Recent Master - MAHASI SAYADAW
THE TRUE APOSTLE

Following the footsteps of the Buddha to make available to all men the Universal principles of Truth and to offer to all the knowledge of the Path, the Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw has diligently performed his noble task according to the famous exhortation of the Blessed One, which says:-

"Go ye, O Bhikkhus and wander forth, for the gain of the many, for the welfare of the many, in compassion for the world for the gain, for the welfare of gods and men. Proclaim, O Bhikkhus, the Doctrine glorious, preach ye a life of holiness, perfect and pure."

Min Swe

Words from the author of this website:

This is my greatest honor to present to everyone the True Apostle of the Buddha at this Age - Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw from Burma. I am delighted and gladdened in every corner of my heart when I am making this page.

It was he, who beat the drum of Deathless and woke me up among the sleepers of the world. It was he, who poured that True Eightfold Noble Path into my heart, and helped me regain my Mindfulness.

Without his guidance, I could never appreciate the true Buddha Dhamma to the extent of my realization right now.

I pay my most revered homage to the Buddha, the past Arahants, and Venerable Mahasi

Sayadaw. He was a true son of the Buddha, a true disciple of the Buddha, who beat the drum of the Deathless in this world.

And those who have wisdom shall hear his words, and those who practiced the True Eightfold Noble Path diligently shall realize Nibbana here-and-now.

Yi-Lei Wu
November 24, 2003

"While mindfulness and the mental process of noting become strong and accelerated, the meditator will feel a subtle and slight thrill with a little tremor. A depressing periodic wave of sensations with a mild touch of chill might occur in the back or hinder surface of the body, or in the pervading joy according to nature. ***Don't fear.*** *It is the occurrence of a pervading joy according to nature. There may be a sudden fright or a thrilling sensation on hearing soft voices or feeble sounds.* ***Don't get frightened.*** *It simply indicates consciousness or awareness of the state of severity of the feeling of touch as concentration gains momentum."*

The Method of Vipassana Meditation
Mahasi Sayadaw

Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw
1904 - 1982

A Brief Biographical Sketch
by U Nyi Nyi

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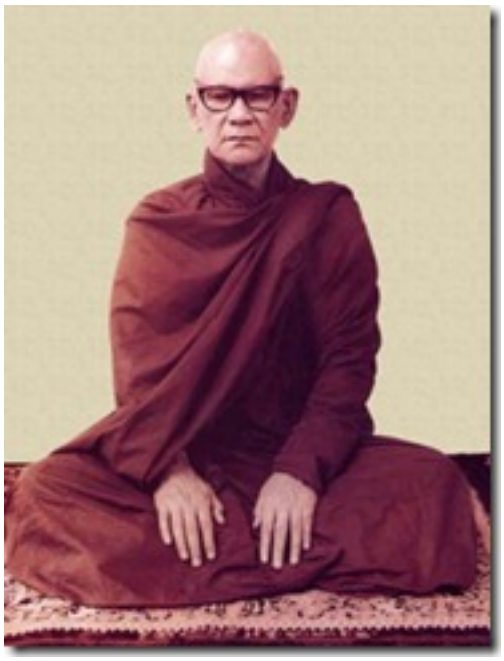


Birth to Youth

The Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw was born in 1904 at Seikkhun, a large, prosperous and charming village lying about seven miles to the west of the historic Shwebo town in Upper Myanmar. His parents, U Kan Taw and Daw Oke, kept a small shop. At the age of six he was sent to receive his early monastic eduction under U Adicca, presiding monk of Pyinmana Monastery at Seikkhun. Six years later, he was initiated as a novice (sāmanera) under the same teacher, and given the name of Shin Sobhana (which means Auspicious). The name befitted his courageous features and dignified behaviour. He was a bright pupil, making remarkably quick progress in scriptural studies. When U Adicca left the Order, Shin Sobhana continued his studies under Sayadaw U Parama of Thugyi-kyaung Monastery, Ingyintaw-taik. At the age of nineteen he had to decide whether to remain in the Order and devote the rest of his life to the service of the Buddhasāsana or return to lay life. Shin Sobhana knew where his heart lay and unhesitatingly chose the first course. He was ordained as a bhikkhu on the 26th of November 1923, Sumedha Sayadaw Ashin Nimmala acting as his preceptor. Within four years Ven. Sobhana passed all three grades of the Pali scriptural examinations conducted by the Government.

Practice of Vipassana

Ven. Sobhana next went to the city of Mandalay, noted for its pre-eminence in Buddhist learning, to pursue advanced study of the scriptures under Sayadaws well-known for their learning. His stay at Khinmakan-west Monastery for this purpose was, however, cut short after little more than a year when he was called to Moulmein. The head of the Taik-kyaung monastery in Taungwainggale (who came from the same village as Ven. Sobhana) wanted him to help teach his pupils. While teaching at Taungwainggale, Ven. Sobhana continued his own scriptural study, being especially interested in the Mahāsatipatthāna Sutta. His deepening interest in the satipatthāna method of vipassanā meditation led him to neighbouring Thaton, where the well-known Mingun Jetavan Sayadaw was teaching it.

Meditation Centers

It was not long before the Mahasi Sayadaw's reputation as a skilled meditation teacher had spread throughout the Shwebo-Sagaing region and come to the attention of a devout and wealthy Buddhist, Sir U Thwin. U Thwin wanted to promote the Buddhasāsana by setting up a meditation centre directed by a teacher of proven virtue and ability. After listening to a discourse on vipassanā given by the Sayadaw, and observing his serene and noble demeanour, U Thwin had no difficulty in deciding that the Mahasi Sayadaw was the meditation teacher he had been looking for.On the 13th of November 1947, the Buddhasāsana Nuggaha Association was founded in Yangon with Sir U Thwin as its first President. The Association's aims were to promote scriptural learning and practice of the Dhamma. Sir U Thwin donated to the Association a plot of land in Hermitage Road, Yangon, measuring over five acres, for the proposed meditation centre. (By 1978, the Centre occupied 19.6 acres, on which many buildings and

ancilliary structures had been built). Sir U Thwin told the Association that he had found a suitable meditation teacher, and he proposed that the then Prime Minister of Myanmar invite Mahasi Sayadaw to the Centre.After the Second World War, the Sayadaw alternated his residence between his native Seikkhun and Taungwainggale in Moulmein. Meanwhile, Myanmar had regained independence on 4th January 1948. In May 1949, during one of his sojourns at Seikkhun, the Sayadaw completed a new nissaya translation of the Mahāsatipatthāna Sutta. This work excels the average nissaya translation of this sutta, which is very important for those who wish to practise vipassanā meditation, but need guidance.

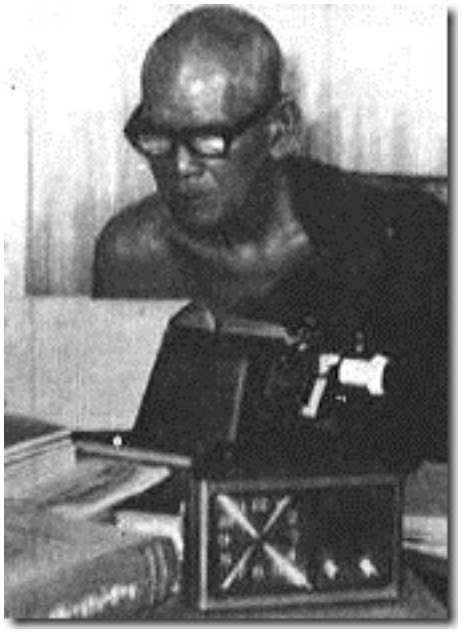
In November of that year, on the personal invitation of the then Prime Minister, U Nu, Mahasi Sayadaw came down from Shwebo and Sagaing to the meditation centre at Yangon, accompanied by two senior Sayadaws. Thus began Mahasi Sayadaw's guardianship of the Sāsana Yeikthā at Yangon. On 4th December 1949 Mahasi Sayadaw personally instructed the very first batch of twenty-five meditators in the practice of vipassanā. As the number of meditators grew, it became too demanding for the Sayadaw to give the long initiation talk to all of them. So from July 1951 a tape-recorded talk was played for each new batch of meditators, with a brief introduction by the Sayadaw. Within a few years of the establishment of the Sāsana Yeikthā at Yangon, many similar meditation centres were inaugurated in other parts of the country with Mahasi-trained members of the Sangha as meditation teachers. These centres were not confined to Myanmar, but included other Theravāda countries like Thailand and Sri Lanka. There were also centres in Cambodia and India. According to a 1972 census, the total number of meditators trained at all these centres (both in Myanmar and abroad) exceeded seven hundred thousand. In recognition of his distinguished scholarship and spiritual attainments, Mahasi Sayadaw was honoured in 1952 by the then President of the Union of Myanmar with the prestigious title of ‘Aggamahāpandita' (the Exalted Wise One).

The Sixth Buddhist Council

Foreign Missions

Sri Lanka

Literary Activities



Abhidhajamahāratthaguru Masoeyein Sayadaw, who presided over the Sanghanāyaka Executive Board at the Sixth Buddhist Council, urged Mahasi Sayadaw to teach two commentaries to the Sangha at Sāsana Yeikthā. Ven. Buddhaghosa's Visuddhimagga Atthakathā and Ven. Dhammapāla's Visuddhimagga Mahātīkā deal primarily with Buddhist meditation theory and practice, though they also offer useful explanations of important doctrinal points, so they are vital for prospective meditation teachers. Mahasi Sayadaw began teaching these two works on 2nd February 1961, for one and a half or two hours daily. Based on the lecture notes taken by his pupils, the Sayadaw started writing a nissaya translation of the Visuddhimagga Mahātīkā, completing it on 4th February 1966. This nissaya was an exceptional achievement. The section on the different views held by other religions (samayantara) was most exacting since the Sayadaw had to familiarize himself with ancient Hindu philosophy and terminology by studying all available references, including works in Sanskrit and English.

Up until 1978 Mahasi Sayadaw had to his credit 67 volumes of Burmese Buddhist literature. Space does not permit us to list them all here, but a complete up-to-date list of them is appended to the Sayadaw's publication: ‘A Discourse on Sakkapa?ha Sutta' (published in October 1978).

At one time, Mahasi Sayadaw was severely criticised in certain quarters for his advocacy of the allegedly unorthodox method of noting the rising and falling of the abdomen in vipassanā meditation. It was mistakenly assumed that this method was an innovation of the Sayadaw's, whereas it had been approved several years before Mahasi Sayadaw adopted it, by no less an authority than the Mūla (original) Mingun Jetavan Sayadaw, and that it is in no way contrary to the Buddha's teaching on the subject. The reason for Mahasi Sayadaw's preference for this method is that the average meditator finds it easy to note this manifestation of the element of motion (vayodhātu). It is not, however, imposed on all who come to practise at any of the Mahasi meditation centres. One may, if one likes, practise ānāpānasati. Mahasi Sayadaw himself refrained from joining issue with his critics on this point, but two learned Sayadaws brought out a book each in defence of the Sayadaw's method, thus enabling those who are interested in the controversy to judge for themselves.

This controversy arose in Sri Lanka where some members of the Sangha, inexperienced and unknowledgeable in practical meditation, publicly assailed Mahasi Sayadaw's method in newspapers and journals. Since this criticism was voiced in the English language with world-wide coverage, silence could no longer be maintained, and so Sayadaw U ?anuttara of Kaba-aye (World Peace Pagoda campus) forcefully responded to the criticisms in the pages of the Sri Lankan Buddhist periodical ‘World Buddhism.'

Mahasi Sayadaw's international reputation has attracted numerous visitors and meditators from abroad, some seeking enlightenment for their religious problems and others intent on practising meditation under the Sayadaw's personal guidance. Among the first meditators from abroad was former British Rear-Admiral E.H. Shattock who came on leave from Singapore and practised meditation at Sāsana Yeikthā in 1952. On his return to England he published the book, *An Experiment in Mindfulness* relating his experiences in generally appreciative terms. Another foreigner was Mr. Robert Duvo, a French-born American from California. He came and practised meditation at the Centre first as a lay meditator and later as a bhikkhu. He later published a book in France about his experiences and the Satipatthāna Vipassanā method.

Particular mention should be made of Anāgarika Shri Munindra of Buddha Gaya in India, who became a close disciple of Mahasi Sayadaw, spending several years with him, learning scripture and practising vipassanā. Afterwards he directed the International Meditation Centre at Buddha Gaya, where many people from the West came to meditate. Among them was a young American, Joseph Goldstein, who has written a perceptive book on vipassanā titled *The Experience of Insight: A Natural Unfolding*
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Some of the Sayadaw's works have been published abroad, such as *The Satipatthāna Vipassanā Meditation* and *Practical Insight Meditation* by the Unity Press, San Francisco, California, USA, and *The Progress of Insight* by the Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka. Selfless and able assistance was rendered by U Pe Thin (now deceased) and Myanaung U Tin in the Sayadaw's dealings with his visitors and meditators from abroad and in the translation into English of some of Sayadaw's

discourses on vipassanā meditation. Both of them were accomplished meditators.

Mahasi Mausoleum

This building was constructed in one corner of Mahasi Yeikthā in Rangoon to serve as a lasting memorial to the tireless work of the Most Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw in propagating the practice of Satipatthāna meditation. Inside this marble mausoleum is a lifelike statue of the late Mahasi Sayadaw, some photographs of his foreign missions, and on the walls, inscribed in marble slabs, one can read (in Burmese) his great work on Vipassanā meditation — Vipassanā Shunee Kyan.

In the centre of the building is a raised wooden platform on which one may practice meditation in the calm and cool interior of this mausoleum. "He reveres me the most who practices my teaching the most." (The Buddha)

The Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw is profoundly revered by countless grateful disciples in Myanmar and abroad. Although it was the earnest wish of his devoted disciples that the Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw might live for several more years and continue showering the blessings of the Buddhadhamma on all those in search of freedom and deliverance, the inexorable law of impermanence terminated, with tragic suddenness, his selfless and dedicated life on the 14th of August 1982. Like a true son of the Buddha, he lived valiantly, spreading the

word of the Master throughout the world and helped many thousands onto the Path of Enlightenment and Deliverance.