสุข 'Happily breathe,' and การพระศาสนา 'the Government of Thai Sangha.'

These four books indeed show his skills on academic field as well as meditation. His Holiness' two books on heaven and hell are truly analytical view on the subject from a Buddhist point of view.

As we are so familiar, in religious sphere, the concept of heaven and hell is a very prominent belief. In many cases, it becomes the goal of religious practice itself. On this very subject, His Holiness critically analyses that the very concept and belief of heaven and hell in Buddhism is a cultural influence of indigenous culture and belief. He states: (I quote) ‘the subject of cosmology appeared in Buddhism is clearly can be seen that it is not ‘Buddhist teaching’ at all but an ancient geography. The concept and belief about it was included in Buddhist Canon merely because of strong influence of popular belief of the time. Later Commentaries further explain about heaven and hell in a greater detail distant itself from the original teaching of the Buddha. If Buddhism teaches such belief on heaven and hell it would not be Buddhism at all but an ancient geography. Buddha wouldn’t be the Buddha who delivered the Noble Truth and ‘timeless’ message for mankind.’ (p. 1) (end of the quote) He then shows in his teaching that the concept of heaven and hell in Buddhism are in fact symbolic, representing the quality of mind and spirituality instead. One can be in heaven and hell in this very earth and life. No need to wait until one dies.

‘Happily breathe’ or หายใจให้เป็นสุข is another collection of His Holiness’ teachings on meditation. In this publication, he explains about mental development. How can one train one’s mind to its ultimate capacity? This is truly a handbook for meditational practice which explains each process in details and easy to be understood and practicable. He states: (I quote) ‘the calmness of mind attached with breathing-in and out results in a very refine state of body and mind. Accordingly, one develops a very refined body and mind. The refined body and mind is indeed the state of bodily peace and mental happiness which can be experienced through mental peace. He is indeed a person whose mind is well cultivated and physically exists in peace and happiness.’ (end of the quote) (p. 74)

These are only few examples of His Holiness’ teachings available to all. As a part of increasing our awareness and wisdom, I take this opportunity to present here with one of his writings on ‘a View of Thailand through Buddhism.’

In Thailand, the practice in Buddhism is voluntary and free. Anybody who wishes to be ordained, to go to Wat to listen to Dhamma preaching, or to perform any virtuous deeds and make merits, can satisfy his desire. Such an opportunity is rarely found in other countries at present, therefore, we all should, greatly appreciate it. We should not be irrational and indiscreet about it. That is, we should not be immersed in this state.

We should consider why we still have this opportunity. It can be said that we do have it owing to the King, who is the great patron of all religions, together with His government, the administrative body, who does not oppress any religion but supports all and those who perform righteous deeds. That is why Buddhism prevails in Thailand. The prevalence of Buddhism can be seen from the great respect for monks paid by everyone here from the King down to ordinary people. If we further consider what causes this state, the answer is the virtue of Buddhism chiefly does. Those who believe in Buddhism apply this virtue to their lives to bring about personal happiness as well as common happiness. This results in prosperity of a small family and even of a community. According to Buddhist principles, those who are related in any way interact well with one another: parents and children, teachers and students, husbands and wives, friends and friends, masters and servants, employers and employees, and even monks and those who respect them. This explains why we live together happily in a small family to a big family that is the country.

Buddhism abounds in virtues, which are contained in Buddhist principles and preaching. Acting according to these principles, a person will treat others well and will help them if he can. In the old days, almost all countries had kings as their rulers, but some did not believe in Buddhism. That is why quite a few underwent many changes as shown today. All Kings of Thailand have always been Buddhists and have ruled the country with the help of the “Ten Dhammas” especially set up for them. Thus, the King takes the firm hold in the minds of all Thai people.

Buddhism is enriched with virtuous principles and it has become the foundation of people’s faith and respect which gave been growing firmly and deeply in all people’s hearts. People keep these principles and use them to guide their conducts so that they could live happily and peacefully

together in a community. For example, parents act as good parents towards their children by raising and supporting them. Children in return are grateful to their parents. They have Dhamma as a strong bond joining them together. Therefore, the three pillars of Thai unity, continuity, and identity or generally known as three symbolic institutions of Nation, Religion and King of Thailand differs from other institutions in non-Buddhist countries in the way that others do not have principles of Buddhism as a bond binding them with the peoples. Then, the common phrase spoken, or the slogan: "The Nation, Religion (or Buddhism) and the King" is not at all non-sense. They really exist and have strength.

We have traditionally believed in Buddhism for a long time and Buddhism directly and indirectly plants confidence and wisdom in people's minds regardless of their status. We can see that monks after ordination have to study Buddhism according to the curriculum. They can also take any course of study that is not opposed to Buddhist disciplines, or, if opposed, only a little. Then, out of their own virtues they will teach people and help them in various ways without interfering with politics. Occasionally, some improvements in religious education and administration have been made by scholarly monks. Up to now, there has been Buddhist education for both monks and lay persons. For monks, there are courses of study at the primary, intermediate and advanced levels of Dhamma. There are also courses of study arranged especially for lay people organized in the same way. For new monks who have just been ordained, they have to study the primary courses of Dhamma which is called "The foundation for newly ordained monks"

In Thailand, there has long been a tradition that people will get ordained in the rainy season during the Buddhist Lent which is about 4 months long. Kings as well as Crown Prince were ordained during this period. During Sukhothai and Ayudhaya Dynasties, there were many kings ordained after their coronation. In Chakri Dynasty, only King Rama V and His Majesty the King Bhumibol were ordained after being crowned, the others were ordained before their coronation. Lay people also like to go into monkhood, thus having an opportunity to study Buddhism including Buddhist principles and the preaching of the Lord Buddha, which are both rational and practical. The practice of these principles will bring about personal happiness as well as common happiness. People of different families and status are under the same Buddhist disciplines, and thus they all undergo fraternal relationship. After ordination, people of all classes, either the king who holds the highest status, or the crown prince, or a poor man, have to live together, and live under the same disciplines as if they were akin in the same family, a Buddhist one. They have Buddhist disciplines as the bond relating them together.

The most important bond of Dhamma is "Samanattata" meaning "impartiality", or "feeling towards others as towards oneself and not proud of oneself". People are similar in some conditions or status and dissimilar in others. For example, they do not enjoy the same wealth. Regardless of men's status, they are respected in varying degrees. They are dissimilar in appearances: some are tall, others are short, quite a few have dark complexion, many have fair. Even fingers of the same man are not of the same length, and his organs are placed differently.

The most important thing is, men are dissimilar according to their actions (Kamma). Some perform virtuous actions, the others perform evil actions, and accordingly they get different results. We have different levels of knowledge too: some have learnt a lot, some have learnt a little. Yet, we have to pass through the same cycle of life, that is, we were born as human beings, then we have to experience old age, illnesses and then death. We are made up of not-self (Anatta), and we all undergo pain and painful feelings (Dukkha). In addition, everybody has his own actions (Kamma): he is an heir of his own actions, receiving the fruits of his own actions without any exception. These are what men have common. And, another thing that they can be similar, is to behave according to Buddhist principles. After the practice of Dhamma that brings about love and respect, men will have righteous actions, speech, and minds, and then share what they get in righteous ways with others. They will be similar in the regular practice of Sila. They will come to think as a Buddhist. In this manner, men will be similar regardless of their positions and status. There will be no gap among them, which means they are close together. With affection there will be no gap. For example, parents and children hold different status, but, when they have affection, they are close, there will

be no gap between them. There is a popular Thai poem about how love fills the gap between persons. It says that with love, we always feel close together though we are as far apart as at the furthest points on earth. If we hate each other, even though we are very near, we turn away from each other as if mountains and woods were between us, and we were as far apart. The word "gap" is heard very often now, as though it were a newly coined word, but in fact it is not new.

The meaning is the same as it is in the old Thai verse mentioned above. The Lord Buddha's teachings result in the unity of men of all classes. This is why Thailand, Buddhism and the King are all united and each leans on one another as firmly as three poles support one another.

As a final thought for today, I would like to say that His Holiness' biography and works have an important value for general public to take it as a model in two different ways: Life model and model of pragmatism.

Even though His Holiness has been in the monastic order all his life, his way of life can be an example to everybody, layman and monks alike. The essence of life or the best thing in life that everybody should take as their goal is surely virtue and virtues for monks and laymen are the same. Take loving-kindness and compassion as examples. Whether they are in the hearts of monks or laymen, they are the same thing.

His Holiness' life is not so different from others in that it has been full of disappointment as well as happiness, success as well as failure. But as he has virtue, which is the essence of his life, his life can be said to have enjoyed more happiness than disappointment. He has had more successes than failures. He is progressively successful as he leads his life to the highest point.

If one analyzes his biography, one can see his five remarkable virtues they are: patience, an inquisitive mind, gratefulness, modesty and respectfulness. These virtues are indeed in need of cultivation among us in our daily life so that we can strive on with our life with a success, peace and happiness.

On this auspicious occasion of the 95th birthday of His Holiness Somdet Phra Nyanasamvara, the Supreme Patriarch of Kingdom of Thailand who is at hospital under close medical care of doctors I invite all listeners to dedicate your good wishes for his good health and longevity. As a birthday present to His Holiness let us all practice his teaching of Dhamma and dedicate all merit accrued from such wholesome thought and practice for His Holiness' perfect health so he can be the spiritual lamppost among us for many years to come.

All are invited to visit Wat Bovornnives at Banglumpoo during the first to third October to participate in many meritorious activities to wish His Holiness Supreme Patriarch happy birthday. There will be places in Wat Bovorn where you can offer your good wishes by signing on the offering good wishes books. There will be offering alms round for 96 monks in Wat Bovornnives Viharn on the 2nd of October at 6.30 am. Interested people are welcome to join in this meritorious dedication by participating in alms offering ceremony. At 4 pm on the 2nd and 3rd of October, there will be chanting ceremony by general public for the good health of His Holiness at Wat Bovorn, I urge all to participate and send your dedication as a birthday gift for his holiness.

On the 3rd October itself, there will be religious ceremony of chanting and offering lunch for monks in the morning under the Royal Patronage of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej. The chanting is performed by all members of Supreme Sangha Council and lunch offering for 496 monks. All are welcome to participate in this royal sponsored ceremony.

For the first week of October, Wat Bovorn also opens the multi-media exhibition under the theme of the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand where one can learn about all 19 Supreme Patriarchs of Kingdom of Thailand. This is another good auspicious occasion to learn about the nation's institution of the Supreme Patriarch and offer your dedication of good wishes to the current Supreme Patriarch.

You can also visit the Supreme Patriarch's website in order to learn about his holiness and send your good wishes on line by visiting at www.sangharaja.org

Last but not the least, I wish you all listeners have a productive and peaceful week ahead and may you all be blessed with happiness and prosperity forever. Also let us wish: ***Dighāyuko hotu sangharājā***, long live the Supreme Patriarch.

You are listening to the Sunday Dhamma talk on Radio Thailand with Venerable Phra Anil Dhammasakiyo of Wat Bovornnives Viharn. If you would like to make any comments or suggestions regarding the programme you are most welcome to do so by posting your valuable comments by emailing at dhammatalk@gmail.com