



THE RIO BUDDHAVIHARA PROJECT AND ITS ROLE IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THERAVADA BUDDHISM IN BRAZIL

"And the Blessed One said to the Bhikkhus: 'I am delivered, Oh Bhikkhus, from all fetters, human and divine. You, Oh Bhikkhus, are also delivered from all fetters, human and divine. Go ye now, Oh Bhikkhus, and wander, for the gain of the many, for the welfare of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, for the gain, and for the welfare of gods and men.'"

Mahavagga 1.11

I – INTRODUCTION

The Rio Buddhavihara Project consists in a major initiative to secure a firm and lasting spiritual home for Buddhist Teachings and its Practice on Brazilian soil, by the establishment of a Serious Center of Study and Practice of Theravada Buddhism, thus immensely strengthening the Dhamma presence in Brazil and South America as a whole.

In other words, it aims to create an enduring home for the preservation and transmission of the Buddha's teachings by venerable and respectful masters established in Dhamma, according to the Theravada Buddhist School, and to stand as a landmark of Buddhist culture and teachings in the middle of the beautiful city of Rio de Janeiro.

When a community from traditional Theravada Buddhist countries needs a center for its spiritual and cultural activities, people simply come and offer their labor and efforts to build it together with the Bhikkhu Sangha. In that context, active fundraising is not very much necessary. Support from the community is voluntarily and spontaneously offered out of a deep appreciation for the value of the Buddha's teachings and its effectiveness. It is mostly based on a firm conviction in the Teachings (*saddha*) and the importance of the practice of generosity (*dana*), as a powerful way to accumulate precious meritorious deeds for developing in the Path.

Thus The Rio Buddhavihara Project was conceived under the understanding that Lord Buddha's Teachings, or Dhamma, is a universal form of medicine that can heal beings from all the suffering and transform ordinary human beings into perfectly compassionate and perfectly wise beings.

South America, and specifically Brazil, are regions of the world known for its social challenges (i.e. high poverty levels, social inequality and basic needs) which create many suffering and survival challenges to the its people. It thus is also part of the implied objectives of the Rio Buddhavihara Project to have an important role in the improvement of life conditions of all those within its outreach.

II –BRAZIL AND THERAVADA BUDDHISM

Brazil is a country of predominantly Christian population. According to the population census realized in 2000 by the National Institute of Statistic Studies (Instituto Brasileiro de Estudos e Estatística, IBGE), a portion of 73.57% of its population (total 169,872,856 of its citizens) declare themselves as Catholic Christians. And only a tiny share of the Brazilian population, 0.13%, or 214,873 citizens declare themselves as Buddhists, Nevertheless, there has been an increasing interest from Brazilians for the Buddha's Teachings. Publications have been increasingly referring to Dhamma, and information has become more accessible through internet and general media.

But Theravada remains as the less known Buddhist School among the Brazilian population, despite being the oldest of the established Schools and preserves in its Canon to the original Teachings of Lord Buddha. This situation may be seen as the result of the fact that during all the years in which Buddhism has been consolidating in Brazilian society, there has not been any project to bring Theravada's approach of Dhamma to the major public.

Thus we assumed as the pillar of this project the establishment of our location as a (i) place for study and practice of the Buddhist Teachings based in the Pali Canon of Theravada Tradition, and (ii) an enduring home for Representatives of Bhikkhu-Sangha, established in

Dhamma and Vinaya, living examples of the Path pointed by Lord Buddha. We are sure such achievements will indeed attract academic and religious audience interested in learning from the most well preserved version of Buddha's Wisdom, thus assuring the strengthening and lasting settling of the Theravada School of Buddhism for the whole South America.

II – SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

Under the general objective of secure a firm and lasting spiritual home for Buddhist Teachings and its Practice on Brazilian soil we could mention the following specific objectives:

- I. ***To establish an enduring home for venerable and respectful Representatives of Bhikkhu-Sangha, thus assuring preservation and transmission of the Lord Buddha's Teachings.*** This will be done through the invitation of Dhammaduta Monks from Theravada School of Buddhism. We are looking forward to selecting future Resident Dhammaduta Monks who must be able to fully communicate in English; interested in learning the local language (Portuguese) for the transmission of Buddhist Teachings and meditation techniques to local students; have a serious commitment with the Dhamma and Vinaya; and keep its monastic vows and perform diligently the duties within the local Buddhist Community while residing at Rio Buddhavihara. We are convinced that under these premises we will set the foundations of a firm and lasting spiritual home for Theravada Buddhist Teachings on Brazilian soil.
- II. ***To build and maintain a landmark of Buddhist culture and teachings in Brazil.*** The ultimate aim of our programs and initiatives is to offer participants conducive conditions to develop their own personal insight through study and practice of Buddha's Teachings, while opening their hearts to the Truth of Dhamma. The building of a Vihara with its monastery and Dhamma center facilities encompass a wide range of activities, reflecting the many interests of all those who will make use of the installations, and in keeping with the spirit

of the Buddhist idea that a diversity of wholesome and skillful methods can be used to promote the welfare, mutual understanding and happiness of living beings. This wide range of activities falls into the three broad categories: *Education, Community Outreach and both Inter-religious and Inter-Traditions Dialogue.*

III. *To strengthen the Brazilian Theravada Buddhist Community.* We understand the importance of Group Spiritual Practices (i.e. meditation sessions, refuge taking and retreats) as a way to support individual development in the Path. Other services would include counseling to the lay community, religious services for ill, dying and the families of the deceased, and teaching of the Pali language to Buddhist and general public. It is also important to mention the powerful way to strengthening the understanding of Dhamma by our members represented by developing Dhamma related publications. With the aim of providing public access to information about the Theravada Buddhist School, publications under the seal and for the raising of funds for the realization of the Rio Buddhavihara will be a very important channel to bring both the understanding of Dhamma and giving out the opportunity for the individuals to contribute to this pure initiative, for the benefit of many.

IV. *To build a new physical structure under the configuration of a completely functional Buddhist Vihara.* By constructing a new Temple complex and renovating its present facilities and structure, a much-needed resource for our expanding student base will be provided on Brazil Buddhist Society's grounds. Thus, establishing it as a reference center for Dhamma Practice and Study. These will form an entire complex for the study and practice of Theravada Buddhism and the preservation of its monastic tradition and its role in the training and guidance of lay Buddhist community in Brazil and South America. We aim that the new temple facilities, built in accordance to the

traditional Buddhist Vihara configurations, will also better serve as a gathering place for Buddhist education, outreach and inter-religious programs. It will enable us to accommodate the venerable and respectful guests who have already graced us with their visits and teachings, such as Bhante Henepola Gunaratana and Bhikkhu Yogavacara Rahula from Bhavana Society, USA; Bhikkhu Buddharakkhita from Uganda, and Bhante Kassapa Thero, from Sri Lanka. The centerpiece of the new facility will be a new Uposatha hall – large enough to accommodate our wider community; larger retreat and meditation accommodation structures, adequate kitchen and an administrative room with a library for storing Dhamma Books and multimedia materials. In resume, the new structure will stand as a unique landmark of Theravada Buddhist School in Brazil and South America. The new structures will follow models of traditional Buddhist architecture, while incorporating modern methods of sustainable design. Its rich symbolism will be configured as an outward expression of the inner qualities that students of Buddhism seek to develop, being designed to be spiritually inspiring and visually striking.

II – CONCLUSION

The programs and daily ceremonies organized at Rio Buddhavihara will be widely offered to the public free of charge, reflecting our commitment to universal access to Dhamma. Since Brazil Buddhist Society's foundation, it has been committed to supporting all programs by donation only, without depending on business enterprise.

This is in keeping with the Buddhist principle that spiritual activities should be conducted in a manner free of commercial interests. Honoring this principle means we rely entirely on the generosity of benefactors, and we always remind them the importance of understanding this interdependence existent between the students and the teachers of Dhamma. This increase will be mostly a result of:

- I.** The establishment of our location as a place for study and practice of the Buddhist Teachings, based in the Pali Canon of Theravada Tradition. Thus attracting academic and religious audience interested in learning from the most well preserved version of Buddha's Wisdom, contained in the Pali Canon. As examples we could mention: (i) human sciences and psychological sciences students from Brazilian and South-American universities; and (ii) students from other Buddhists traditions, such as Mahayana and Vajrayana, organized and active through temples and groups existent in Brazil and South America.

- II.** The establishment of our location as a tourist attraction very benefited from the proximity of other famous and internationally known landmarks of the City of Rio de Janeiro as: the Christ Statue, the Lapa Aqueduct, the Tijuca Forest National Park, etc.

Thus, it is clear the great potential role of Rio Buddhavihara Project in the establishment of Theravada Buddhism in Brazil, under the very important (and essential at its beginning) support and recognition from International Buddhist Community. We are sure that all those who come to hear about its objectives will see the priceless opportunity to be part of such unique and important moment for the establishment and spreading of Buddha Sasana throughout the World.

REFERENCES:

The official Letter of Intent of the Rio Buddhavihara Project was the main source of information used in this document