

Leading to Liberation

12th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women

**Bangkok, Thailand
June 12 to 18, 2011**

Edited by Karma Lekshe Tsomo
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Leading Buddhist Women of Ancient India

Rupali Mokashi

According to the 2001 census, India, the land of the Buddha, is home to 3,881,052 female Buddhist devotees.¹ There are an estimated 300 million Buddhist women worldwide, including more than 130,000 nuns. This growing community stands proudly in the tradition of the lay women devotees and nuns who have been an integral part of the Sangha, almost since its inception. However, apart from the heart-rendering stories narrated in the *Therīgāthā*,² in which the early *bhikkhunis* recount their struggles and accomplishments along the road to arahatship, no historical evidence has yet been substantiated. As a result, the record of early Buddhist women's contributions rests entirely with the literary characters of the *Therīgāthā*.

The role of women in ancient Indian who espoused the timeless Buddhist tradition is mostly determined by analyzing the famous female protagonists depicted in literary works or the norms laid down in scripture, and thus has neglected "real" women, such that their patronage and contributions to the propagation of Buddhism were rarely brought to light. This is a major lacuna in Buddhist history.

It was during the Mauryan period that Buddhism emerged as a distinct religion with great potential for expansion. Emperor Ashoka initiated the tradition of engraving inscriptions, which became widely popular in India thereafter.³ A large number of Buddhist donors' inscriptions help to reconstruct a more precise framework for understanding the followers of Dhamma, especially women. A close survey of these inscriptions discovered in Deccan⁴ during the period spanning from the third century BCE to the twelfth century CE bring to light the contributions of more than 300 women who embraced Dhamma either as laywomen or nuns. Though the contributions of all of them are noteworthy, this paper will highlight just a few eminent women who belonged to different social strata of ancient Indian society during the early centuries of the common era who contributed to the propagation of Buddhism.

An inscription on the famous Ashokan pillar at Allahabad mentions Karuvaki, the second chief queen of emperor Ashoka.⁵ She is the first Buddhist woman to figure by name in Indian inscriptions. The record, in form as well as content, is a command from the king to his ministers (*mahamantra*), who were instructed to take a note of the queen's donations. This inscription is therefore known as the Queen's Pillar Edict.

Various architectural styles emerged with the spread of Buddhism and the growth of brisk trade between Deccan and the western world Deccan beginning from the second century BCE. These include the construction of *stupas*, *chaityas*, and *viharas* in the Sahyadri mountain ranges at Karle, Bhaje, Nasik, Junnar, and other locations. The need for places of worship and residences for monks and nuns led to the speedy growth of these styles. Inscriptions tell us that these architectural achievements were due in part to endowments made by women who belonged to different social groups. It can be observed that queens, laywomen, nuns, and even courtesans contributed according to their individual financial capacities.

The magnificent *stupa* of Sanchi partially owed its existence to 87 female devotees. Of these only one, Vakalaye Devi, appears to be a royal woman; the others were 36 nuns and 50 laywomen. Sondegva, the wife of Siharakhita;⁶ Naga, the wife of Kamdadi Gamiya Sethin (a trader from the town of Kandadi); Gharini (housewife) Sijha from Virohakata; Sangharakhshita, the *antevasini*⁷ (female pupil) of Yasila;⁸ and Bhicchuni Kadi from Ujjaini⁹ were some of the laywomen and nuns whose donations were recorded at Sanchi. The total number of female benefactors who have been identified as being of royal

descent is 35, far fewer than the remaining 210 laywomen and 87 nuns, which indicates popular base of support for Buddhism.

A number of inscriptions give us insight into the economic climate of the time and also the very good economic sense shown by a laywoman named Vishnudatta who planned and invested money by donating for the benefit of the Sangha around 1700 years ago. Vishnudatta Shakanika was the daughter of Saka Agnivarman, the wife of Ganapaka (literally, “accountant”) Rebhila, and the mother of Ganapaka (also an accountant). In Cave No. 10 at Nasik, a person named Vishnuvarman is recorded as having donated some money for the cause of Dhamma¹⁰ in the year 258 CE.¹¹ This endowment was meant to provide medicines for the sick among the community of monks from all directions who dwelled at the monastery on Mount Trirasmī.¹² Toward this endowment, Vishnudatta invested more than 3500 *karshapana*.¹³ 1000 *karshapanas* with the guild of Kularikas, 2000 *karshapanas* with the guild of Odayantrika, 500 *karshapanas* with the guild of (name lost), and some more with the guild of Tilapippaka.¹⁴ It is very interesting to see that Vishnudatta invested money with guilds such as Kularika (potters), Tilapippaka (oilmen), Odayantrika (workers fabricating hydraulic machinery), and so on. The interest accumulated from this money was to be directed to benefit the Sangha.¹⁵

The inscription of Lavanika in Cave No. 75 at Kanheri¹⁶ has been dated to the early third century CE. This interesting inscription records two grants given by Lavanika at two places, the Kanheri Caves and the Ambalika Vihara near the ancient port town of Kalyan.¹⁷ Lavanika was the wife of an *upasaka* named Sethi Achala from Kalyan. She donated the cave (*lena*), cistern (*panipodhi*), and a bathing tank (*nbanapodhi*), dedicated to the welfare of her family. The second part of the donation records her endowment of 300 *karshapanas* for the monks at Ambalika Vihara. This grant was to be utilized for providing robes (*chivaraka*) for the monks residing there.¹⁸ The location of this *vihara* was explicitly stated in the inscription as “near Kalyan,” but the exact site has yet not been determined. Since Kanheri was a famous place, it is obvious that Lavanika chose to engrave her donation at Ambalika Vihara, so that more devotees could come to know of it. There is a mention of another monastery at Kalyan in an inscription in Cave No. 32 at Kanheri. This Brahmi inscription belongs to the second century CE. A merchant named Dharma, Kaliyanaka (a resident of Kalyan and son of Sivamitra), along with Budhaka and his entire family, gifted a house with two apartments (*bibhaga*) and a dining hall to the *vihara* at Kalyan in an area called Gandharikabhāmi.¹⁹ Due to the robust trading activity during these early centuries, many west Asian and Greco-Roman trading communities had settled in Western India. Inscriptions suggest that many women of foreign descent adopted the Buddhādhamma as a way of life.

Unlike Kanheri, where a large number of donors hail from the city of Kalyana, at Karle the majority of donors were residents of Dhenukakṭa. Many of these were Yavana,²⁰ who were followers of Buddhism. The grand Chaitya at Karle²¹ records the donation of Mahamata, the wife of (name lost) from Dhenukakata, recorded on the tenth pillar in the left row.²² There is a possibility that Mahamata was of Greek descent, since the donation of Greek male donors are also recorded here.

There are also inscriptions that document the existence of donors who were nuns. According to monastic law, Buddhist ascetics could not possess property, so they must have accumulated the resources for making the rails and pillars of the cave temples by going for alms. This was no doubt permissible, as the purpose was pious one.²³ As a result, the donations of a large number of nuns have been recorded at various sacred places. This highlights the difference between Jain nuns and their Buddhist counterparts. Inscriptions reveal that, although the Jain nuns influenced a large number of laypeople to donate toward religious causes, since that is explicitly mentioned in the donations, they themselves hardly figure as prime donors. By contrast, Buddhist nuns such as Pavaitika (nun) Ponakisana²⁴ and Bhikhuni Damila²⁵ are themselves recorded as having made donations at various

places.

There are many references to courtesans who embraced Dhamma in the Buddhist literature. The *Therīgāthā* refers to Vimala and Sarama, who were sisters, who were courtesans. Amrapali was a famous courtesan (*ganika*) who resided in Vaisali, the capital of Vriji Republic. The tradition of courtesans who supported the Dhamma continued for centuries. An inscription from Sannati²⁶ that dates from the second century CE refers to a dancer (*natika*) named Govidasi²⁷ who constructed an enclosure, or *prakara*. Another inscription from Sannati, belonging to the same period, refers to another dancer named Aryadasi, the daughter of Nadiya Guda and Nati Valuki, who constructed a *mukhbadika*, or lofty entrance hall.

Overall, the story of Buddhism is incomplete without understanding the contributions of these capable and confident female followers of Dhamma. Although these women hailed from different time periods and geographical areas and belonged to different social and economic strata, they had one thing in common: a deep and passionate involvement with the teachings of the Buddha.

NOTES

¹ <http://wcd.nic.in/stat.pdf>

² The *Therīgāthā*, often translated as *Verses of the Elder Nuns*, is found in the Khuddaka Nikaya, a collection of short works in the Sutta Pitaka. It consists of 73 poems, organized into 16 chapters.

³ Ashoka was an Indian emperor of the Maurya Dynasty who ruled almost all of the Indian subcontinent from 269 to 232 BCE.

⁴ Geographically, Deccan is a large plateau bounded by the Arabian Sea to the west and the Bay of Bengal below the Narmada River to the east. This area was known as Dakshinapatha in Sanskrit.

⁵ *Annals of Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 34, p. 30; *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* I-II-VI-B, p. 159.

⁶ *Epigraphia Indica* 10, p. 27, n. 177.

⁷ *History of Dharma Shastra* II-1, p. 272. *Antevāsini* means one who dwells near the teacher.

⁸ *Epigraphia Indica* 10, p. 33, n. 245

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 31, n. 226

¹⁰ *Epigraphia Indica* 10, p. 127, and *Epigraphia Indica* IV, p. 114.

¹¹ This epigraph has been dated to the reign of Abhira king Ishvarasena.

¹² *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* 4, p. 114.

¹³ The term *karshapana* refers to a silver coin weighing about 34 grains. The *karshapana* mentioned here were probably those of the western *kshatrapas*, which appear to have circulated in Maharashtra

during the time of Abhiras.

¹⁴ *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* 4, p. 114, and *Epigraphia Indica* 10, n. 1137, p. 127.

¹⁵ *Epigraphia Indica* 10, p. 127

¹⁶ The Kanheri Caves are a group of rock-cut monuments located north of Borivalion in the western outskirts of Mumbai. These caves date from the first century BCE to the ninth century CE. In total, 109 caves have been excavated from the basalt.

¹⁷ Kalyan lies 53 km northeast of Mumbai.

¹⁸ *Ghokhale Shobhana, Kanheri Inscriptions*, pp. 98-101. The existence of monestries along the ancient trade route was not merely coincidence.

¹⁹ *Epigraphia Indica* 10, p. 104, n. 998. According to Shobhana Gokhale, Gandharikabhumi was a residential quarter for Greeks in the ancient city of Kalyan. Even today, there is a small river called Gandhari, a tributary of the Kalu River, near Kalyan. The surrounding area is also known as Gandhari.

²⁰ There is no unanimity about the origin of the Yavanas. There are various claims as to their origins, Ionia to West Asia.

²¹ This *chaitya* dates to first century BCE and is the finest type of early Buddhist caves. The *chaitya* contains a huge *stupa* and 37 richly decorated pillars. An inscription in the *chaitya* states that this is the foremost cave throughout Jambudvīpa and says that it was completed by the moneylender Bhutapala of Vaijayanti. These caves are located 114 kms. from Mumbai.

²² *Epigraphia Indica* 7, p. 52 and pp. 83-84.

²³ *Epigraphia Indica* 10, p. 369.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 105, n. 1006. Ponakiasana's other title, *theri* (elder nun), indicating her senior status in the order.

²⁵ Ibid. p., 106, n. 1013. Both these nuns made donations at Kanheri.

²⁶ Sannatiis was a small village on the banks of the Bhimain Chitapurataluk River located in Gulbarga District of Northern Karnataka.

²⁷ I. K. Sarma and J. V. Rao, *Early Brahmi Inscriptions From Sannati* (Harman Publishing House, New Delhi, 1993).

Portrait of Chinese Buddhist Women in Tangerang

Venita Tanusuwito

Chinese Buddhists have lived in Tangerang, Indonesia, since the beginning of the 17th century. In the period between the 17th and 18th centuries, they were concentrated along the Cisadane River in downtown Tangerang, which is now located in Banten Province. From there, many of them moved to suburban areas in other parts of Tangerang, for example, to Sewan and Kampung Melayu. Because these people have lived in Tangerang for as long as six or seven generations, they have adapted to the local culture. Most do not even speak or understand Chinese any more. Intercultural marriages occur frequently, which is evident in their physical appearances, which no longer resemble ethnic Chinese. This Chinese community is often nicknamed Cin Ben (Cina Benteng). Many of them live in poverty. They work in petty trade or as farmers or fishermen. Only a few manage to make their way out of poverty and are able to establish stores or small companies.

Cin Ben Women

Women in the Cin Ben community suffer along with their children. Many are poorly educated and therefore are only able to work in the informal economic sector. Due to their lack of skills, they can only do jobs such as washing clothes, selling small snacks, or helping their husbands in the paddy fields. Women in this community share the financial responsibility for their households. In fact, many women work harder to earn money than their husbands. Although they are hard workers, the work that these women do for a living is often insufficient to make ends meet. They are so poorly paid that their income is hardly adequate to buy groceries, let alone to fulfill their children's education needs. As a result, their children often do not receive higher education and end up uneducated and poor, just like their parents.

This situation is made worse by the fact that they do not have any authority or access to government assistance. Many still do not have proper certificates proving that they are Indonesian citizens and therefore do not have legal identity cards. This makes it difficult for them to get documents such as birth certificates, health insurance for the poor, and so on. Currently, the situation is improving somewhat among the younger generation, since many in this age bracket have Indonesian citizenship certificates.

Girls in many families are still discriminated against when it comes to higher education. Many parents still give higher priority to their sons' education than to their daughters'. Education for girls often terminates in junior high school or sometimes even in elementary school. Unskilled and uneducated, many women marry at a young age. In line with tradition, many parents push their daughters into marrying young.

Assessing the Needs

Women in the Cin Ben community are seriously in need of assistance. They need training to improve their skills, such as training in cooking, handicrafts, or agriculture. Their lack of education and skills make them unable to make a decent living. Some local organizations have already made efforts to provide occupational training, but they are held only once in a while. There is a need for ongoing programs that offer continual training in order to effect real improvements for the women. The

trainings should not only include practical skills, such as baking or sewing, but should also include social awareness and gender training. People in this community have no concrete plans about their future. They live only for today and barely think of the future. The causes are not only related to poverty, but also to their mindset.

As is commonly recognized, women have great influence on their families. Since the task of education in each family is often the task of women, it is important that women be educated. Only educated women are able to educate their children well.

This also means that we have to pay adequate attention to education for girls. Girls should not be discriminated against, but should receive an education of the same standard as boys. The future lies with the children. Better education for the children will bring significant changes for the next generation.

A good program should consist of training courses in many different kinds of practical and professional skills. Workshops on legal right should also be conducted to give the community sufficient knowledge of their rights as citizens, especially the women. Most importantly, the community needs to awaken from its long sleep and gain confidence that, with hard work, despite the difficulties, they can achieve a better life.

Sakyadhita: An Expanding Frontier of Buddhist Women and Global Linking

Thich Nu Nbu Nguyet

Very often, people are of the opinion that, at best, women can only cultivate themselves and cannot undertake important Buddhist tasks that could support the spread of the Buddhaharma. However, as we have seen in recent times, *bhikkhunis* in the worldwide Sangha are now displaying strong determination to become involved in the teachings of the Buddha, and, together with *bhikkhus*, have shared the important task of educating talented *bhikkhunis* in order to preserve and promote Buddhism. This is indeed a significant achievement to be recorded in the history of contemporary Buddhism.¹

History has shown that strong Buddhist women have always made their presence known throughout the ages and, especially in the last century, have contributed a great deal to the development of both Buddhism in general and the *bhikkhuni* order in particular. However, *bhikkhunis* in some countries have not had sufficient opportunities to cultivate their abilities and not much is known about their work. However, recently Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women has recently appeared on the global Buddhist scene with a goal to expand the frontier for the global integration of Buddhist women. Their aim is not only to work for the welfare of women, but also for Buddhism all over the world.

The 12th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women is being held in Bangkok in June 2011. This is an opportunity for Buddhist women from all around the world to review the efforts that have been made to strengthen Buddhism and Buddhist societies over the past two years. This is also an occasion for the daughters of the Buddha to exchange their experiences in their work of teaching Dharma and benefiting society, as well as advancing the status and roles of women in general and of *bhikkhunis* in particular in their countries and in the international arena.

Buddhist women in the modern world have proven their abilities by serving in a variety of positions in different fields, typically through Sakyadhita activities. The aim is to continue the tradition of Buddhist women and especially to expand the frontiers of their activities further, through the global network of Sakyadhita. Toward that end, this paper will focus on: (1) global routes to Sakyadhita; (2) the continuing development of Sakyadhita; and (3) the current shortcomings and future prospects of Sakyadhita.

Global Routes to Sakyadhita

Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women includes people from various cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. I have personally witnessed how inclusive Sakyadhita is in welcoming all traditions – Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana – in their activities. Women from a wide range of Buddhist traditions easily come together, irrespective of the differences in their interpretation of Buddhist teachings. This is a very exciting development in Buddhist history. The Sakyadhita conferences are public gatherings that attract Buddhist *bhikkhunis* and laywomen, and also some monks and laymen, in addition to followers of other religions. These gatherings are historically important. They are proof of a unique phenomenon taking place in the world of Buddhism: the emerging recognition of the contributions to Buddhism that earlier generations of *bhikkhunis* have made and the potential for future generations. Buddhist women are increasingly conscious of their responsibility to help fulfill one of the Buddha's important teachings, which is to propagate the Buddhaharma "for the benefit of the many, for the welfare of the many, out of compassion for worldly beings." It is noteworthy that

for many centuries, women's potential has not been fully recognized. I now realize that when women come together to share their experiences and to discuss their various approaches, they do not only teach the Buddhadharma, but they also undertake various activities to alleviate the sufferings of the human condition they see, at both the local and the global levels. with an unwavering spirit.

I would like to start with the story of my first experience of taking part in a Sakyadhita conference. In 1999, after the completion of my two-year master's degree program in Buddhist Studies, I became a Ph.D. candidate at Delhi University. During that time, I attended a lecture given by Bhikkhuni Karma Lekshe Tsomo at Delhi University, along with a group of eight Vietnamese *bhikkhunis*. After the lecture, impressed by the group of petite but active Vietnamese *bhikkhunis*, Lekshe came to talk to us and we became friends. It was then that she invited us to join the 6th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women to be held in Lumbini, Nepal, the following year.

My first formal contact with Sakyadhita was at the conference in Nepal. After listening to the papers presented at the conference, participants were asked to draw their own thoughts on a large piece of paper provided for each group. It was very interesting and delightful to see the Buddha's daughters, several hundred in number, completely wrapped up in giving shape and color to their own thoughts. There were pictures which drew laughter. One portrayed the daughters of the Buddha holding hands around a big globe. There were pictures imbued with the all-pervading essence of the Dharma. One showed simple, small, lovely *viharas* situated on the slope of a hill covered with trees, with leaves falling here and there and young nuns on their way to school with books in their hands, just as the sun came out. There were pictures alive with the infectious enthusiasm of Buddhist women seen linking arms to form a garland of flowers to offer to the Buddhas in the ten directions. Some showed nuns crossing hills and mountains to reach the Himalayas to join the conference or sitting in meditation facing the snow mountains. The lovely, colorful drawings depicted a new world and revealed a new horizon before my eyes. The vast panorama was full of light and optimism. I felt small in the company of so many professors, scholars, panelists, and researchers who came from different universities, research institutes, and other institutions of learning.

My first encounter with Sakyadhita is something I will never forget. Coming into contact with Sakyadhita has inspired me greatly and I was naturally encouraged in my studies and spiritual practice. Since then, I have unceasingly put forth my best efforts to attend each of the Sakyadhita conferences, so that I can learn from all the many different aspects it offers – its vast pool of knowledgeable scholars and students, outstanding monastic practitioners who embody the Buddhist spirit of compassion and altruism, and excellent meditators. Four years later, at the 8th Sakyadhita conference in Seoul, I presented a paper entitled “Education in the Contemporary Bhikkhuni Sangha in Vietnam,” which was well-received. My efforts were bearing fruit. Sakyadhita and all it offers have been major factors in my personal development as a student, researcher, and Buddhist practitioner. Like me, many other young nuns with few opportunities to advance in their study of Buddhism and share their practice experience with fellow practitioners have also been welcomed into the embrace of Sakyadhita. For all of us, Sakyadhita is an expansive frontier of all Buddhist followers in the world.

By the time of the 11th Sakyadhita Conference in Vietnam, Sakyadhita had grown to such an extent that it attracted many less-privileged nuns and laywomen from far-flung regions and snow-covered regions who are generally unknown in the world. For many Buddhist followers, Sakyadhita represents a milestone in their lives, giving voice to their thoughts and bringing light to their life. I have asked many women what it is about Sakyadhita that appeals to them. Some of the answers I received were, “Meeting these many great living practitioners in person makes me believe in my own spiritual potential.” Meeting Buddhist women teachers such as Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo and Bhikkhuni Karma Lekshe Tsomo at the Sakyadhita conferences has inspired me and many others. The teachers and

practitioners are all are truly compassionate – they do not differentiate among people. Rich or poor, educated or not, they open their hearts to all of them. They work tirelessly to help women develop their potential, giving them the keys they need to move onward and upward.” By the way, I want to add something more about Bhikkhuni Karma Lekshe Tsomo, as I myself have been inspired so much by her great personality. I cannot imagine how my spiritual life would have been without my contact with her. She is so humble that, when she received my paper, she asked me to delete these words of praise. But I strongly wish to express my feelings and have insisted on keeping these lines. I wish to take this opportunity to tell her how deeply grateful I feel. I have seen her working many sleepless nights for the success of Sakyadhita conferences and the welfare of Buddhist women around the globe.

The Continual Development of Sakyadhita

The 1st Sakyadhita Conference in 1987 in Bodhgaya brought together Buddhist nuns and women for the first time in the 2500 years of Buddhist history. The Buddhist women it brought together had previously lived isolated lives in their own communities, without meeting Buddhists of other traditions. Although the focus of the 1st Sakyadhita Conference was Buddhist nuns, Sakyadhita has always been inclusive, ever since the first gathering. Everyone was invited to this first conference, regardless of gender, social status, religious affiliation, or place of origin. At this conference and at the subsequent Sakyadhita conferences, we see people coming from both Asian and Western countries, working together with warm affection and close friendship – something that was impossible to imagine previously, due to the strong impact of colonialism. The power of the Buddhist spiritual tradition breaks through all kinds of boundaries and links people together, despite their vastly different backgrounds.

Six years after its first gathering, Sakyadhita organized its third conference in Colombo, Sri Lanka. This event was a milestone in the history of Sri Lankan Buddhism. After more than a thousand years, the *bhikkhuni* lineage, which had disappeared in Sri Lanka, has been re-established, inspired by Sakyadhita and its many courageous female participants. Today, there are over 500 fully ordained *bhikkhunis* in Sri Lanka and a locally organized Sakyadhita Training Centre for Nuns in Colombo. These developments signify a major step forward in Sakyadhita’s development.

As the years go by, despite many hindrances, Sakyadhita has successfully scheduled and organized eleven international conferences in many different countries. To cite an example, in 2006, Sakyadhita broke through religious and cultural boundaries to organize its ninth conference in Malaysia, a Muslim country. By doing so, it promoted interfaith dialogue and crosscultural understanding, embracing religious diversity and furthering international harmony.

In 2009, Sakyadhita held its eleventh conference in Vietnam. With as many as 3,000 Buddhist women participating, this became the biggest conference in the history of Sakyadhita.² At this conference, monastics and laity gathered together to share, learn, and laugh. This demonstrates the growing appeal of Sakyadhita as an association and the many practical benefits that it offers. The 70 participants from Vietnam present here today as I speak reflect the enormous impact that Sakyadhita has had in our country.

Today, Buddhism is faced with many challenges. New social, economic, and political shifts affect Buddhist societies and traditions across the globe. Even with the current negative impact of the global economic downturn and natural calamities that affect millions of people’s lives, Sakyadhita still draws the attentions of thousands of women students, researchers, and practitioners from all walks of life from many countries. Intellectuals, monastics, and ordinary Buddhist followers come together to discuss issues that are relevant to their lives, such as the role of women in

modern society, opportunities for full ordination for women, the challenges facing Buddhist women today, and the roles of Buddhist women past and present.

The world we live in today is faced with many challenges, many of which can be attributed to a decline in moral values. More than ever before, the world and its inhabitants need to restore positive human values such as compassion, honesty, non-violence, selflessness, peace-loving spirit. Through its regular conferences, the growing presence of Sakyadhita in today's world has helped to awaken people to their inner peace and to the values that the Buddha has taught centuries ago. There are more than 300 million Buddhist women worldwide, and this represents a powerful force for good in the world. If all these women unite their efforts for compassionate social action, they can be a major force for global transformation.³ In this context, Sakyadhita has indeed become an important, positive global communion of Buddhist women in the world, nourishing them academically and spiritually for the good of the world.

The fact that new Sakyadhita branches are continually being instituted in as many as ten countries in North America, Europe, and Asia is a sign of the organization's development. A series of publications – *Sakyadhita: Daughters of the Buddha* (1998); *Sisters in Solitude: Two Traditions of Monastic Ethics for Women* (1996), *Innovative Buddhist Women: Swimming against the Stream* (2000), *Bridging Worlds: Buddhist Women's Voices across Generations* (2004), *Out of the Shadows: Socially Engaged Buddhist Women* (2006); *Buddhist Women and Social Justice* (2004), to mention just a few – have appeared in bookstores and on library shelves across the globe, introducing readers in academic circles and the general public to Buddhist women, their contributions, and their struggles. These publications are another reflection of Sakyadhita's constant development.

The Present Shortcomings and Future prospects of Sakyadhita

Alongside Sakyadhita's many great achievements, some shortcomings still remain. First, since its establishment 24 years ago Sakyadhita has made it possible for women from developing countries to attend their bi-annual conferences and, by doing so, has enabled the women to actively contribute and help resolve issues that are of concern in their countries and the world. Still, the research papers and reports presented at the Sakyadhita conferences are largely theoretical in nature. As a result, the conferences have not met the expectations of all members of the younger generation of nuns as they seek to advance their studies and practice. On one hand, the Sakyadhita conferences have helped gain credibility for Buddhist women's research. On the other hand, young nuns would like to see more emphasis and discussion related to practical issues, such as the establishment of training centers that are open to nuns from different countries, the means to obtaining grants and funding to improve living and practice conditions for nuns in less developed countries, and so on.

Second, the Sakyadhita conferences, held in a different host country once every two years, offer opportunities for Buddhist women to meet and discuss the accomplishments they have made in the past two years. However, the discussions tend to be quite general and are not always relevant to the experience of women in other countries, in the sense that they do not offer practical advice that could enhance the global links among Buddhist women. For example, they do not focus on how to provide short-term or long-term courses for young nuns and laywomen from various countries to help them develop the specific skills they need, such as organizational development, event management, administrative expertise, and other skills that women could naturally excel in and would enable them to offer more to their communities.

Third, it would be good if Sakyadhita could create a strong financial foundation for its activities. It needs help in cultivating a larger network of donors and hopefully, with these donors' support, we

could establish business enterprises to provide Sakyadhita, its national branches, and local chapters with a stable source of funding. This would enable Sakyadhita members to provide programs to support and train Buddhist women to become a major resource base with professionals in a range of fields, with women taking leading roles. If this could be done, Sakyadhita would no longer be dependent on membership fees and occasional donations, but instead could extend its support to members, women's monasteries, retreat centers, and other projects that face with difficulties, especially when the world economy is reeling under the impact of severe recession.

Fourth, Sakyadhita needs to expand its operations over a wider geographical area to reach more people from different social strata. This is possible with the help of modern mass media, such as the internet. The association could expand its publications in different languages to be distributed throughout the world, with a focus on Asia, where the vast majority of Buddhist women live, often in disadvantaged circumstances. Sakyadhita could also further expand its engagement in social welfare activities, such as health care centers, education centers, self-reliant retreat centers, economic self-sufficiency projects, meditation courses, and advocacy programs for nuns' ordination.

Fifth, many feel that Sakyadhita should establish learning centers for nuns and laywomen in various locations. Some are very passionate and ambitious, calling for the establishment of a *bhikkhuni sangha* that unifies nuns all over the world. Some request Sakyadhita to exert greater effort to support nuns and laywomen around the world. They request Sakyadhita to translate the papers presented at the conferences into many languages and to encourage more female Dharma teachers and professors to join Sakyadhita in order to spread the Buddha's teachings to everyone. Of course, we all recognize that Christie Chang, Karma Lekshe Tsomo, and their dedicated team are already working night and day to achieve these aims. Sakyadhita desperately needs greater support from those who share its aims and values. Therefore, we call on all women to put aside conflicting emotions, such as jealousy, pride, and attachment, and come together to support each other in complete trust and love, and to work together in harmony for the greater good of Buddhist women and society as a whole.

I believe that, through the 12th Sakyadhita Conference, we can find solutions to these challenges and outline a course of action that will establish Buddhist nuns and laywomen as scholars, practitioners, and activities on par with their male counterparts. If we work together selflessly, we will all be able to contribute more effectively, helping develop valuable global links among Buddhist women while maintaining our own unique cultural values.

NOTES

¹ Bhikkhu Thich Thien Hoa, Vietnam Buddhist Sangha's Headquarter Leader, Opening Speech at the Foundation Ceremony of the Vietnam Bhikkhuni Sangha on 12 February 1957, An Quang Temple, manuscript published by Hue Lam Nunnery, 1957.

² Remarks by Bhikkuni Karma Lekshe Tsomo, quoted by Bhikkhu Thich Quang Tuan on *Giac Ngo Online*, the official publication of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha.

³ Dr. Christie Yu-Ling Chang, "When Buddhist Women Meet: Sakyadhita and the International Buddhist Women's Movement." Paper presented at the Council on International Educational Exchange and National Taiwan University, 2009.

The Effect of Japanese Feudalistic Residues on Lay Buddhists in Japan

Aiko Mizuno

It is well known that structures of male-dominance are often supported by women as well as men, and we also know that gender equality is often fortified by men as well as women. Thus, gender discrimination comes down to the choices made by each one of us as humans. We need to carefully examine our backgrounds and the effects our experiences have on the development of our individual perspectives so we can intelligently make those choices. In the case of Japanese society, the long history of the Japanese feudalistic system, rife with patriarchy and the overly prized integrity of the ancestral line, still exerts visible and invisible influences on people and on how they behave and structure society. Japanese Buddhists are no exception. In this paper, I will focus on Japanese lay Buddhists, examining how some of these feudalistic residues intersect with Buddhist teachings.

Lay Buddhism in Japan

In an article in the latest issue of *Dharma World*, Dr. Gene Reeves, one of my mentors in becoming a Buddhist scholar-practitioner, states, "...While today the most vital, energetic, and socially engaged Buddhism in Japan is found largely in lay Buddhist organizations, the term *Japanese Buddhism* is often used by scholars in ways that suggest that the only Buddhism in Japan is found in traditional temples and their headquarters, ... If one ignores the existence of lay Buddhist movements in Japan, probably the significant involvement of women in Japanese Buddhism will be ignored as well."¹ To help surmount this wall, I will give a brief introduction to the Japanese lay Buddhist movement.

The environment surrounding Japanese Buddhists has been unique. Unlike other lay Buddhist organizations, in which laypeople play subordinate roles to the monastics, Japanese lay organizations are very independent of them. There are independent lay organizations in other parts of the world too, but in Japan, this characteristic has developed nationwide. When Japanese lay organizations interact with ordained people, they do so with respect, yet from a standpoint of equality. In short, and as a lay Buddhist myself, "we are proud to be lay Buddhists."

Considering such independence, some issues may arise. First, how are the monastics and traditional temples being financed? The answer is the *danka* system. This refers to the voluntary and long-term affiliation between a Buddhist temple and the households in its region. Those households are called "*danka*." They financially support the temple and in exchange, the temple performs rituals and provides for the households' spiritual needs. Once compulsory for all citizens in Japan, the mandatory *danka* system was officially abolished after the Edo period. Nonetheless, the tradition still exists, and constitutes a major part of the income of most temples. *Danka* people can also be called lay Buddhists, but one should not confuse those lay Buddhists who belong to lay Buddhist organizations with *danka* Buddhists, since the nature and characteristics of the two groups are very different. From another perspective, a lay Buddhist belonging to a lay Buddhist organization may also be a *danka* to a certain temple, usually the temple that the person's family has been associated with since the days of the mandatory *danka* system.

Another issue is that most Japanese monks can no longer be called "monastics" in the traditional sense, because the majority of them generally lead a secular life. By eating meat, drinking alcohol, and marrying, how can they earn people's respect? Therefore, it is natural that lay Buddhist supporters started to separate and form their own Buddhist gatherings. The secularization of Buddhist

monastics was one factor that accelerated the lay Buddhist movement from the beginning. However, no movement that arises from negativity can endure for long. What lies at the heart of the movement is the ability and the freedom of an individual practitioner to create his or her own atmosphere of spiritual practice. The lay Buddhist movement offers the opportunity to remain a layperson and still walk the Buddhist path.

The lay Buddhist movement initially arose at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, but the idea and philosophy can be traced back to when Buddhism was first introduced to Japan from Baekje. In the early 7th century, Prince Shōtoku promoted Buddhism and published the *Sangyō Gisho* (Annotated Commentaries on the Three Sutras). The Three Sutras are the Mahayana texts: the *Hokeke Gisho* (Annotations on the Meaning of the Lotus Sutra), the *Shōmankyō Gisho* (Annotations on the Meaning of the Srimaladevi Simhanada Sutra), and the *Yuimagyō Gisho* (Annotations on the Meaning of the Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sutra). In his commentaries, Prince Shōtoku celebrates the enlightenment of a woman (in the *Shōmankyō Gisho*) and a layperson (in the *Yuimagyō Gisho*) and argues that, if one truly tries to achieve *nirvana*, one should be able to meditate anywhere, whether in a city or a forest, whether inside or outside the home (the *Hokeke Gisho*). There are varying academic views on the existence of Prince Shōtoku, because there is no reliable historical record of him. Popular historical documents that describe the life of Prince Shōtoku, the *Nihon Shoki* (*the Chronicles of Japan*) and *Kojiki* (*Record of Ancient Matters*), were edited almost a century after his time and overly mystify him. Nonetheless, it is agreed that the remarkable *Sangyō Gisho* was indeed created during that period in Japan.

Buddhism in a Feudalistic Mode

Ancient Japan reflected the ideals of China. All aspects of cultural life were influenced by imports from China, including Buddhism and other philosophies. One philosophy was Confucianism, which promoted five constant virtues and five human relationships. Confucianism promotes the view that cultivating and expanding the five constant virtues (humanity, loyalty, courtesy, wisdom, and belief) helps maintain the healthy functioning of the five human relationships between parents and children, lords and vassals, husbands and wives, elders and youth, and friends. Some scholars argue that although Confucian teachings did not initially promote a subordinate role of women to men, it became a strong tradition later, during the Tang Dynasty in ancient China. After the death of Prince Shōtoku at a young age, various Buddhist schools – fused with Confucian traditions – were brought to Japan, where they were acculturated. Even today, we can observe the cultural fusion of Buddhism and Confucianism. For example, Buddhist temples serve and protect tombs and monopolize the inscription of mortuary tablets. Also, Buddhist monks perform funeral rites, even though, according to some Buddhist texts, they are not supposed to attend funerals. Personally, I do not object to Buddhist monks performing funeral rites, but I do not think they necessarily have an occupational right to do so. It is a bit ironic that some Buddhist practices resemble those of *brahmins*, who, by propagating the authority of the Vedas, monopolized the performance of all ritual to make their living.

Buddhist temples were transformed by their association with other moral standards and social customs in order to survive. They helped promote Confucian and feudalistic values in children by functioning as *terakoya* (temple schools). *Terakoya* flourished during the Edo period, during the long, stable reign of the Tokugawa Shogunate, which propelled the spread of strict feudalistic measures. Even after the overthrow of the shogunate and the opening of the country to outside influences, the financial success of the *zaibatsu* (family cartels that formed industrial conglomerates and protected each other in those days) helped further institute and formalize patriarchy. The hierarchy of social ranks and noble

bloodlines were things to be praised and not trespassed.

Lay Buddhism in Japan Today

Japan spent most of the 20th century engaging in wars. During that time, drastic changes in moral values and ways of thinking occurred. The lay Buddhist movement in Japan emerged from the profound depths of the common people's struggles and efforts to find hope and create a better future. From another perspective, this movement occurred as a counter-measure to structural hierarchies, just as Buddhism itself had arisen to oppose the authority of the Vedas and the *brahmin* priests. Today, certain issues still need to be addressed within the lay Buddhist organizations in Japan.

First, unconsciously failing to fulfill their initial purpose, most of these organizations automatically praise and promote the family lineage of their founders. The founders' descendants generally succeed to the post of president or other leadership positions. Sadly, it seems to be the universal impulse of any organization and its followers to grow larger. And the bigger the organizations become, the more they tend to rely on hierarchical structures. In this unconscious attachment to old, inherited values, women often continue to hold themselves back and create or contribute to an atmosphere that defines women's roles as subordinate to men.

Second, it is surprising to discover that so many Japanese lay Buddhist organizations are based on the *Lotus Sutra*, yet there is no connection whatsoever among them. It has been the custom for Japan's administrative systems to work vertically so it seems that these organizations are following the same general structural model. Yet closer observation also shows that many of these Japanese lay Buddhist organizations are derived from and became independent of the same source organizations. As a result, they tend to emphasize their differences from each other, and efforts to go beyond those differences and to communicate with each other have been few.

In this regard, I had a sad but memorable experience. Not long ago, I attended an INEB (International Network of Engaged Buddhists) conference for the first time. In a discussion among Japanese participants, the president of another Japanese lay Buddhist organization mentioned the importance of *bodhisattva* practices. I agreed with him, saying, "I truly agree with what you've said about *bodhisattva* practices!" His immediate and spontaneous reply to my words showed discomfort and caution: "Yeah, but it should not mean vigorous member hunting." He knew nothing about my organization and nothing about me. I still believe that he is an interesting person who has much to offer as a socially engaged Buddhist. Although one aspect of the Buddha's teachings is to eliminate prejudice and see things as they are, that man's perception of me was somehow encumbered or clouded even before we could start a human relationship.

Encouragement

As Buddhists, we all strive to follow the path of the Buddha (or buddhas). Regardless of many variations in understanding the Buddha's teachings, I know one thing for sure: The Buddha taught and encouraged us to be fully aware and to appreciate the experiences of life. In order to achieve this, we all need to patiently try to be wholeheartedly present, especially in problematic or uncomfortable situations. In order to learn how to be present, we all need to look into the depths of our hearts and understand what is really playing behind the scenes of our decision-making.

Wasting women's potential – half the world's human potential – is just too obviously bizarre. It also wastes men's potential for liberation. Many people of both genders, with or without full awareness, are still engaged in the old formalities that diminishes women. Although women and men

have certain physical differences and abilities, these must not be confused with abilities and roles. We all know that, regardless of gender, every individual has his or her own unique character to be celebrated. As Dr. Reeves puts it, "...While progress is slow, there are reasons to be encouraged, even to think that it may be Buddhist women who will lead the way toward universal recognition of the value inherent in all human being equally."²

In closing, I would like to mention a few things. To some people, it may seem that I presented a view in opposition to the ordained community. To be clear, I do not distinguish and stand against it. To me, it is evidence of the Buddha's skillful means that one may be either lay or ordained. I only object when people try to achieve respect merely due to the forms. Respect is not something to be accorded by structures, but is something to be earned by being good examples. In the same manner, trust is also not automatically achieved in a day, but is something to be cultivated in everyday communications and interactions over time. Therefore, I hope for and look forward to many, many beginnings of many, many friendships at this Sakyadhita conference!

NOTES

¹ *Dharma World* 38, p. 6.

² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Ayakova Zhargal

The form of Buddhism that spread in Mongolia and Buryatiya is the Tibetan tradition of Mahayana, sometimes called Lamaism. The Tibetan Mahayana tradition is a development of Indian Buddhism. It represents a transformation of religion and culture that corresponds to the social and spiritual needs of Tibetan society. This tradition took a distinctive form among Mongolian language speakers, particularly among the Buryat people. As in all Buddhist traditions, Buryat Buddhism fully accepts the concepts and principles of early Indian Buddhism, identifying the existence of suffering and the necessity to overcome suffering to achieve liberation from cyclic existence.

In the canonic literature of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, we find all the main teachings attributed to Sakyamuni Buddha, including the transitory nature of all compounded phenomena, the pervasiveness of suffering, the connection between human suffering and actions created in previous rebirths, as well as the way to overcome suffering and become free from the craving for existence. These key elements of Buddhist doctrine – the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, the 12 Links of Dependent Arising (*pratityasamutpada*) – are the essence of the Buddhist tradition adopted by the Tibetans, Buryats, and Mongols. In Buryatia, the Four Noble Truths became the guiding principles for Buddhist followers, impelling them to meditate on the nature of existence and the meaning of life. *Pratityasamutpada* is identified as central to understanding the idea of unfortunate and fortunate rebirths. In this tradition, the immutable law of *karma*, which puts the responsibility for all misfortunes on the individuals concerned, is made concrete in a detailed list of unwholesome deeds and their corresponding consequences in this or future lives. Movement along the Eightfold Path means abstaining from the ten nonvirtuous actions: three of body, four of speech, and three of mind.

A contemporary Buddhist woman in Buryatia is a woman who sometimes goes to a *datsan* (Buddhist monastery outside of town) or *duugan* (a branch of the *datsan* in town), consults *lamas*, orders personal prayer services, makes offerings (*dalgaa*), practices rituals, and attends Buddhist ceremonies (*khural*). *Duugans* are located in different parts of the town, which allow women to visit often. This is convenient for women, since they are busy with work and social activities. They may visit *duugan* before or after work to order the special services that they need. Many people gather on their days off. Generally, they attend prayer ceremonies, repeat mantras, go around the *datsan* (*gooroo*) one to three times, make individual visits to *lamas*, and consult *lamas* specializing in Tibetan medicine (*emchy-lama*) and astrologers (*zuurbay-lama*).

In addition, modern Buryat Buddhist women have various Buddhist articles and images or statues (*burhkan*) in their homes. Almost every Buddhist family has a photo of H. H. 14th Dalai Lama, individual prayer beads, and incense sticks (*adiss*). Women visit the *datsun* or *duggan* more often than men, since women have a religious consciousness that leads them to the religious behavior. This does not mean that Buryat Buddhist women know Buddhist philosophical systems or have penetrated the core of the Dharma, however. As mother, wife, sister, and daughter, women take care of the family and home and are concerned about the destiny of the near relatives. Generally, women have idealistic worldviews, believing in spiritual responsibility (*karma*), which means not to do bad actions, since they can return to us in this or another life.

Women usually resolve their material or spiritual problems thanks to *lamas*, ceremonies, *mantras*, helping sick relatives by everyday prayer. It was extremely meritorious that Buryat Buddhist women were able to keep Buddhist religious traditions alive during the Soviet antireligious period. Secretively, they visited *lamas*, commissioned rituals, and

preserved Buddhist relics. During the years of suppression of religion, a generation grew up and into old age without the benefit of the Dharma. The transmission of Buddhist religious values from one generation to the next was lost and restoring these links has not been easy. Due to the efforts of Buryat women and their natural religious consciousness, religious values were maintained in the family even without external support or expressions of religious behavior. Buryat women had boundless faith in good will, good health, and good *karma* based on their knowledge of Buddhism and lived their lives according to Buddhist ethical values. In the family, women initiated Buddhist practices and taught their children Buddhist traditional practices in everyday life.

In 1993, a *datsan* for Buddhist women called Zuungon Darzhaling was founded in Ulan-Ude, the capital of Buryatia. The great Buddhist teacher Yeshe Lodoi Rinpoche made a major contribution to the founding of this *datsan*. He named it Zuungon Darzhaling (“noble and thriving”) and conferred the lay precepts (*geninma*, Sanskrit: *upasika*) on the women of the *datsan*. Zorigma Budayeva, director of the *datsan*, took the *geninma* precepts and began to serve the *datsan*, living nearby with her family. She took part in the 8th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women in Seoul, Korea, in 2004. Currently there are five *geninma* in this *datsan*. Outside the *datsan*, they appear to be ordinary Buryat women, wearing Mongolian clothes no different from other women in Buryat society. They say: “Life is life. We are not free from social and professional activities and must fulfill all our family responsibilities and bring up our children.”¹

Every morning at 9:30, these women hold a prayer ceremony called Zhamsaran. On special days, they perform other rituals, such as Mandalshiva, Tsedub, Altan Guerel, Lhamo, Otosh, and Tui Mandalshiva. People come to the *geninma* for advice, individual rituals, and *mantra* recitations, and astrological forecasts. The *geninma* teach the laywomen how to pray, perform rituals, and conduct themselves during praying ceremonies. They explain some philosophical ideas, such as *karma* (cause and effect) and the moral law of Dependent Arising (*pratityasamutpada*). They explain why it is important to take the fundamental precepts of becoming a Buddhist: not to kill, steal, lie, commit adultery, or drink alcohol.

In general, the functions of the women’s *datsan* do not differ from the functions of all the other *datsans* and *dugaans* in Buryatia. Many Buryat women no longer speak Buryat language, however, so the *lamas* speak to them in Russian and therefore need to use words such as “soul” to explain the notion of *hunhan* (vital energy, consciousness) or “God” instead of *burkhan* (enlightened beings). In the *datsans* and *duugans*, one also sees Russian women coming to the *lamas* for advice.

Virtuous behavior for Buryat believers includes paying respect of the three precious things: Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. To respect the Buddha and the enlightened ones means actions of praying, bowing, not turning one’s back on them, and maintaining proper behavior around them. To respect the Dharma means actions such as learning to read and write Buddhist language, so that one can read and understand the scriptures, purchase them, copy them, and carefully preserve them. It also means taking part in Buddhist ceremonies (*kebural*), reading *mantras* (*tarni*), and using prayer beads. It not only means following the rules of Buddhist ethics and practice, but also teaching them to family members. To respect the Sangha, the community of monks, with actions means acquiring spiritual knowledge, showing respect to *lamas*, making offerings to the clergy and the *datsans*, and building temples, shrines, *stupas*, and so forth.

There are some Buryat Buddhist Women who have a deep philosophical knowledge of Buddhism. They have a doctoral degrees and work at the Institute of Mongolian, Buddhist, and Tibetan Studies of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Science. Most are social scientists, but one of them, Irina Urbanayeva (Tenzin Chodron), who has a doctoral in philosophy, has taken the precepts of a nun (*getsulma*). Her appearance, clothes, and lifestyle are those of a nun. As the director of a Buddhist

community called the Green Tara Temple (Nogon Dara Ekhe), she is active in society. For example, in 2005 in the center of Ulan-Ude, she organized a large-scale gathering and collected the signatures of Buddhist followers and laypeople to invite H.H. the 14th Dalai Lama to visit Buryatia. As is known, the Russian government did not grant a visa for His Holiness to visit Buryatia. Irina Urbanayeva was able to attract the attention of all local mass-media resources, but all efforts were unsuccessful. Still, Buryat Buddhists have not relinquished their hopes to meet His Holiness and receive Dharma teachings from him.

The aspiration of Buryat Buddhist women to receive Buddhist teachings is great. Therefore, they attend lectures on Buddhism given by teachers such as Gueshe Dzhampa Tinley or Ole Nidal. As a rule, the public learns about lectures from advertisements and the halls are generally full of people. Often books become the major source of Buddhist teachings for laywomen. More affluent Buddhist women travel Dharamsala and other parts of India to attend the philosophy lectures by H.H. Dalai Lama. Nowadays, touring the historical *datsans* in Buryatia has also become very popular. All over Buryatia, Buddhist women gather in small groups to travel to *datsans* and meet local *lamas* who tell them the history of the *datsans*. They believe that these visits are a source of great merit.

Buddhist women also try to visit sacred places in nature. In the territory of ethnic Buryatia, there is a sacred mountain called Alkhanai, which was visited by H.H. 14th Dalai Lama in 1991. Since ancient times, Mt. Alkhanai has held special meaning for the Buryat believers and has been the site of mass pilgrimages. The harmonious relationship between Buddhist beliefs and natural monuments in Buryatia teaches people love and respect for the environment, affirming the unity of humanity and nature. Buryat Buddhists believe that the hot springs at Mt. Alkhanai have healing power for the treatment of headache, kidney and liver diseases, sterility and so on. Local *lamas* teach the laypeople to generate *bodhicitta* to make the treatment more effective. The main results come from our consciousness, right thoughts, right words, and right actions. Twelve sites with rocks and stones of unusual shape, such as Dimchig sume (named after a Buddhist deity who protects Alkhanai) and Ekhyn umai (a site that gives joy to mothers), have become pilgrimage destinations. The stone paths that lead to them are compared to a human being's spiritual journey; walking on such a path, pilgrims believe that they become spiritually and physically purified, treading the path of self-improvement. Alkhanai is now under the protection of UNESCO.

In the *datsans* and in sacred places in nature, Buddhists repeat, "*Om mani padme hum*," the *mantra* of Avalokiteshvara, *bodhisattva* of compassion. The *lamas* teach many *mantras*, which can be used by laywomen according to the situation. But nowadays, many *lamas* tend to especially recommend recitation of the *mantra Om mani padme hum*, because of its universality and because it is not difficult to pronounce. They advise followers not to make mistakes in repeating more complicated *mantras*, but just remember this one, *Om mani padme khum*, to be recited everyday and for all situations.

Only a few people try to understand the deeper philosophical meaning of the Buddhist teachings about the world and human beings' place within it. Most believers focus on directing loving kindness and compassion to all living creatures. The practice of rituals also has great significance for Buryat Buddhists. Believers clearly understand the meaning and sequence of numerous rituals performed at religious sites: *datsans*, sacred natural places (*obo*), and at home. Nobody doubts that creating good deeds (*buin*) and staying away from bad deeds will result in a prosperous life and a fortunate rebirth.

In Buryat Buddhism, there are two types of rituals (*khural*): large temple ceremonies and everyday religious prayer services. The most important ceremonies, large and small, are open to the public. Large temple ceremonies are held to celebrate various aspects of the Dharma or to commemorate important Buddhist events. For example, Ganzhur *khural* is dedicated to the Buddha's

teachings, Zula *kbural* is held to commemorate the day when Je Tsongkhapa attained *nirvana*. Small *kburals* are everyday religious prayer services that are dedicated to different Buddhist deities, each with meaning for people's lives. The majority of the visitors who attend the *kburals* and prayer ceremonies are women. Buryat Buddhist women have strong faith in *lamas*, *mantras*, and the efficacious or magical power of the prayer ceremonies and rituals. A few meditate on the deeper philosophical teachings, such as the value of being born as a human beings, the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the 12 Links of Dependent Arising (*pratityasamutpada*). According to Nagarjuna, "If one seeks to make one's fate easier only by performing rituals, not caring about one's spiritual development, that is wrong thinking."² But together with the regular performance of religious rituals to provide prosperity in all spheres of life, Buryat Buddhists also follow the five precepts, the fundamental moral principles of human society.

Overall, the *datsans*, *dungans*, and the social and spiritual functions they provide are very significant in Buryat society. These religious traditions, ceremonies, and rituals are the central activities in the lives of Buddhist women in Buryatia. The modern Buryat Buddhist woman plays a major role in restoring Buddhist values in the Buryat Republic, preserving Buddhist traditions in the family and giving children practical knowledge about Buddhist traditions.

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¹ Z. Budayeva and D. Tsinguyeva, *In the Aspiration for Nobleness* Ulan-Ude, 2008, p. 52.

² V. P. Androsova, *The Buddhism of Nagarjuna*, 2000, p. 538.

Buddhist Women and the Universal Monarch Concept

Kustiani

According to the Buddhist texts, during the Buddha's time there were 16 tribal states (*mahajanapadas*)¹ in India during the Buddha's time that adopted either republican or monarchical systems. Vajji and Malla were republics, while Kosala, Vasa, and Magadha were monarchies.² From a Buddhist perspective, both systems were regarded as equal in status.³ The two systems of government were also equal in another sense: almost all Indian sources agree that, whether the state was a republic or a monarchy, the leaders were all men.

The king held the highest political position in the monarchical system. Buddhism developed its own ideal of such a ruler: in Buddhism, an ideal king is called a universal monarch (*cakravatti*). A perusal of Buddhist texts shows that women are never mentioned as becoming *cakravatti*; in fact, the term *cakravatti* is always used to refer to men. There is no mention of women becoming a *cakravatti*. As far as the historical records are concerned, only during the later period do we find that Buddhist women became rulers in Sri Lanka.⁴

Women in Society and Politics as Depicted in Brahmanical Texts

Indian society prior to the emergence of Buddhism was Brahmanical and patriarchal in its religious and social structure. It is said that even in the birthplace of the Buddha, *brahmins* officiated at the domestic religious functions of the Sakyan people and settled in an area called Khomadussa.⁵ The influences of Brahmanism were strong and had a deep impact on the mindset of the people. Political life was patriarchal, too; hence, the rulers were predominantly men, and generally from the warrior caste (*khattiya*).

Brahmanic teachings place women lower than men in almost all respects. This is shown in the Laws of Manu (*Manusmṛiti*), the fundamental Brahmanical text regarding social organization. According to this text, in religious life, women are not allowed to study religious texts to the extent that men are and there are certain ritual *mantras* that women are prohibited from reciting.⁶ Women are regarded as beings who come into the world predisposed to seduce men.⁷ In their social and family lives, women's duties are mostly limited to producing children, serving their husbands, and doing domestic work.⁸ In general, women's roles in Indian society are depicted in the *Manusmṛiti* never move beyond the domestic sphere. It was impossible for women in Brahmanical society to have a significant role in political life.

Buddhism does not place women in such a low position as Brahmanism does, though Buddhist texts also do not speak much about the role of women in relation to political life and kingship. Some Buddhist texts mention that women are unable to become a *cakravatti*. For example, the Anguttara Nikāya clearly says: "It is impossible, monks, it cannot come to pass, that a woman should be a universal monarch. But, monks, it is quite possible for a man to be a universal monarch."⁹

The Buddhist Monarchical Concept and its Relation to Women

It is important to keep in mind that the concept of rulers of empires already existed in the Brahmanic society before the emergence of Buddhism. The development of the concept can be traced in some Brahmanic texts, such as the *Maitrīyāya Upaniṣad*.¹⁰ In Brahmanic society, the concept of a ruler is related to the concept of a god. Rulers of empires are said to be equivalent to the gods Indra

and Varuna.¹¹

The concept of *cakkavattī* is found in the earliest texts of the Pāli canon and seems to have developed later, as the temporal counterpart of the Buddha, who is viewed as a spiritual ruler or leader.¹² In Buddhism, the concept of *cakkavattī* is not related to gods; rather, the status of *cakkavattī* can be gained by any king who is seriously concerned about the welfare of his people, including both their material and spiritual welfare. Socially and politically speaking, a *cakkavattī* is given a special status in later Buddhist texts.¹³ A *cakkavattī* is regarded as equal to the Buddha in some aspects, such as working for the happiness of humankind¹⁴ and as the teacher of the people.¹⁵ Well-known *cakkavattīs* in the Buddhist texts are Dalhanemi¹⁶ and Mahāsudassana.¹⁷

Some Buddhist texts praise the physical qualities of the *cakkavattī*, which are same physical qualities that marked the Buddha. Both the Buddha and the *cakkavattī* are said to possess the 32 bodily marks of a great person (*dvattimsamabāpurisalakkhaṇā*).¹⁸ These bodily characteristics include, for example, having wheels with a thousand spokes on the soles of the feet, being able to touch the knees with the hands, and a sheathed male organ. During the Buddha's time, the concept of the 32 bodily marks was common in fortune telling and prognostication practices in Indian society,¹⁹ though these practices were rejected by the Buddha as being low arts or pseudo-science (*tiracchānavijjā*).²⁰

The 32 bodily characteristics provide evidence that, in order to become a *cakkavattī*, one must be a man. The reason for this is that such a being possesses the vital organ of a man within a sheath (*kosohitavathaguyha*).²¹ It can thus be assumed that a woman will not be able to be a *cakkavattī*.

There is a relationship between women and the concept of *cakkavattī* in the canon, however: it is said that woman is one of the seven treasures of a *cakkavattī* – the woman treasure (*itthiratanā*). The other six being the wheel treasure, elephant treasure, horse treasure, gem treasure, household treasure, and adviser treasure.²² According to descriptions of a *cakkavattī* in the Buddhist texts, a woman must possess certain qualities to be an *itthiratanā*. She must be:²³

.... lovely, fair to see, charming, with a lotus-like complexion, not too tall or too short, not too thin or too fat, not too dark or too fair, of more than human, deva-like beauty. And the touch of the skin of the Woman-Treasure was like cotton or silk... Her body smelt of sandal-wood and her lips of lotus... was not unfaithful to the King even in thought, much less in deed.²⁴

It is clear that the qualities of “woman” that are emphasized here are the “feminine” qualities. So far, we do not have any evidence that women were also given the opportunity to make contributions to the development of the country. The greatest worth of a woman is merely producing a crown prince for the continuity of the country. It is unclear whether a *cakkavattī* has one wife or many wives as *itthiratanā*.²⁵

The Original Meaning of Mahāpurisa in Relation to Cakkavattī

Some may ask, why did the Buddha not say that a woman can also be a *cakkavattī*? Does it mean that the Buddha was sexist? We cannot easily make such a judgment. The answer is related to socio-political conditions of Indian society at the time. Due to the patriarchal and sexist attitudes of Indian society at the time of the Buddha, it was difficult for women to hold high positions in political life. Women were only involved in the domestic sphere, without access to political knowledge. Even if there were women from royal families who gained access to politics, it would have been a “social shock” if the Buddha had openly admitted that a woman could be a *cakkavattī*. When women learn about the Buddhist concept of *cakkavattī*, some women might never have the courage to participate in political

life. They might think that it is useless to engage in politics, because it is not the world they should be involved in.

When we carefully examine the early and later strata of Buddhist texts, we discover that the reason may not only be a matter of socio-political conditions in Indian society of the day, but may also have been a different emphasis regarding the concept of a great person (*mahāpurisa*) in the early²⁶ Buddhist texts and in later²⁷ texts, where the concept becomes infused with references to the importance of bodily marks. In defining the concept of the great person, the Buddha provides a different view from the various notions that prevailed in Indian society at that time. This is well exemplified in the *Vassakāra Sutta* of the Anguttara Nikāya where the Buddha defines the great person as a person who is concerned for the welfare and happiness of humankind, who has mastered the mind and the way of thought, has trained the mind well up to a certain level, such as possessing the four *jhānas*, and has destroyed the defilements of mind by attaining liberation of mind (*cetovimutti*) and liberation by wisdom (*paññāvimutti*).²⁸

Another explanation of the great person can be found in the *Mahāpurisa Sutta* of the Samyutta Nikāya.²⁹ In this *sutta*, the Buddha clearly says that a great person is one whose mind is liberated. Hence, it can be assumed that the Buddhist concept of a great person is related to qualities of the spiritual life. Although the word *purisa* is masculine in gender, the description of the requirements for a *mahāpurisa* in these two discourses is silent about gender and applies to all people, both women and men. Hence, it can be said that the concept of a great person applies regardless of physical qualities. This view is supported by the *Lakuntakabhaddiya Sutta*,³⁰ which tells a story affirming that even an ugly dwarf can attain liberation of mind and become a person with great spiritual power (*mahiddhiko mahānubbhāvo*). Although Lakuntakabhaddiya was an ugly dwarf, he was praised by the Buddha as a beautiful and delightful person, due to his mental qualities.³¹ As far as the concept of *cakkavattī* is also imbued with the concept of great person, it can safely be assumed that the real *cakkavattī* should fulfill the real mental quality of the *cakkavattī*.

The purpose here is not to try to provide justification for women to be *cakkavattī*. Rather, we seek a new perspective that may empower women's role in politics. Women do not need to think about the importance of being qualified to be a *cakkavattī*. The most important thing that women must be able to access to the moral teachings that underlie the *cakkavattī* concept. Here, we want to focus on the inner spiritual qualities of a *cakkavattī* rather than the physical characteristics. Emphasis is on the essential quality or service that a "*cakkavattī* had to conduct in accordance with the Dhamma, providing the right watch, ward and protection to the people (*dhammika-rakṣhāvara āgutti*)."²⁸ It is said that when the king is righteous and keeps the precepts, a wheel-turning monarch (*cakkavattī*) will appear in the kingdom.²⁹ By trying to fulfill the mental requirements for becoming a *mahāpurisa* and considering the real meaning of *cakkavattī* as a ruler who fulfills the *ariyan* duties (*ariyancakkavattivatta*), women can become leaders. Women can become leaders of their community, country, and even the world. Though it may be difficult for women to gain the title *cakkavattī*, they can become leaders as great as *cakkavattī*.

Many Buddhist women can be taken as role models of successful leaders. A queen named Sima in the Kalinga kingdom of Indonesia was a just ruler in the 7th century CE.³⁰ In contemporary times, we can take the examples of Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka who in 1960 became the first woman prime minister in the world and Aung San Suu Kyi, the democratic leader in Burma who won the Noble Peace Prize in 1991. They are examples of the changes that great women can bring for humankind through their role in politics.

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¹ The names of these tribal states are *a gāna, magadhāna, kāsīna, kosālāna, vajjīna, mallāna, cetīna, va gāna, kurūna, pañcālāna, macchāna, sūrasenāna, assakāna, avantīna, gandhārāna, kambojāna*. A.N. I. 212.

² Abeynayake, Oliver. *The Fundamental of Buddhist Polity* (Singapore: Ti-Sarana Buddhist Association, 1995), p. 30.

³ Ibid., p. 31.

⁴ For example, Lilavati, Sivali and Anula. They governed the country for short periods of time. Anula, for example, was the ruler of Sri Lanka for about four months. Anula was labeled a bad queen, a “lewd woman,” because she killed many men. See G. P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pāli proper Names* (London: Pali Text Society, 1974), p. 93.

⁵ Davids, T.W. Rhys. *The Story of the Nations: Buddhist India* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903), p. 21. See also *Khomadussa Sutta*, S.N. I. 183.

⁶ A sacrifice called *agnibotra* (fire sacrifice) was performed only by males who belonged to the three Aryan *varnas* (*sudras* not included). The sacrifice could be performed by women and *sudras* also, but without the recitation of *mantras*. G. Buhler, *The Laws of Manu* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), p. 32.

⁷ “It is the nature of women to seduce men in this (world); for that reason the wise are never unguarded in (the company of) females.” Ibid., p. 69.

⁸ See the Laws of Manu regarding family life. Ibid., p. 75 ff.

⁹ *Atthānametam, bhikkhave, anavakāso yam itthī rājā assa cakkavattī. Netam thānam vijjati. Thānañca kbo etam, bhikkhave, vijjati yam puriso rājā assa cakkavattī. Thānametam vijjati*. A.N. I. 28.

¹⁰ “There are other great ones, mighty wielders of bows, rulers of empires, Sudyumna, Bhūridyumna, Indradyumna, Kuvalayasva, Yauvanasva, Vadhyasva, Asvapati....” F. Max Müller, *The Sacred Books of The East*, vol. 15 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884), p. 289.

¹¹ Sanath Kumara Nanayakkara. “*Cakravartin*,” *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, vol. 3 (The Government of Sri Lanka, 1977), p. 592 ff.

¹² Ibid., p. 594.

¹³ “Though this relation between the Mahāpurisa concept and the Buddha and cakkavattī concepts is mentioned in the canon itself, it could be that this belongs to the later stratum...”. Wimalaratana Bellanwila. “Mahapurisa,” *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, vol. 6, op cit, p. 468. But early texts say that it is better to be a *sotapanna* than a *cakkavattī*, because a *cakkavattī* will only be born in the heavenly realm (*kiñcāpi, bhikkhave, rājā cakkavattī catunna dīpāna issariyādhipacca rajja kāretvā kāyassa bhedā para mara ā sugati sagga loka upapajjati devāna tāvati sāna sahaḥyata*), S.V. 341.

¹⁴ *puggalā loke uppajjamānā uppajjanti babujanahitāya babujanasukhāya, babuno janassa atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussāna*, A.N. I. 76.

¹⁵ *puggalā loke uppajjamānā uppajjanti acchariyamanussā*, A.N. I. 76

¹⁶ *Bhūtapubba, bhikkhave, rājā da hanemi nāma abosi cakkavattī*, D.N. III. 58. Cakavattisihanāda Sutta.

¹⁷ *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, D.N. II. 47.

¹⁸ “... *mahāpuriso āyatapanhi boti...pe... dighanguli boti... mudutalunabattapādo boti... jālabattapādo boti... ussankhapādo boti... enjangho boti... thitakova anonamanto ubbohi pānitalehi jannukāni parimasati parimajjati... kosohitavattbhaggyho boti... idampi, bhikkhave, mahāpurisassa mahāpurisalakkhanam bhavati.*” *Lakkhana Sutta*. D.N.I. 141. ff. Translation: Translation. Maurice walse. *The Long Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications. 1995), Pg. 441 ff.

¹⁹ Wimalaratana, Belanvila. Concept of Great Man. Singapore: Buddhist Research Society. Pg. 20.

²⁰ “*angam nimittam uppātam supinam lakṣhanam mūṣikacchinnam aggibomam dabbibomam thusabomam kanabomam tandulabomam sappibomam telabomam mukhabomam lobitabomam angavijjā vatthuvijjā kbhattavijjā sīvavijjā bhūtavijjā bhūrivijjā abivijjā visavijjā vicchikavijjā mūṣikavijjā sakunavijjā vāyasavijjā pakṣajjhānam saraparittānam migacakkam iti vā iti eva rūpāya tiracchānavijjā micchājīvā*” Ibid. Pg. 22 or see: D.N. I. 8, *Brahmajāla Sutta*.

²¹ *Lakkhana Sutta*, A.D.N. III, 160; *Mahāpadāna Sutta*, Apadāna I 30; D.N. II. 17.

²² *Tassimāni satta ratanāni bhavanti. Seyyathidam cakkaranam, batthiratanam, assaratanam, maniratanam, itthiratanam, gahapatiratanam, parināyakanameva sattama. Ambattha Sutta*, D.N. I. 88; *Mahāpadāna Sutta*, D.N. II. 13.

²³ *Tassimāni satta ratanāni bhavanti. Seyyathidam cakkaranam, batthiratanam, assaratanam, maniratanam, itthiratanam, gahapatiratanam, parināyakanameva sattama. Ambattha Sutta*, D.N. I. 88; *Mahāpadāna Sutta*, D.N. II. 13.

²⁴ *Mahā Sudassana Sutta*. D.II. 175. Maurice Walsh, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), p. 208.

²⁵ Based on the *Lakkhana Sutta*, it is said that the vital organ is enclosed with sheath and therefore a *cakkavattī* will have more than one thousand sons. Logically, then, a *cakkavattī* has more than one wife. See Maurice O. Walshe. *The Long Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), p. 451.

²⁶ A.N. III. 35; Samyutta Nikāya/Parayana Vagga of the Sutta Nipāta.

²⁷ *Mahāpadāna Sutta, Mahālakṣhana Sutta, and Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta*.

²⁸ A.N. I 109.

²⁹ “If you perform the duties of an Ariyan wheel-turning monarch, on the fast-day of the fifteenth...the sacred Wheel-Treasure will appear to you, thousand-spoked, complete with fellow, hub and all appurtenances.” *Cakkavattī Sihanāda Sutta*. Marice Walsh, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995) p. 396.

³⁰ [<http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Keling>] Accessed December 9, 2010.

The Question of Lineage from Women's Perspectives: Buddhist Women and Political Power in Bangladesh

Wasfia Nazreen

This paper discusses the challenges faced by Buddhist women in Bangladesh today in establishing their equal rights to Buddhist practice. It attempts to link these challenges with the legacy of the rich Buddhist heritage of the past, including the role of Buddhist women, and touches upon the decline and resurgence of Buddhism, and its survival today, in Bangladesh. These leaders led their people against discrimination, colonization, and militarization. A central part of the struggle of the Buddhist peoples today is to retain their identity and culture, inspired by Buddhist principles. The paper will focus on the frontier region of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, where the writer did most of her primary research.

Methodology

Through a survey carried out amongst participants from both the Barua and Adibashi (indigenous) Jumma communities, participants were questioned on several issues, including their profession, their lineage, and their perspective on the way Buddhist women are treated in Bangladesh. All subjects were women. Special emphasis was given to the issue of discrimination, indifferent treatment, gender-based humiliation, and the subjects' feelings on ordination and the future of Buddhism and women in Bangladesh.

Perhaps because I am ethnically Bengali, from the majority ethnic group, the survey initially received very little feedback. This trend was particularly conspicuous amongst rural women, in comparison to city dwellers. Later on, several indigenous Jumma women were given the task to carry out the survey within their own communities or among women they associated with on a daily basis. Some of the questions were also very difficult for many of the women to answer, since they were formulated in English. Later on in the study, the questions were formulated in Bengali, the national language. This study is preliminary and I hope to improve upon it in the future, by carrying out the survey in each of the indigenous peoples' mother tongues.

Buddhism in Historical Bengal

There are an estimated one million Buddhists in Bangladesh, which is less than 1 percent of the total population, of which 90 percent are Muslims. More than half of these Buddhists live in the partially autonomous Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region, where the largest indigenous ethnic groups adhere to Buddhism. Faced with assimilation-oriented political policies of successive governments and gender discrimination from within and outside their own societies, Buddhist women, as members of indigenous/tribal groups, and as women, particularly in the CHT, face discrimination as minorities in an increasingly intolerant Muslim-majority society. Against this backdrop, Buddhist women are bravely struggling to retain their place in society, as Buddhists and as citizens. Whether they are middle class women in the cities and towns or farming women living in isolated hilltop hamlets, they all struggle against militarization and patriarchy.

In the past, Indian and Bengali rulers were quite liberal, due, among other factors, to the influence of a few thousand years of Buddhist culture and philosophy. Including in present-day Bangladesh, the period of the Buddhist Pala Dynasty is regarded as the golden age of Bengal. For four

hundred years, Buddhist civilization, culture and philosophy flourished throughout Bengal. Historically, the Bhikkhuni Sangha continued to exist in Bengal until the 12th century. In the 12th century, the Hindu Brahmin kings of the Sena Dynasty started to persecute Buddhists. After that, from the 13th to 16th centuries, Muslim rulers patronized Islam. Fortunately, secularist Sufi philosophers, who were clearly influenced by Buddhist principles of tolerance and pluralism, influenced Muslim social and cultural practices in Bengal outside court circles.

By the beginning of the 19th century, the largest segment of the Buddhist population had retreated to the southeastern region of Chittagong and the CHT, bordering Myanmar (former Burma). By this time, Buddhist practices are known to have included elements of Vajrayana Buddhism, co-existing with shamanistic and other indigenous spiritual practices. Religious practices were presided over by *raolis* or *luris*, who referred to scriptures from part-Pali, part-vernacular texts. In 1856, at the invitation of the Chakma regnant-queen, Kalindi Devi, a leading monk of the Arakan Dynasty, the Bhikkhu Saramedha, reestablished Theravada Buddhism in the Chittagong-CHT region.¹ From then onwards, most Buddhists in Bangladesh have practiced Theravada Buddhism, with cultural influence from Burma, Sri Lanka, and Thai Buddhism, alongside indigenous socio-cultural and spiritual practices. The Theravada Buddhist revival received another boost in the 20th century, through the leadership of the late Bhikkhu Rajguru Aggavamsa Mahathera,² and later, Bhikkhu Sadhananda Mahathera (known as Vana Bhante).³

Buddhist Practices and Status of Buddhist Women in Bangladesh Today

With the survival and resurgence of Buddhism in Bangladesh today, Buddhist women play a pivotal role in managing monasteries, arranging alms-round, serving the Bhikkhu Sangha, and in other ways. An increasing number of women of different ages practice the eight precepts in different monasteries on full moon days and other special occasions. Despite this, few women are in leadership positions in the administration of the monasteries. A visible exception is the Rajvana Vihara, at Rangamati (CHT). This monastery is under the leadership of Bhikkhu Vana Bhante, who practices the austerities (*dhutanga*) and is believed to have attained *nirvana* or supreme enlightenment. Women are represented in the committee of this monastery, whose chairperson is the Chakma Rajmata, Rani Arati Roy. However, no *bhikkhunis* (nuns) have yet been ordained in Bangladesh in recent times, including at Rajvana Vihara. Although there has been a constant demand over the past decade or so, a nuns' order has so far been unrealized.⁴

The central role that Buddhist women play in maintaining and strengthening Buddhist culture and practices in Bangladesh today is perhaps best epitomized by the work of the women leaders who are associated with the Rajvana Vihara at Rangamati and at its branch monasteries strewn over the rugged terrain of the CHT. Many of these women are known to draw their inspiration from the Chakma Rani Kalindi, who helped reestablish Theravada Buddhism in Bangladesh in the 19th century, as well as the secularist and indigenous women's rights activist of the 1990s, Kalpana Chakma, who supported autonomy and spoke out against militarization and against patriarchy.⁵ In a remote monastery atop the 600 meter-high Falitangyasoke, women leaders continue to brave border guards to make daily offerings to the Buddha's image within the guards' "security enclosure," which forcefully incorporated their monastery.⁶ Similarly, with the cooperation of Buddhist women from the town of Rangamati, women from a dozen or so hamlets surrounding the Furamone and Swargapur Vana Vihara hilltop monasteries regularly supply the food required for the daily alms round of the resident monks, who specialize in Vipassana meditation.⁷ At the latter monastery, laypeople, including women, also participate in meditation retreats on special occasions.

Facing the Challenges: Buddhist Women and Leaders in Bangladesh

Of the women who participated in the survey, 80 percent of who come from the CHT indigenous Buddhist communities, an astonishing 98 percent agreed that women are treated as second-class human beings. The most widely cited example was the derogatory attitudes and terminology evident in the monks' sermons. For example, there is a very common saying that, if human beings do bad deeds, then they are bound to be re born as females in their next rebirth. Another common saying is that the survival of Buddhism is to be a few millennia less on account of the Buddha having allowed ordination to women. Several traditions of Theravada monastic rules state that even the junior-most male monk (*bhikkhu*) will take seniority over even the senior-most female monk (*bhikkhuni*), irrespective of age and period of ordination, and that Bhikkhunis may never admonish a *bhikkhu*, but not the other way round! The life of a female is seen as painful and one that entails special burdens, such as having to go through childbirths and other sufferings associated with womanhood. Another example shared by many participants is that socially women are asked not to enter the main sanctuary and discouraged from offering food to monks, at all, or during their menstrual cycles. These instructions are usually received from a woman generally, older to younger, but also from men.

On the subject of ordination, 82 percent said that they found the lack of ordination for women to be highly discriminatory. The remaining 18 percent declined to comment. A handful of female practitioners with shaved heads can be seen in various regions of the CHT, but these rare practitioners (nuns) are usually not allowed to live in the monasteries. For example, one such practitioner, who wishes to remain anonymous, lives in a small shed built by her family. Everyday, she goes to Maitri Vihara in Bonorupa, Rangamati, to perform her own rituals. Aside from that, she practices the eight precepts (*oshtoshila*) in her own shed.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Women have a right to be ordained and to practice as a nun without social degradation. Any nun or monk should be respected for her/his *karma* (actions), *medha* (merit), and *anusilan* (effort), regardless of her/his gender. This is the teaching of Buddha Sakyamuni.

Sakyadhita can play an important role in raising gender awareness in theological and everyday discourse and practice among Buddhists in many countries, including Bangladesh. This survey is one tool to begin raising questions about male domination in the practice of Buddhism. Sakyadhita can bring to light historical references to gender equality in the Buddhist teachings through publications in local languages. It would be very helpful to organize workshops in the local temples and monasteries, support the participation of women from these communities in international Buddhist conferences and so forth. Gatherings such as this one help could reinforce the Buddha's affirmation of the equal spiritual potential of women and men. They raise awareness and help identify gender bias and prejudice in the practices of contemporary monks in CHT and elsewhere. Many of these monks deliver sexist sermons without realizing their own prejudices and unaware of the inherent gender politics that have been passed down through generations of monks. All of us, including nuns, monks, and the laity, need to unlearn the biases we have inherited and shed discriminatory gendered language and practices.

NOTES

¹ Raja Tridiv Roy, *The Departed Melody* (Memoirs), PPA Publications, Islamabad, 2003, pp. 195-96. Roy was awarded the titles, Sri Lanka Ranjana National Award and Saddhamma Jotika Dhaja by the governments of Sri Lanka and Myanmar, respectively, for his contribution to Buddhism. He also represented Pakistan at the Sixth Buddhist Council in Myanmar in 1957.

² The late Rajguru was given the title of Agga Maha Sadhamma Jyotika Dhabja by the Government of Myanmar for his contribution to Buddhism. He participated in the Sixth Buddhist Council in Myanmar in 1957.

³ Bhikkhu Sadhananda Mahathera (Vana Bhante) is the abbot of Rajvana Vihara, Rangamati, the largest monastery in Bangladesh.

⁴ Interview with Raja Devasish Roy, Chakma Circle Chief. See also, Raja D. Roy, “Monastic Life of a Novitiate at Rajvana Vihara, Rangamati.” April, 2011. [www.chakmaraj.com]

⁵ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page]

⁶ T. Chakma, of Falitangyasoke, Barkal Sub-district, Rangamati District (CHT) narrated her accounts to me of how she and her women fellow villagers courted arrest and violence at the hands of government border guards while maintaining and repairing a monastery, which the guards had enclosed within their “security” zone of a tele-communications tower.

⁷ Raja D. Roy, op cit.

Although the advancement of women's status is global, in many countries today women's social participation is still undermined and remains lower than that of men. Korea is among such countries. The phenomenal economic growth of the past two to three decades enabled Korean women to achieve both higher education and social status than previously possible, so that contemporary middle-class women in particular enjoy unprecedented freedoms, cultural enrichment, and purchasing power. In addition to these personal and economic victories, many women are also involving themselves in the betterment of society by working in the public sector, for example, in government offices and large companies. When it comes to women in decision-making level leadership positions, however, Korea continues to rank very low among its peer Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. In the religious arena as well, despite the remarkably conspicuous nature of female participation in the operation of religious orders, the role women play is marginalized as a background supporting force, while men dominate the more visible religious activities in the foreground.

Social prejudices, lack of psychological, educational, and financial support systems, and women's own hesitance to break with inherited concepts of gender roles are counted as the main obstacles to women's advancement in the labor force. While some women have dared to move forward and forge their own paths up mainstream social ladders, overcoming social and cultural obstacles and prejudices, it is still common to hear dispiriting accounts of the tremendous number of social and psychological difficulties that women experience in terms of advancement throughout their careers. The proverbial glass ceiling is still firmly in place in Korea. Addressing this barrier is hindered, however, by the complexity of the factors underlying it. What appears on the surface of the gender disparity belies its scope and depth. For example, more alarming than the external prejudices women experience along the path toward achievement are the profound hidden, inner battles that they must wage with themselves. The higher a woman climbs up the steepening pyramid of social and professional structures, the more she finds that the female colleagues by whom she was initially surrounded disappear rapidly and it becomes harder for her to find women mentors and a female support system. Surrounded by competitors, such women must push themselves to be ever more effective and capable. Yet, the more they push themselves, the more they experience loneliness and internalized self-doubt and fear, even while they may not recognize it themselves.

Traditionally in East Asia, women were taught to be obedient and submissive, not only in external manifestations such as gestures and etiquette, but also in their internal lives, so that these "feminine" qualities were ideally molded into the psyche. Today, the system of ethics taught in East Asia for thousands of years has been officially curtailed and replaced by modern Western ethics and concepts of gender equality. This ideological transformation, however, contrasts with the everyday realities of continuing challenges, attempted subversion, and judgmental perceptions directed toward women in leadership positions. The traditional emphasis on serving others rather than oneself that is so ingrained in Korean women creates in high achievers a dynamic of doubt and self-consciousness concerned about whether or not their pursuits are based on pure motivations or by self-serving ambition and a selfish love of success. In a modern society characterized by competition and self-promotion, women continue to feel uncomfortable about being assertive. They are often uncertain about when and how to put their ideas and achievements forward, and worry that taking initiative may be interpreted as being motivated by pride or conceit. While this conflict might simply be the inevitable

result of the various pressures of social norms imposed on women in contemporary Korean society, it could very well also originate in a much more fundamental self-doubt that is both profound and deeply rooted.

In particular, those women who are active in the context of Buddhist society tend to eagerly emphasize that the motivation behind their involvement with certain tasks is not driven by conceit, love of fame, or the pursuit of personal gain. While the East Asian Chan Buddhist tradition in general is characterized by its consistent emphasis on the practice of “putting oneself down” and “humble mind,” what is of interest in a gendered discussion is how these moral characteristics are especially expected of female practitioners. Meanwhile, the Confucian tradition, which is also a strong moral force in East Asian societies, holds the principles of love (*ren*) and respect (*li*) as cardinal rules, specifying the ideal execution of these ideals within distinct codes of action – such as the three bonds and five moral rules – set out in particular forms of relationship, such as those between husband and wife and elder and younger. This moral code is designed to prevent conflicts that might arise among people by establishing a hierarchical society that filters out possible courses of action through specific social and moral stipulations. The culturally conditioned behavior of following these prescribed and accepted social norms offers a comparatively easy guide to actions and behavior for socially involved individuals, freeing them of the responsibility of overly reflecting about their autonomy and its potential influence on their actions and the social ramifications of those actions.

On the other hand, the principles of “putting oneself down” and “humility” places a moral burden on women’s shoulders to weigh the implications of their choices in any given situation. When matters go well, they may ascribe the causes to themselves rather than as the inevitable result of social structures or external conditions, especially when the matter is related to human relations. By the same token, it can be observed that when matters go poorly, many women tend to place the blame on themselves, scrutinizing their own actions and character for the cause of the problem. While such devoted practice of humility might be appreciated in the religious realm, the dilemma is that such religiously framed prescribing of moral responsibility, removed from the secular social context, may spill over and serve as a stumbling block in the way women function in modern society. The fact is that the modern world requires people to let others know about their achievements.

What is the primary mechanism behind women’s disinclination to be more assertive in the pursuit of their own needs and desires? The prevalent assumption is that many women feel that wishing to be recognized for their achievements is a crass reflection of personal pride. In examining why women often tend to be more reserved and less confident of their own motives, I hope to address the following questions: How do women integrate Buddhist teachings with a perspective of non-self? Is there a way of wanting recognition that does not reflect self-interest and pride? I would like to apply the Buddhist doctrine of non-self to such situations that revolve around the issue of self-doubt.

The non-self doctrine is a central tenet of early Buddhist teachings. It negates the existence of a permanent, independently existing self, arguing that although our sense of self originates from a socially conditioned self-consciousness, in truth, there is no self that is substantial and unchanging. According to the Buddha, adherence to the false notion of an independent and eternal self leads inevitably to disappointment and frustration. We tend to believe that this world and the things in it exist eternally in the same way, but Buddhist doctrine holds that in reality no compounded thing in the world continues to maintain its self-identity in an unchanging and everlasting way. The non-self doctrine teaches freedom from the attachment to self because the self is, quite simply, empty of abiding existence. Things come into existence as a result of dependent arising. Nothing comes into being by itself, nothing is self-sustained, and nothing is able to maintain its own identity permanently. The Buddhist *sutras* say, “Things arise interdependently; thus, they are empty.”

According to the non-self doctrine, we exist in co-arising relationships and cannot continue without connections with others and the world. We grow within these relationships and we gradually come to understand ourselves through our relationships with others. *Vimalakirtinirdesa*, a Mahayana Buddhist text, defines a *bodhisattva*, a being committed to awakening, as someone who has gained insight into the truth of emptiness, but resolves to embody that insight in the world by performing altruistic acts for the benefit of others. The individual and those who surround her are not considered to be separate, independently functioning beings, but are beings whose individual actions exist within the context of a complex web of relationships. Those who comprehend the truth of emptiness are free from fixed notions of self versus other, subject versus object, absolute good and evil, and beauty and grotesqueness. Such realized individuals can, by overcoming the falsity of reified dualities, progress with the practice of unhindered altruism. This freedom from falsely conceived dualities is illustrated in the text when a goddess admonishes Sariputra for differentiating men and women in an overly determined way. Only those who are free from clinging to dualities are free from attachment and can truly understand emptiness.

Moreover, the *Vimalakirtinirdesa* teaches that only those who understand emptiness and dependent-arising can fully practice compassion towards others. The *bodhisattva*, for example, is someone who can identify sympathetically with other beings, with the emotional capacity to share the feelings of others and thus embody and practice the principle of non-discrimination between subject and object and unbiased value judgements. According to Buddhist doctrine, when a practitioner perceives non-duality through a personal practice of the non-self doctrine, s/he will then finally be capable of practicing true compassion – truly sharing the pain of others as his or her own.

On the other hand, the same text also says, surprisingly: “But one who entertains egoistic views as huge as Mount Sumeru can still set his mind and aspire to the highest attainment. From this you should understand that all the various earthly desires are the seed of the Tathâgata.” Even if we consider that this teaching should be understood in the context of the paradoxical polemics for which it is famous, it still sounds radical. I would like to employ this interesting polemic to the situation we are discussing in this essay – as a “skillful means” (*upaya*). We know that an egoistic view (Sanskrit: *sat-kāya-drsti*) is something that Buddhism usually teaches its adherents to overcome, but this text holds that those who maintain their egoistic outlooks can yet aspire to the highest level of enlightenment. What then did Mañjusri mean by “egoistic view” in this text? The renowned Korean Buddhist scholar Wonhyo (617-686) mentions this condundrum in his *Essentials of Observing and Transgressing the Code of Bodhisattva Precepts*: “Although one gives rise to a view of oneself [i.e., egoism] as big as Mt. Sumeru, one should not let oneself give rise to a view of emptiness [i.e., nihilism] even as small as a hair.” Wonhyo compares the view of oneself to egoism and the view of emptiness to nihilism, arguing that egoism is better than nihilism for the sake of enlightenment. The *Sikṣasamuccaya* by Santideva contains a similar passage.

Is it not possible to interpret this “egoistic view” as a necessary evil? In order to move on to the project of changing the world and benefiting others, *bodhisattvas* must allow themselves to aspire to act for justice, an aspiration motivated by frustration at the social injustices that exist in this world. The *bodhisattvas* are models of realized beings who retain their emotions and feelings, such as volition, desire, and passion. The *bodhisattvas* are not emotionless persons. Indeed, their “egoism,” such as it is, gives rise in them to such high-minded personal resolutions as: I should do this work, I am the right one, I am supposed to do it, and I cannot expect others to do it but must take it on myself. That is, it is their egoism or self-assertiveness that facilitates their efforts on behalf of others. Intense emotion may be accompanied by a sense of “I” and yet this sense of self can be an expression of altruistic

motivation. That is, consciousness of self itself might act as a skillful means of achieving noble actions for the good of others. Further, along the path of acting for others in a righteous and dutiful mindset, the devoted practitioner should ideally be able to recognize the fundamental interrelatedness of all things. What one person achieves is made possible only by a teeming ocean of conditions and causes. Inevitably, an awareness of interrelatedness and community leads one to develop greater empathy and compassion. Inevitably, too, for those who act out of empathetic compassion, the sense of a self will disappear. The text's treatment of both "wisdom" and "skillful means" as the two most important *paramitas* seems to support this point.

With such an understanding, one realizes that all achievements are not in fact one's own, but are the culmination of a network of relationships. Although one's own actions may be the primary instigating force, the overall results are created by the interrelated operations of various causes. One who sees through attachment to actions and results, informed by wisdom and compassion, is free from attachment to one's own achievements. By acting in a way that is free from attachment, stumbling blocks such as attachment, desire, and fear can be overcome. Self-less action is directly enabled by the realization of non-self. The value of the work I perform manifests through relations with those surrounding me and is affirmed by the communal sharing of these values. The ethics of non-self entails concerted practice and the implementation of these core values for the benefit of others.

Social engagement in Buddhism means to discover the meaning of one's own actions in the context of one's relationships with others, considering all beings as an interconnected community. This view derives from the practitioner's awakening to the truths of emptiness and non-self. My own actions in this moment cannot possibly be achieved solely through my own intentions and efforts. The effects of an action will not rebound only on those who performed them, nor will the effects be created independently of a host of other actions and causes. My actions create corresponding effects, not only for me, but also for everything with which I am linked. My decisions, expressed in the forms of thoughts, words, and actions, are related to the thoughts and actions of others. My commitment to performing good actions brings good results to others as well, just as my accomplishment affects the eventual accomplishments of others. I comport myself according to certain principles, not out of the conviction that my behavior will benefit me alone, but because I believe that it will benefit others as well. Realizing the fundamental interconnectedness of beings through actions and practice is the lived experience of the non-self theory. One can only move forward when one has self-confidence and conviction, yet simultaneously compassionately motivated actions express a realization of non-self. The theory of non-self is not merely a negation of the self. One begins with an understanding of the conventionally existent self and gradually moves forward to the realization of non-self, the humble mind. At the beginning of this process, however, being overly self-effacing and timid may impede one's altruistic intentions.

Here I have presented my candid experiment in applying non-self doctrine to the matter of women's self-understanding and development of the confidence needed to be successful in the *bodhisattva* pursuit. I believe that it is time for Buddhist ethics be further developed to reflect contemporary social behavior in ways that will assist women's awakening and enable them to become more daring in their virtuous activities. The theory of non-self need not erode women's self-confidence. On the contrary, paradoxically, it may enable great achievements. In early Buddhist texts, we find courageous women who find themselves shaken by Mara's whispers, thus conjuring up their fears and memories of painful pasts, but who nevertheless heroically overcome their self-doubt and

assert themselves, confident of the purity of their motivation and practicing valiantly to achieve spiritual freedom. It is time for Buddhist women to take inspiration from such stories and find the courage to overcome their own delusions of inadequacy.

Yu-chen Li

How does the absence of Dharma lineages affect the support and structure of leaderships roles for Zen Chinese nuns? Two factors are especially relevant: (1) the Chinese cultural pattern of family lineage based on patriarchy and only male heirs (2) the lack of *bhiksuni* Buddhist institutional education, training, and opportunities for women which legitimates their leadership roles. Without the authority to form female lineages, create their own educational systems, perform their own religious functions and rituals, their environments are not institutionally developed or favorable to the growth and development of leadership. Instead their authority tends to become localized in personal power which was not the original intention of fro a Bhiksuni Sangha and limits it's potential for not only itself, but also for serving the *bhiksu* and lay community.

Systematically Marginalized Women

Institutions empower men with authority, so the religious careers that men pursue are considered necessary and their achievements are regarded as beneficial to religious structures and institutions. By contrast, influential women, being outsiders without the sanction or authority of these institutions, need to carry out their work and seek recognition through other channels. Their influence and authority are regarded as a functions of their personal power rather than a right of their institutional authority.

When women's achievements are personalized, their experiences and resources cannot be systematically passed on to others, because those who teach women and make decisions about women's work and contributions are not women. The classic texts that women read and teach very rarely address the right and need for women to receive leadership training. Furthermore, personalized leadership and power cannot guarantee that women are involved in policy-making processes. On the contrary, the achievements of outstanding women cause others to hold either unreasonably high or much lower standards for women practitioners. The outstanding performance of Madame Curie, for example, created an exceedingly high threshold for women scientists who followed her.

Institutionalized Chinese Lineage: Dharma Lineage and Family Genealogy

In this paper, I discuss Dharma lineage, a very important system in the Chinese Buddhist tradition. Since Buddhism integrates ordination (the granting of membership) with Sangha training and education, the final achievement for all Sangha members is to enter a Dharma lineage and become leaders, both actually and symbolically. Only through ordination, the receiving of certain precepts, can Sangha members begin to learn those precepts and take on important roles in the Sangha, such as serving as preceptors, Dharma teachers, and abbots.

I am not denying the fact that there are women preceptors, Dharma teachers, and abbesses. As we can see, there are nunneries everywhere in the Chinese Buddhist world and most nuns are very much engaged in the secular world. Very often, nuns become so busily engaged with teaching Dharma and finding resources that they have little remaining time to focus on their own Dharma practice. The issue is that nuns' long-term efforts lack documentation and institutional support, because nuns are not included in Dharma lineages.

A Dharma lineage in the Chinese Buddhist context is very different from what it was in India; it resembles the patriarchal genealogy of Chinese families. All Chinese clans are eager to establish their family genealogies in order to record their lineages. The longer the history of a family genealogy, the higher social status a family acquires. In a family genealogy, first of all, only male offspring are recorded; second, the eldest son is the only heir for each generation; and, third, a system of branch families is also established. Simply put, in Chinese families, the eldest son in each generation succeeds to most or all of the family properties. Daughters are never included in the family genealogy. Other sons can establish their own branch families and lineages, and are again succeeded only by their eldest sons.

The Chinese pattern of family genealogy has become translated into Chinese Buddhist lineages, as exemplified by the system of Zen patriarchs. Each Zen generation has only one patriarch, who passes the lineage on to a Dharma son. If other Dharma brothers of the same generation are sufficiently outstanding, they may establish other lineages or family branches. In this way, five branches gradually developed in the Chinese Zen tradition: first the Linji and Caodong schools, then the Yunmen, Weiyang, and Fayuan. Most Chinese monasteries belong to the mainstream Linji and Caodong lineages of Zen. Evidence of these lineage can be found in the system of Dharma names. Through Dharma names, Chinese sangha members are able to trace whether they belong to the same school and which generation they belong to. Those who started their own branch schools may also start their own lineages of Dharma names. Successful lineages last for generations, whereas unsuccessful lineages may die out over time.

Contemporary Women and Buddhist Dharma Lineages

Women Zen teachers are rarely included in Chinese Zen lineages.¹ We have records of a very few nuns, such as Bhiksuni Muoshan, but no idea whether she ever took any disciples or established her own lineage. The crucial point is not whether Bhiksuni Muoshan took any disciples, but that fact that, as a woman, she was not qualified to be recorded in the Dharma lineage. This is rather strange. It makes sense that women are not included in secular family genealogies, since they will “marry out” and would siphon off family properties if they were recognized as heirs. But the situation of Buddhist nuns is not at all like that of laywomen; like monks, they are disciples of Sakyamuni Buddha. On the other hand, the Chinese concept of branch families has been used to justify the different schools that have been established by monks.

When I studied the Bhiksuni Sangha in Chinese history, I found nunneries in every generation throughout the generations; certain nunneries existed for over two hundred years. Some nunneries were eventually taken over by monks, but the reverse also occurred. All these nunneries perform ordinations and had their own lineages, but there are no records of them in Chinese Buddhist history. Even nuns whose nunneries belonged to the Linji or Caodong lineages of Chinese Zen could not become Dharma heirs; their lineages were not recognized.

In 1995, when I was conducting fieldwork in Dali in Yunnan Province in China, I had only a general understanding of the importance of lineage. Back then, local Zen monasteries were recovering from the damage done by the Cultural Revolution. In the graveyard of one Zen monastery, I found a tablet with the record of monks that mentioned their Dharma names and the generation of the Linji School to which they belonged. In the kitchen, I found another tablet with the names of monks (presumably the successive abbots of the monastery) who comprised the central lineage and the nicknames of some nuns recorded on the side. Although the monastery is now occupied by monks, during the Cultural Revolution, it was women who secretly took care of the monastery and ensured its survival.

At another Buddhist monastery, a representative of the Chinese Communist Party told me that the women of this monastery (called *jinglao*, women who considered themselves nuns) were only involved in superstition and not important at all. But later that evening, when I sneaked back to the same monastery on my own, I found a big crowd of people who had come to consult these women. Some had even requested the women to perform special healings or blessing rituals.

In the same area, I found another monastery where the abbot was a “monk” who did not even stay there, but instead lived down the hill with his wife and family. This abbot frequently travels to different villages to teach women to chant the name of the Buddha and returns to the temple only during important festivals, such as Chinese New Year and the ceremony of “feeding” the dead during the seventh lunar month. The residents of the monastery were seven nuns who did not shave their heads, though none had ever married. Their average age was 70 and they had practiced in the monastery for 40 to 50 years. They performed the morning and evening chanting together, although only two of them were literate. Only the abbot knew how to perform the formal rituals and all the *sutras* were locked inside his room.

Dharma lineages in Taiwan have become more complicated in recent years. Relatively speaking, these lineages also pay more respect to nuns. Bhiksu Baisheng (1904-1989) passed his Dharma lineage to Bhiksu Jingxin (1929-) and Bhiksuni Tianyi (1924-1980). These Dharma heirs belonged to the 42nd generation of the Linji School, the school that created the foundation for dual ordination in Taiwan. Later, Bhiksu Jingxin also included *bhiksunis* among his Dharma heirs. In 2005, Bhiksu Shengyen of the Dharma Drum Mountains designated two types of Dharma heir: lineage Dharma heirs and functioning Dharma heirs; he included both *bhiksus* and *bhiksunis* in both types.

By contrast, Bhiksu Yinshun (1906-2005) started a separate lineage for his female disciples in Taiwan. Yinshun was ordained in southern Min Province in China, but moved around as a result of war, finally settling in Taiwan, where he lived from 1963 to 2005. Earlier, in China, Yinshun’s master had placed some disciples under his authority, so that Yinshun’s lineage would not die out. However, in addition to taking on his own male disciples in Taiwan, Bhiksu Yinshun also established a separate Dharma lineage for the female disciples he took on in Taiwan. For example, Bhiksuni Zhengyan, founder of Ciji Foundation, is a first generation female disciple of Bhiksu Yinshun. In Taiwan, there are also some nuns, such as Bhiksuni Lianchan, who belong to the Linji School of Zen and are also recognized as followers of the Tibetan tradition or lineage.

The Necessity of a Nuns’ Lineage

If nuns do not become Dharma heirs or establish their own lineages, they will not only be excluded from Buddhist history, but will also eventually put the *bhiksuni* lineage in danger. Because the ordination of nuns needs to be confirmed by both monks and nuns, according to the Vinaya, nuns could never take male disciples. The continuity of individual *bhiksuni* lineages is therefore more risky than that of *bhiksu* lineages. If Buddhist patriarchs continue to pass on their lineages only to monks and not to nuns, nuns will always remain subordinate assistants in the lineage. At the same time, if nuns are only able to pass on their lineages to nuns, the chances of them being able to maintain their lineages are much smaller than for monks’ to pass on their lineages to monks. Although monks tend to pass on their lineages to monks, not nuns, if they need to wait for a male heir to appear or to prepare to assume the lineage, monks could rely on nuns to maintain their lineages, even though the patriarchal model of lineage prevents nuns from succeeding them as heirs. As long as women’s lineages are not at the core of the Dharma lineage, it becomes difficult for women to pass their lineages on.

The basic question is one of equality. The Buddha gave women and men equal opportunity for

Dharma practice, but if Dharma lineages are only passed to men and not women, then this institutionalized pattern of authority rationalizes a distortion. When authority is institutionalized and is further supported by culture, opportunities for education and leadership training among monastic women are not only constrained, but such constraints are also taken for granted. Not only are nuns' contributions neglected, but gender inequality in the Buddhist community also becomes rationalized. This, in turn, endangers the agency of Buddhist women in general.

NOTE

¹ See Miriam Levering, "Lineage or Family Tree? The Implications for Gender," in *Innovative Buddhist Women: Swimming Against the Stream*, ed. Karma Lekshe Tsomo (Surrey, England: Curzon Press, 2000).

The Question of Lineage in Tibetan Buddhism: A Woman's Perspective

Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo

Some years ago I was visiting a Tibetan Nunnery in North India and was shown into their shrine room, which in those days doubled as a dining room, also. The main image was of Shakyamuni Buddha, flanked by the *bodhisattvas* Avalokiteshvara and Mañjushri. With pride, they pointed out the *thangkas* of the lineage *lamas* that had been presented to them by their head *rinpoche*. There were about ten or more *thangkas* around the walls filled with icons of each of the heads of that lineage, starting from the founder in the tenth century up until quite recently. I exclaimed, “But haven’t you noticed that the figures in this shrineroom are all males? This is a nunnery, but where are the representations of enlightened women?” The nuns were surprised, because they had never thought of this fact before. They took it for granted that the symbols of enlightenment would have a male body.

The Buddhism of Tibet, and likewise other Asian countries, is, of course, patriarchal. This means that the Dharma from the time of the Buddha until today has been written about and handed down by male scholars and practitioners who are usually monks. Nowadays, we are much more aware that the Dharma is presented from an almost totally male perspective and often by men who, from their infancy, have had little or nothing to do with women and therefore regard the feminine as suspect, if not downright dangerous. We all know this.

Of course, one of the reasons that in Tibet, at least, the lineage was almost exclusively in male hands is the phenomena, restricted to Tibet and surrounding regions, of recognised incarnations of realized practitioners, known as *tulkus*. This means that when a great *lama* or teacher dies, then after a certain time has passed, a search is made for the reincarnation. Relying on previous indications and signs, together with the dreams and prophecies of other high *rinpoches*, the new incarnation is found and brought to his monastery at an early age. My own *lama* was enthroned at the age of two, while he was still wearing diapers under his robes and drinking milk from a bottle.

These incarnate *lamas*, of which there are hundreds, are automatically given special training to prepare them in their role. They receive teachings and empowerments from the highest *lamas* within their lineages. They are often kept apart from ordinary monks and are raised to become the teachers and heads of their monasteries.

The lineage holders, especially, are brought up as Dharma princes and infused with all the empowerments, oral transmissions, and knowledge that they will need to enable them to transmit these same traditional teachings to others in the future. In other words, a lineage master will transmit the complete Dharma treasure of his tradition to his most worthy disciples, who are often the recognized incarnations of his own masters. Thus, after a time the lineage of *lamas* becomes an exclusive boys’ club, with just a few *lamas* of that lineage passing along the ball of tradition among themselves. There is no room for women in such an all-male set-up.

Once I asked my *lama*, Khamtrul Rinpoche, why there are so few female *tulkus*. Rinpoche replied that his sister had more signs surrounding her birth than he himself had had. Everyone was hopeful, but when the child turned out to be a girl, they were very disappointed and just considered it to be a mistake. Rinpoche explained, “If the child had been a boy, he would have been well taken care of, probably placed in a monastery, then educated and groomed as someone special. But since the baby was a girl, her spiritual upbringing was ignored and she had no chance to be trained in the Dharma.” Khamtrul Rinpoche said that this was fairly common in Tibet and such women were usually married off. Only after the family was grown, did they have the opportunity to go off and spend time in

personal cultivation. But since they had little education, they were unable to benefit many others through their teachings, even should they attain personal realization. Khamtrul Rinpoche added, “It has nothing to do with inherent male superiority. It was just social conditions that made it difficult to choose coming back in a female body.” It is highly unlikely that the highest lineage *lamas* would even acknowledge one of their own number incarnating in a female body.

Nonetheless, occasionally woman masters did appear in the *early* days of the lineage. For instance, in the Vajrayogini and Chakrasamvara tantric lineage of the Drukpa Kagyu tradition, there appear 2 *yoginis* – Kunden Rema and Machik Konjo – who came after Rechungpa, the heart son of Milarepa. Women were accepted as long as it was a yogic lineage, but once the practices were absorbed into the monasteries, the lineage becomes exclusively male.

However, there are some practice lineages that were *started* by female practitioners. One is the Nyungné purification tradition that includes fasting and prostrations based on devotion to the thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara, *bodhisattva* of compassion. This tradition was founded on the visions of Gelongma Palmo (Sanskrit: Bhikshuni Lakshmi), a nun from a royal family in India who was cured of leprosy by this practice. Nyungné is the one tradition in Tibet that monks, nuns, and laypeople practice together.

Another important early lineage associated with women was the Shangpa Kagyu, a lineage that went underground after some centuries, but resurfaced in the late 19th century due to the efforts of Jamgon Kongtrul. More recently, Kalu Rinpoche and his followers did much to re-establish the practice of this yogic tradition. The Shangpa Kagyu lineage is associated with two important *yoginis*, Niguma and Sukhasiddhi. Although they were both born in Kashmir at around the same time, it seems that they never met. Niguma was the sister of the great scholar and *yogi* Naropa, but she received her teaching directly from the primordial Buddha Vajradhara and some human *gurus* and attained a rainbow body during her lifetime.

Sukhasiddhi was married and had 6 children. Later in life, she met the great ascetic Virupa and received empowerment from him. In one evening, she attained enlightenment and the rainbow body simultaneously. Both Niguma and Sukhasiddhi were teachers of the 11th-century Tibetan practitioner Kyungpo Naljor who founded the Shangpa Kagyu tradition.

Another important lineage known as *chöd* (cutting off) was founded in the 11th century by the great *yogini* Machik Labdrön. The *chöd* practice has been incorporated by all Tibetan Buddhist schools. Although after the early days these lineages soon became almost entirely male dominated, down to the present day these practices have been especially beloved by women. Other important traditions have been passed on through the family line, rather than through an incarnation line, but again it is usually only males who are considered eligible for high ecclesiastic office.

Unfortunately, this situation can seriously undermine the feelings of confidence and aspiration that female practitioners require as encouragement for their progress on the path. Everyday, when they recite the names of the lineage of enlightened masters, hardly one of them is a woman.

In modern times, an interesting possible exception is Khandro Rinpoche Tsering Paldron, the eldest daughter of Mindrolling Trichen Rinpoche, an important Nyingma *lama* who died a few years ago. Since her father had no sons, Khandro Rinpoche, who is a nun, seems to have taken on the role as the head of the Mindrolling tradition and runs not only her own nunnery, but also the large Mindrolling Monastery. This lineage is well known for its strong female practitioners, called the Mindrolling Jetsunmas, which began with Mingyur Paldron in the 18th century. Perhaps Khandro Rinpoche will abdicate the role if and when an incarnation of her father is recognised, or maybe not. Of all the Tibetan traditions, the Nyingmapa are probably the most sympathetic towards women practitioners.

In addition, there existed at least two exclusively female lineages in Tibet that can be mentioned as exceptions to this general situation. The first was started by a princess named Chokyi Dronme during the 15th century. She was recognised during her lifetime as an embodiment of the tantric deity Vajravahni (Tibetan: Dorje Phagmo) in a form that is recognized as the queen of the *dakinis*, representations of the enlightened female principle. This was a female incarnation tradition associated with a Samding Monastery, where the residents were half monks and half nuns. She was the only woman in Tibet whom H.H. the Dalai Lama was permitted to bless by placing his hand on her head. Otherwise, in earlier times, even his own mother was only blessed with a tassel. The 12th incarnation in this lineage, known as Samding Dorje Phagmo, presently lives in Lhasa and is employed as a high-level government official. In 1993, I visited Samding Monastery, which is situated in a spectacular location overlooking Yamdrok Lake. There we met a number of friendly resident monks who told us that the present Dorje Phagmo incarnation rebuilt the monastery after its destruction during the Cultural Revolution and comes every year to stay at the monastery for a short period. However, H. H. the 16th Karmapa mentioned to me that he met and instructed this Dorje Phagmo when she was young and did not think that she was the genuine incarnation.

The other, more recent female incarnation lineage began in the 19th century with a woman known as Ani Lochen Chonyi Zangmo. She was born in 1865 in Rewalsar, the sacred lake of Guru Padmasambhava near Mandi in the northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. She was an extraordinary practitioner who eventually founded Shugseb Nunnery southwest of Lhasa. In time, her fame grew and many of the great *lamas* and high government officials of the day visited her. She became known as Shugseb Jetsun Rinpoche and the nuns of her nunnery were renowned for their practice of *chöd*, following the Nyingma tradition. Shugseb Jetsun Rinpoche died in the early 1950s. At present, Shugseb Nunnery has been rebuilt both in Tibet and also in north India and the resident nuns continue to practice their traditions.

In Vietnam, I was heartened to see chapels set aside in the nunneries to honor the nun masters of their traditions, starting with paintings of Maha Prajapati Gautami preaching to her nun disciples. The nunneries display photos of their founding abbess and the subsequent abbesses up to the present. All these nuns are honoured with lights, incense, and flowers. This is a tradition that is already followed in certain Buddhist countries nowadays and we sincerely hope that the custom will spread widely.

In conclusion, as nuns in the Tibetan tradition – at least those in nunneries situated in India and Nepal – continue to develop their scholastic abilities and undertake long-term meditation retreats, we hope that they will be empowered to contribute their distinctive feminine voices to the male chorus, so that finally the message of the Dharma can be sung harmoniously by a mixed choir.

Learning to Lead, and Leading to Learn: An Awakening Journey to Leadership

Christie Chang

When the term of Bhiksuni Karma Lekshe Tsomo was about to end about two years ago, I was asked to run for the office of president of Sakyadhita and promised to help. To me, assuming the role of president was not important. I see myself as a Sakyadhita volunteer. That's all. It never occurred to me what a difference the title "Sakyadhita President" would bring for me until the end of the 11th Sakyadhita Conference in Vietnam.

The night after the closing ceremony and before the temple tour, I was pulled into a hotel room by a few conference participants, who proceeded to "remind" me of my role as the president of Sakyadhita: "Christie, if you are the president, *act* like a president!" they said. Of course, I knew very well what they meant. They were referring to the fact that, throughout the conference, the local Vietnamese organizing committee did not recognize me as the president of Sakyadhita. This group of conference participants felt that I should "assert" my role as the president and should "say something." They felt that I had been seriously "insulted." I patiently listened, but only laughed at their well-intentioned advice. I tried to explain the very complicated social circumstances and the Buddhist cultural context of Vietnam, and thought no more about this incident.

Since then, however, I have noticed many more comments regarding my role as the president of Sakyadhita. Usually, after "confirming" that I am the current president, typical reactions include: "Wow, Sakyadhita can have a lay president?" Various suggestions may follow, such as: "You should buy some more formal clothes"; "You need to dress up more!"; "Hey, you should get a perm"; "You look too young to be president!"; Sometimes, I get very contradictory suggestions. For example, some told me to lose weight and some told me to keep my weight, all for the very same reason: to "look and act more like a president." In all these questions and comments, we can observe many stereotypes, assumptions, and expectations for a Sakyadhita president related to gender, age, culture, and image.

In the prolonged and difficult process of struggling to prepare this paper, I have tried to informally solicit input about the expectations that people from different parts of the world have about what it means to be the president of the world's largest Buddhist women's organization. My thinking was that perhaps I could include in this paper some cross-cultural perspectives on these expectations. To my mind, the extensive lists of qualities that I have received from several Buddhist women are rather daunting. These women seem to expect that, to lead the daughters of the Buddha, a president must be a highly-accomplished *bodhisattva* or perhaps a perfectly realized Buddha. That may be understandable, but it does not match reality at all. In fact, I am just beginning to learn to walk the *bodhisattva* path. In reality, I hold two jobs in addition to being a volunteer for Sakyadhita, not to mention many other responsibilities. In reality, I am just beginning to "re-learn" how to be a "leader." This time, I am consciously and mindfully approaching the process of becoming a leader – as a woman and, most importantly, as a Buddhist woman.

"A Born Leader," before I Knew I was a Woman

In her talk on "Buddhist Women as Leaders" in Vietnam, Bhiksuni Karma Lekshe Tsomo, one of the founders and past president of Sakyadhita, pointed out that most women, particularly women in Asia, do not have many opportunities for leadership training.¹ However, one time she also commented privately to me: "Christie, you are a born leader." Well, I *was* indeed a natural "leader," but

that was before I knew I was a woman. In the following, I shall help you see what kind of “leader” I was before.

Born as the first child to an extended loving family with parents who fortunately seemed free of the gender discrimination that was so prevalent at their time, I was completely spoiled by people around me: my parents, my grandparents, my aunts and uncles, as well as the entire long street of senior relatives named “Chang.” I was the “king” of the family, and although the family was no longer a rich one, I could still literally have everything I wanted (although, interestingly, since I was young, I somehow began training myself not to want anything – perhaps, since I got everything too easily, I got bored with it?)

As a child, I was extremely “wild.” I was a “tomboy.” As a matter of fact, I thought I *was* a boy – I only played with boys. I could not bear girls. Although as mentioned, my parents never made me feel any less valued as a girl, somehow unconsciously I identified myself more with boys. In fact, no one treated me as a “girl,” perhaps because I was always the “powerful” and the privileged one. I demonstrated traits (or, actually, stereotypes) that did not fit the girls of my time. For example, I was never shy. I enjoyed singing and dancing, and would perform at any request. At school, I excelled in almost all aspects: I represented my class and my school in all sorts of activities, including sports that I had never played before. Even before I knew the rules, I was already in the contests.

Before the age of 16, I had won all sorts of prizes and was very used to winning. I was the teachers’ favorite student and was empowered with various privileges. Whether I learned it from TV or from powerful people around me (following the patriarchal model, of course), I had also learned to use (and abuse) my power: I exercised my own sense of “justice” by protecting the weak and the wronged. I challenged the powerful, including teachers and school administrators, whenever I felt it was necessary. All my classmates were very careful not to “offend” me, so that they would not lose the teachers’ trust. Little boys tried to please me by presenting me with their favorite snacks. In a nutshell, before I turned 16, my teachers and friends liked me, but they were also afraid of me. That was the kind of leader I was: confident (perhaps arrogant) and extremely bossy (perhaps tyrant-like).

A “Lost” Leader...

My confidence and my sense as a “leader” gradually was lost after two critical moments of realization: the moment when I realized that I was a woman and the moment when I learned that I could not accomplish my parents’ wishes – both of these were related to the fact that I *am* a woman. The first time I had my period, I remember asking my grandmother when it would ever stop. My grandmother said, “Silly girl, it will visit you every month from now on.” “*Every month???*” That felt like the end of the world for me back then. “A woman’s *karma*!” my grandmother continued. “What? Woman? *Karma*?” I still remember the courtyard where I was forced to accept my “sentence” that day. Despite the fact that my grandmother had always treated me like a “king,” starting that very day, like it or not, I knew I could “at most be a queen” – an extremely subordinate role, in my estimation.

My second moment of failure – actually, two consecutive moments of realization in a period of three years – arrived when I finally realized that I could not fulfill my parents’ wishes to pass the exams for Teachers’ College, which, in those days, the general public considered the best choice for girls. Although my parents had always taken pride in me and did not really express any gender discrimination, they could not remain unaffected by traditional values and ideas about the best career for a woman. Like most parents in southern Taiwan, they hoped that their outstanding daughters would go to teachers’ colleges. According to the examination system in Taiwan, I had two opportunities to get into the teachers’ colleges, which were independent from the general entrance exams for other

schools. The first opportunity was after three years of junior high school and the second was after three years of senior high school. The first time, I missed passing the teachers' college exam by only a half point, even though I scored really high and got into the best girls senior high school in central Taiwan. During all three years of senior high school, I had only one goal: to enter the national teachers' college, so I could fulfill my parents' wishes. Unfortunately, I missed the second opportunity again, even though I again scored very high and ended up being admitted to National Taiwan University, the university that all my classmates aspired to. It was a big joke to both me and my parents. It was also a great lesson for me about *dukkha*.

During the first three lost years preparing for the second exam, I turned into another kind of "leader" in my class. After my first experience of failure, I became somewhat introverted, leading an extremely simple life, commuting more than two hours each day to school, with the single goal of entering the national teachers' college. Although I had no intention to take any leadership position, somehow I was chosen to be the class representative, as always. But this time, I was a rather silent and passive leader. All my classmates in this girls' high school loved me; I was regarded as the "class treasure." My classmates came everyday to tell me their personal stories and I just listened as they shared their family problems. My teachers loved me, too. I did great and was not at all naughty like the other girls. I was the model student. When the girls were afraid to play tricks on a serious-looking, authoritarian teacher one April Fool's Day, they played the trick on me instead. I never got angry. I was happy when everyone was happy. What they could not understand, though, was why I was not happy that I had gotten into everyone's "dream university." Even I had great difficulty understanding why. I only knew that I was suffering and my parents were suffering. My fellow students, whether they felt happy or jealous of my "achievements," could not understand why I was suffering, though they were also suffering. My heart echoed the words of a poet I read in my freshman English Literature class: "Tears. Idle tears. I know not what they mean."² This unhappiness was my second glimpse of *samsara* in a seemingly happy life.

An Awakening Journey to Become a "Leader"

In the following years – four years in college, two years as an English teacher, and another seven years studying abroad in Hawai'i, and in my current employment – I have continued to take numerous leadership positions. Maybe because I am taller, maybe because I look strong and trustworthy, maybe because I am such a busybody, or maybe because it *is* my *karma*, I have learned to assume positions of leadership. I was never self-conscious about being a leader in the past and never even particularly mindful of being a leader, I must confess. All of a sudden, however, after taking the leadership of a Buddhist women's organization, and especially after my experience at the Sakyadhita conference in Vietnam, I began to develop a very strong sense of awareness about being in this position of leadership. Why? Of course, it was the result of various causes and conditions. These included the personal journey and experiences I shared above, as well as my learning and practice of the Buddhist teachings over the past sixteen years. After becoming liberated from my parents' expectations, I am now "my own boss." But I am not completely liberated from the expectations of being a Buddhist woman, especially the expectations of being a Buddhist women leader.

Having taking a leadership role in Sakyadhita for many years, Bhiksuni Karma Lekshe Tsomo shared her experience with "expectations" with me.³

A leader necessarily takes a public role. There are different expectations about how a leader will dress and act, even when and how loud she can laugh. It is impossible for her to please

everyone and when she fails to please people, she is likely to be criticized. Constructive criticism can be healthy and very helpful, but destructive criticism can be very discouraging. This is especially true for those of us who are serving in leadership roles on a volunteer basis. Unlike the CEOs of corporations, we are working without any compensation, usually paying our own expenses. Even so, we sometimes come under criticism, no matter how hard we try to do our best.

It is indeed a “miracle” that Sakyadhita survives till today – no physical office, no paid staff for the past 23 years, and it is not even easy to find consistent volunteer helpers. Bhiksuni Tsomo also mentioned:

Being a leader is not easy, because there is so much to do, and a leader takes on the responsibility of getting it done. She needs helpers, but women do not have large budgets. She can try to get volunteers and there are many wonderful women volunteers on virtually every Buddhist project – but women have many other responsibilities looking after their families, and they cannot always be around to help.

Indeed, “apologies” are what Sakyadhita leaders have been very used to receiving. But what can we say or do except remain understanding and practice patience? What is most challenging, in fact, is facing gender-based criticism, as revealed in the following observation:⁴

Women tend to be held to a higher standard than men. Both men and women make mistakes, but the public seems to notice and to judge women more harshly. This means that a women leader needs to be very careful in her behavior. That can be a positive practice, but it is also stressful.

So, what better position could there be to practice walking on the *bodhisattva* path than being a Buddhist woman leader?

Conclusion: Leading to Learn and Leading to Liberation

To be or not to be (in any position), that is *not* the question. The question is whether one continues to learn and whether one can capably lead oneself and others towards the ultimate goal of liberation. Reflecting on the kind of leader I was before I knew I was a woman and before I became a Buddhist, I feel that I was not learning much, nor was I leading myself or anyone around me to liberation. I probably created more negative than positive *karma* in that position, since I was unaware of the power structures and privileges I enjoyed. Most likely, I generated more fear and unhappiness in others than joy and benefit. *Amitofo!* My most sincere apologies to all those who have suffered from such leadership.

The awareness of being a woman and a Buddhist, and the awareness of being lay and being in a leadership position have all been part of a great awakening. Although there are not many contemporary Buddhist women who serve as models of leadership, I feel fortunate and very thankful to have quite a few wonderful Buddhist women mentors around me. They have nourished me with their wisdom and compassion and taught me what it means to be a “Buddhist feminist” and a leader. I am full of gratitude for their kindness and everlasting patience in educating me, especially Bhiksuni Karma Lekshe Tsomo. This journey of awakening has been possible for me through the Sakyadhita

network and through working for Sakyadhita. I am sure it can also be a wonderful journey for many more daughters of the Buddha to come.

Finally, I would like to point out to all my Sakyadhita sisters that, in a sense, we are all already leaders of our time. What we are doing is truly revolutionary. Our global network of Buddhist women who are working with the pure and selfless intention to help educate, inspire, and empower an entire generation of Buddhist women to contribute to world peace is unprecedented. We are all learning to lead in our various impermanent roles and positions. We are also all leaders for ourselves. Through this network and through working for all daughters of the Buddha, we are leading ourselves to liberation.

I would like to end with an aspiration modified from the refuge prayer of the Chinese tradition: “Taking refuge in the supreme community (of Sakyadhita), may all living beings (especially our sisters) lead all members in this community with no obstacles. May we venerate all eminent Buddhist practitioners (including women and men, lay and ordained), and follow their good examples.”⁵ May all beings be happy. May all beings be free from suffering.

NOTES

¹ This talk has been published as Karma Lekshe Tsomo, “Buddhist Women as Leaders.” *Gender and Women's Leadership*. Edited by Natalie Green and Karen O'Connor (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. 2009).

² Poem written in 1847 by Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892), the Victorian-era English poet.

³ Personal correspondences.

⁴ Bhiksuni Karma Lekshe Tsomo, personal correspondence.

⁵ The modifications are rendered in the parentheses.

The Socio-religious Roots of Violence Against Women in Thailand and Southeast Asia

Bhikkhuni Rattanaali

The problem of violence against women in Thailand is epidemic. The most egregious example is the sex trade. The epidemic of sexual exploitation is spreading from the epicenter of Bangkok and now influences Cambodia and Myanmar severely, with gradually increasing influence in Laos. The trafficking of drugs from the Golden Triangle and the sex trade are two major factors contributing to the current instability in Southeast Asia. Epidemiologically, with HIV/AIDS increasing rapidly in Myanmar and Cambodia, the forecast is further regional destabilization.

Recent history reveals that Southeast Asia is a “shatter belt” between the clashing ideologies of communism and capitalism. Thailand is a fragile democracy that has experienced intermittent military dictatorships.

When searching for the roots of Thailand’s sex trade epidemic, it is customary for scholars to note global militarism, including the Japanese soldiers during WWII and the American soldiers during the Vietnam War, etc. Other scholars analyze the economics of sexual exploitation and the International Division of Labor (IDL) between the developed countries of the global North and the developing countries of the South. Still others focus nationally, recognizing the effects of rapid modernization, poverty, and the economic assistance that women provide to their families via sex work. Overall, scholars largely dismiss the impact of traditional gender-oppressive religious beliefs and practices by viewing them as merely sexist.

Few scholars have ventured to deeply analyze the ideological roots of the social epidemic of sexual exploitation, because of the taboo against criticizing Thai Buddhism. The pioneering work of Jit Poumisak, Sukanya Hantrakul, and then Khun Thitsa have pointed in the direction of ideology, that is, religion. Hantrakul examined the concepts of *kamma* and merit making. Kornvipa Boonsue, a former United Nations scholar, analyzed gender bias in Buddhism and state formation in Thailand and the ways in which Buddhist teachings influence Thai values, resulting in the oppression of women.

This paper moves this research forward by exploring and indicating clearly the methods of religious indoctrination of Thai men and women that contribute to the current sexploitation crisis, which has mounted for several generations and been catalyzed by global militarism, IDL, poverty, and rapid development. This research indicates that ideology precedes action and that the oppression of women and girls emerges from gender-oppressive religion and uses of religion. Last, this research proposes ideological deconstruction and the use of Buddhist values to shed light on the system to create movement and change. As a member of the Buddhist clergy, I feel confident that this analysis will be of benefit to Southeast Asian women and children.

Looking briefly at Thai history and religion, the influence of Hinduism propagated by Brahmin priests can be noted in the region of ancient Thailand as early as the 7th to 10th centuries. This influence appeared among the Mon dynastic ruling class as a means of sanctifying the royalty. At the same time, Theravada Buddhism and animism were the predominant ideological frameworks for the masses. During the Khmer Dynasty (1181-1219), Theravada Buddhism became part of the ideological milieu, along with Hindu Brahmanical teachings.

By the Sukhothai period (1250-1350), scholars note that Theravada Buddhism was formally being introduced into Thailand, although there were prior Buddhist influences, both Theravada and Mahayana. Po-Kun Ram Khamheng, the early leader of the Sukhothai period, did not embrace Hindu ceremonies performed by *brahmin* priests to justify his rule. According to Kornvipa Boonsue, however,

Brahmanical influences reemerged during the Ayudhaya period (1350-1767) that irrevocably changed the face of Theravada Buddhism in Thailand.

Thai Buddhism incorporates elements of Theravada Buddhism, Hinduism, and animism. Even the Buddhist scriptures, which took written form some 400 years after the Buddha's death, show evidence of Brahmanical influences degrading to women. During the Ayudhaya period (1350-1767) the adoption of the Manu-Dharma Sattrra (ancient Hindu laws written by *brahmin* scholars) set the stage for hundreds of years of oppression of women and children in Thailand. These laws gave rise to values that persisted even after the creation of other legal codes that consider women and children as property that could be bought, sold, beaten, or killed. A married woman was the property of her spouse, and children were the property of their father. In society at large, women and children could be bought or sold and punished by beatings or death.

The Manu Dharma Sattrra laws of 700 years ago are one of the root causes of the current sex trade. Misogynistic attitudes toward women and the disavowing of girl children became firmly institutionalized in Thai Buddhism. As time passed, ruling Thai dynasties maintained their power through the use of Brahmanical rituals to embellish the king as divine. Simultaneously, ruling dynasties subdued the masses through a Hindu interpretation of *kamma* that has been used to justify caste oppression until the present day. In Buddhism, *kamma* means "action," emphasizing the effects of actions in the present moment, not in a disempowered past or future.

Overtime, Buddhism grew among the masses, and competition for spiritual-political space intensified in the public sphere between the Buddhist monks and the Brahmin priests. Thus, the Buddhist monks absorbed Brahman rituals and Hindu belief structures in their attempts to solidify their power. Much of this was influenced by state power. Brahmin priests of Thailand were common at the turn of the last century, yet are rare today. However, their influence irrevocably changed the face of Thai Buddhism, and the quality of life for women and girls in Thailand and Southeast Asia.

Due to the influence of Hinduism, certain central Buddhist concepts came to be misused by Thai Buddhists, such as the concept of *kamma*. Today, this misuse is still apparent in the following cultural examples of value indoctrination: "If a woman is beaten by her husband, it is because she beat him in the past. If a woman is raped, it is because she raped someone in the past. If a woman is sold into the sex trade, it is because she sold someone into the sex trade in the past." The woman is "blamed" for the suffering and violence she encounters. As a result, many such women are unable to overcome their trauma and remain unaware, silent victims of their oppression. This process of oppression is known as "blaming the victim." It is interesting to note that in the northern Buddhist countries that are not heavily influenced by Hinduism, the concept of *kamma* does not appear to be misused in this way.

The misrepresentation and misuse of the teaching about *kamma* in southeast Asia has had very clear epidemiological impact. When we look at a map of Asia, it is very clear that the AIDS epidemic has a major epicenter in Southeast Asia, and is not found in the Mahayana Buddhist countries to the same extent. This indicates that the AIDS epidemic and misunderstandings about *kamma* in Southeast Asia directly overlap. From misunderstanding the teaching on *kamma* to the oppression of women and girls, we see the powerful influence of values, resulting in a flourishing sex trade and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS.

This interpretation of *kamma* is quite un-Buddhist. The Buddha listened to people and counseled them through stories that offered wise and compassionate insight. He did not blame people for their sufferings, but instead instructed them to use the present moment as the moment of change. Many texts associated with the Buddha (for example, the Jataka tales) are Hindu fables with Buddhist add-ons. The research of Boonsue deeply explores the gender-oppressive ideology perpetuated via

these texts.

The Buddha empowered men and women equally in the monastic community, opposed the caste system, and walked away from the monarchic system into which he was born. The misrepresentation of teachings on *kamma*, coupled with authoritarian social structures, have made people in Thailand rather passive and resistant to change. Under the circumstances, religion and especially a mistaken notion of *kamma* can become mechanisms that trap women ideologically, for example, “she is born a woman because of bad *kamma*.” Interestingly, in Sri Lankan Buddhist literature, one sees examples of a woman being born as a woman due to previous good *kamma*.

The Hindu concepts of *kamma*, ritual beliefs and practices around statues possessing special powers, and the empowerment of kings in the past as “god kings” have one important element in common, namely, the belief in an external locus of control. Buddhism is characterized as different from other religions, due to the belief in an internal locus of control. That is, in Buddhism, there is no god or external force or belief system outside of oneself that is more powerful than oneself. The important Buddhist belief that “the power to make change rests within the individual” has nearly vanished in Thailand. Instead, rituals and objects have become the sources of power. Authoritarianism has given rise to passivity and subsequent cultural dysfunction. In religion, males (namely, monks) have become the redeemers of females and society. This notion, coupled with the concepts of *kamma*, “*boon*” (merit making), and “*bop*” (mistake), form the basis for cycles of violence against women and girls. The philosophical concepts of wholesome and unwholesome deeds became distorted and the generous spirit of helping others is seen as less meritorious than giving to monks.

In popular Thai Buddhism, “*tamboon*” and making “*boon*” come from offering items to monks. If a woman wants to create merit, she has to give something to monks, even her own son. Success in life does not rest in the hands of the people, but in the realm of magical thinking. The concepts of *boon* and *bop* are examples of very early stages of ethical development of good and bad and the process of magical thinking is an example of a very early stage in childhood thinking and development. For women, these concepts and processes formally institutionalize a pathway for them to identify with their oppressor. Women then need to identify with their oppressor’s needs, meet his needs, and support his needs. This became a means of future positive outcomes in the next life for the woman, because a woman can gain merit by donating to monks and thus be reborn as a man in her next life.

Coupled with these misconceptions are misunderstanding about the concept of “*parami*,” the perfections. A man comes to be seen as having a great store of *parami* or virtues if he has many wives or lovers. This later evolves into men regularly frequenting sex workers as a sign of their virility. This religiously condoning of men’s reckless sexual behavior contributes to a social epidemic of sexual exploitation and sexually transmitted diseases.

Protests against this cycle are prohibited by the general taboo against criticizing a monk, a group of monks, or the monastic community. Some are taught that a woman will be reborn as a prostitute if she criticizes a monk or the monastic community. Thus, women are oppressed into silence; their respectful fear (*greng jai*) of monks silences any analysis and prevents them from speaking out about the misogyny of the monastic community. Instead, they are taught to cherish, adore, and respect their redeemer/oppressor.

Simultaneously, the concept of women as virtuous models in society and ordained Sangha members are omitted or suppressed, although such stories appear repeatedly in ancient texts, including an entire volume about enlightened Buddhist women masters. Instead, negative valuations of women are taught, for example, to be a woman is a lower rebirth, evil, Mara, unclean, a temptress, a prostitute, not worthy of educating, foolish, trivial, etc. A woman can redeem herself by offering her sons to the monastery, as tradition dictates. The son then gives the “*boon*” of his practice to his mother so that

she can have a better rebirth.

What is the implication of this system for the daughter in the family? The daughter is not worthy of ordaining and creating merit for her family. Spiritually, this cuts the bond of sacred trust and love between mother and daughter. A mother may even contemplate selling her daughter. Even animals in the wild protect their offspring from harm, yet the power of the religious tradition surpasses even the biologically powerful instinct to nurture and protect. Because the mother sees little value in womanhood, she has conflicted emotions, low self-esteem, and is taught to despise being born a woman. Thus, at some level within, she despises herself and her daughter. Tragically, the mother may sell her daughter, or remain silent when her daughter is sold by others, or encourage her daughter to sell herself. The natural, protective, instinctive bond between mother and daughter is spiritually compromised, severed, yet economically the bond remains. The daughter seeking love and approval may then move against her own instincts and engage in sex work and gives the money to her family. She also gives money to the monks in order to gain merits. And, so the cycle goes. It is a case of religious indoctrination leading to gender-oppression.

The solution to these cycles of violence to women and girls is to look deeply at the initial concept of *kamma* and “blaming the victim.” Through further analysis and deconstruction of these initial misinterpretation, followed by substitution of positive values and a healing pathway.

The pathway to healing the social epidemic of sexual exploitation from an ideological and spiritual perspective is to create a culture of human-centered development. Social workers and psychologists can bear witness and help process the emotional suffering of the community. Women who have appropriate listening and counseling skills, who serve as role models, symbols of wisdom and compassion, and provide refuge, are essential.

When there is so much trauma – sexual trauma, physical violence, psychological violence, and economic violence – against women and girls in a culture, then the society begins to decay, collapse, dysfunction, self-disintegrate. Yet simultaneously there are gifted listeners, gifted healers, gifted survivors within the culture. Little by little these members venture out and share, breaking the silence.

The culture tries to resist the sharing because there is not yet psychological and social infrastructure in place to hold the totality of the cultural pain. Yet, a culture is alive, a living organism and inherently wants to survive, to thrive, to flourish. So, those who can reframe the issues, make sense of the suffering, express it to others, and facilitate healing are the seeds of hope of the society for regaining balance and health. They allow and facilitate the healing of women and girls, and then the men and boys can begin to heal from the cultural wound which has damaged them spiritually as well.

Lay Buddhist Women: The Absolute Majority as the Most Alienated

Jong-in Kim

A non-discriminating attitude toward women is one of the reasons Buddhism is attractive to modern people. Among the followers of the four noble truths, there is a clear distinction between the ordained and the non-ordained; however, in Buddhism there is no such clear distinction between men and women, especially with regard to religious goals. Monks and nuns pursue *nirvana*, the ultimate religious goal; laymen and laywomen support the clergy by providing for the everyday needs of the clergy – the lay persons' wish for *nirvana* is postponed until their next life. The Buddha did not make an unreasonable distinction between men and women, either among the ordained or the non-ordained. He stated that women were also capable of obtaining enlightenment and allowed them to be ordained. This is a remarkably progressive attitude when we compare it to attitudes toward women in other religious traditions, such as Christianity and Islam. Had the Buddha's view and manner toward women been adhered to by the Buddha's followers, there would have been no discontentment from Buddhist women.

Unfortunately, however, inequality among Buddhist followers has developed and women have not been rewarded commensurate with their devotion. Buddhist precepts state that a nun's status in the *sangha* (the Buddhist clergy) is lower than that of a monk and that nuns should be subservient to monks. Nuns are, however, not the most unfairly treated group in the Buddhist community. The most unfairly treated are laywomen. Laywomen comprise the overwhelming majority of followers in most countries and in no other religion are the numbers of female followers as disproportionate as they are in Buddhist societies. Nevertheless, laywomen's role in the Buddhist *sangha* is very limited; they are usually subordinate not only to monks and nuns but also to laymen. Laywomen are the overwhelming majority in terms of their sheer numbers in the Buddhist community, but they are a small minority in terms of their presence in a leadership capacity. This article will discuss how and why Korean lay Buddhist women are shunned from positions of leadership in Korean Buddhist society.

The history of Buddhism in Korean society stretches back over 1,800 years. Currently, Buddhism has the biggest proportion of the religious population in a society of over forty-five million people. Korean Buddhism has significant sociopolitical power in Korean society, simply because of the sheer number of its followers, and the role of laywomen is crucial, for they form the bulk of the supporters. The Buddhist clergy is comprised of less than 20,000 monks and nuns. The number of active laymen is very small and the overwhelming majority of Buddhists who visit temples and participate in the affairs of Buddhist religious life are laywomen. During Dharma ceremonies at Korean Buddhist temples, it is not at all unusual to see a congregation composed entirely of women. According to one survey, only two percent of those who attend Dharma ceremonies are male.¹ One may see only ten or twenty men among several hundred Buddhist laywomen at such gatherings; at small temples, it is not unusual to see Buddhist ceremonies where no laymen are present. Usually, the percentage of laymen registered at Korean Buddhist temples is around 30 percent on the roster of names, but this percentage does not indicate whether or not these laymen regularly visit the temples or attend Dharma ceremonies. Most of the laymen whose names appear in the Buddhist temples' registry of names are not active participants in the rituals of the temples. They are counted as Buddhists because their wives or mothers have placed their names on the registry of names at the temples.



Lay Buddhist Leaders of the Jogye Order



A Typical Image of a Buddhist Congregation

Laywomen are the absolute majority in Korean Buddhist society, but their roles are very limited, confined mostly to support of the *sangha* by almsgiving. The only places we commonly see the names of laypeople recorded are on *dana* lists and inscribed on Dharma bells, statues, and buildings. Occasionally, we discover the names of a few intellectual laymen among the traditional academic Buddhist works, works written mostly by monks, but these names number less than twenty. One of the reasons for the inactivity of lay Buddhists was suppression of Buddhism by Confucians during the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1897). Monks were classified as one of the lowest classes, and aristocrats and government officials were not allowed to become Buddhists. The practice of Buddhism was prohibited by the law. Korean Buddhism became a religion almost exclusively for women during the Joseon Dynasty. Only women visited Buddhist temples and prayed for worldly benefits, such as good fortune, health, and longevity. During this dynasty, laymen disappeared from the fourfold *sangha*. The *sangha* became a threefold *sangha*, composed of *bhikkhus*, *bhikkhunis*, and *upasikas*. After the fall of the Joseon Dynasty and consequently Confucianism, the dismantling of the Joseon state ideology, and the influx of Western civilization, Korean society entered the modern age and religious freedom was given to the people.

It is not known how many lay Buddhist intellectuals and elites sympathetic to Buddhism existed before the 20th century, but after that several members of the social elite were known to be sympathetic toward Buddhism. Yi Neunghwa (1869-1943) was an erudite Buddhist scholar of the time. Han Yongun (1879-1944) was known as a Seon (Ch'an) master, but he was also a lay Buddhist thinker. Jang Jiyeon (1864-1921), Choe Namseon (1890-1957), and Yi Gwangsu (1892-1950), the famous public educators of during that time had a strong interest in Buddhism. There was also Gweon Sangno, a famous Buddhist scholar, and Gim Taeheup (1889-1989), who was criticized for his pro-Japanese activities, but was also a famous lay Buddhist theorist. Yi Wanyong (1858~1926), the notorious pro-Japanese sympathizer, was also a patron of Buddhism. All the laypeople mentioned above, however, are men. No laywomen of the time were known for their prominent social activity. There were laywomen's organizations and laywomen leaders of these organizations, but they did not make an impact as social policy leaders.

Lay Buddhist activity became stagnant again in the middle of the 20th century. After the Korean War in 1950, South Korea was under the strong influence of American culture and Christianity surged in the society. On the other hand, Buddhism suffered for several decades from an internal struggle between celibate monks and married monks. Buddhism remained alive on remote mountains only.

During the 1980s, as Korean people became more prosperous, they began yearning for a rich inner life, also, and Korean Buddhism began to draw positive attention from the society. The poor but honest and peaceful life of Korean monks on the mountains was publicized throughout Korean society. Buddhism began to be understood by the Korean people as a religion of spiritual enlightenment, a religion that could guide their inner life. During this time, some educated laypeople were motivated to reform Korean Buddhism. They founded institutions and organizations to achieve their goals in a systematic way.

Currently there exist countless Buddhist social organizations in Korea. A growing number of social activities are now part of Korean Buddhism. Korean laywomen, however, are still under-represented in the leadership of these Buddhist societies. Although the absolute majority of Korean Buddhists are laywomen, most of the positions of leadership in Buddhist organizations are occupied by monks, nuns, or laymen.

The superior position traditionally accorded to the ordained is the basic reason why laywomen are inferior in rank to monks or nuns in the Korean Buddhist community, and this is impossible to change, unless we deny monastic tradition. Furthermore, in most societies a women's social status is lower than a man's and thus it might be too optimistic or naive to expect Korean laywomen to take positions superior to laymen. Nevertheless, laywomen's social status in Korean Buddhist society is more disappointing than we can imagine. Korean women in no other social group have such an unfair status. Why are laywomen in Korean Buddhist society always behind women in other social groups? The answer seems to come from laywomen themselves. According to a survey conducted by the Jogye Order Women's Career Development Center, few Korean laywomen feel a sense of gender discrimination in Buddhist society.

However, this does not adequately indicate whether or not there is gender discrimination in Korean Buddhist society. Rather, it shows how Korean Buddhist laywomen conceptualize gender discrimination, and suggests that they may be insensitive to the gender realities. By some very obvious measures, Korean Buddhist laywomen experience a significant degree of discrimination. According to the survey mentioned above, the ratio between men and women Jogye Order congregations is 14:86; the male:female ratio among the board members of these organizations, on the other hand, is an astounding 96:4.² Even more astounding is that there are no female representatives among the associations of the congregation from 24 of the main districts of the order. Although lay Korean Buddhist women are greatly discriminated against, they are not aware of it.

Why are laywomen absent from positions of leadership in Korean Buddhist society? There is an historical basis and precedent for Korean laywomen's lack of leadership. Korean Buddhist society is one of the most conservative social groups in Korea. While Christianity in Korea is often seen as representing modern Western culture to Koreans, Buddhism has become emblematic of a traditional culture in which Confucianism has a prominent role and Buddhists are prone to conservative thought and patriarchal ideas. The relationship between monks/nuns and laywomen is directed by this patriarchal thinking. Monks believe that laywomen should be subservient to their judgment and receive instructions on every matter. Not only with regard to Dharma teaching, but also with regard to secular activities, monks hold complete authority toward laywomen. Lay Buddhist women have accepted this relationship without resistance. This makes it difficult for them to work together as equal partners.

Furthermore, most Buddhist social organizations in Korea are financially sponsored by monasteries or monks. Because of this financial support, the organizations are under the monks' directorship or guidance, and the monks prefer to appoint men to key positions, when they are not occupying these positions themselves. There are also Buddhist social organizations that are independent from monasteries and monks. These organizations are usually progressive and critical of monasticism.

Most laywomen are disinterested or not supportive of them, which is consistent with their conservative attitudes in other areas. The members of these organizations are mostly men, so there is no chance here for women to occupy positions of leadership either. Thus, whether the organizations are conservative or progressive, there is little chance for laywoman to be part of their leadership.

NOTES

¹ Seminar Material, “Sillcheonhaneunbulgyo, haengdonghaneunyeoseong,” p. 16.
Bulgyoyeoseonggaebalweon, “Yeoseongbuljagyoyuk program gaebaleulwihanseolmunjosabogoseo” (Daehan Bulgyo Jogyejong BulgyoYeosong Gaebalweon, 2004), p. 5.

² “Tonggyero bon yeoseong bulgyo hyeonhwang,” Ubaiyechan 1, Daehan Bulgyo Jogye-jong Bulgyo yeoseong gaebalweon, p. 21.

Theravada Bhikkhunis and Social Development in Thailand

Bhikkhuni Silananda

The Theravada *bhikkhuni* movement in Thailand is built upon the premise that Buddhism provides services to women in the community. The impact of Thai Buddhism at large on gender has resulted in the inferior status of women in Thai society, which places them at risk of abuse, domestic violence, sex trafficking, and increased vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

This paper takes a positive approach toward examining Theravada *bhikkhunis* and *samaneris* in Thailand and their potential contributions to social development by positing three research models: (1) *bhikkhuni* and *samaneri* development, which explores the psychological capital of hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism for renunciants as it relates to the roles they perform and the satisfaction they derive from those roles; (2) Sangha community development for *bhikkhunis* and *samaneris*, which explores their moral development, social capital, and religious capital in relation to social development; and (3) the social development of *bhikkhunis* and *samaneris*, which explores women's access to training in *bhikkhuni* temples, leading to spiritual development and social development through group processes, leading to an intention towards greater commitment to large-scale social development projects.

The results of this study indicate that Thailand needs more women to share the full responsibility of being spiritual leaders in Buddhism. The emergence of Theravada *bhikkhunis* is an important landmark for Thailand and neighboring Theravada Buddhist countries. In 2008 and 2009, small groups of *bhikkhunis* began gathering together to form Sangha communities. This has led to positive Sangha processes of caring, skillful listening and mutual support, which have enhanced their psychological capital, social capital, and religious capital. From these developments, *bhikkhunis* and *samaneris* are beginning to have an impact on social development and are inspired to continue doing so in the future.

Susmita Barua

Growing up in a minority Buddhist home in Calcutta, amid a sea of poverty and suffering, I felt great joy and relief as a child that the Buddha discovered a way out of *dukkha*. My childhood imagination also took flight with the opening lines of the *Dhammapada*, “We are what we think.” Our thoughts create our experience, our reality. My first thought was: How could the thought inside our heads create reality outside? Or how could the Buddha know the truth of ultimate reality without the help of science or technology? I had to leave these questions aside, since Dhamma was not part of our school curriculum. In college, I had the option to study economics as a science subject, but it hardly gave me any insight into the causes of the growing economic disparity between rich and poor and between developed and developing nations.

This paper is my effort to apply Dhamma creatively to inspire mindful economic system change by harnessing the power of collective attention and intention. I am using the term Dhamma economics rather than Buddhist economics, as used by Schumacher,¹ to align economics with the vision of creating a Dhamma society – an enlightened civilization that values living a noble life with mindful awareness, dignity, and fearlessness. The Buddha himself used Dhamma as his guide and the investigation of Dhamma is one of the seven factors of enlightenment.² The Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hahn speaks about the danger to our civilization and planet from the “disease of capitalism.” Engaged Buddhist and social critic David Loy says, “The situation the Earth is in today has been created by unmindful production and unmindful consumption. We consume to forget our worries and our anxieties. Tranquilizing ourselves with over-consumption is not the way.”³

The Pali word Dhamma (Sanskrit: Dharma) has a deep and comprehensive meaning. It encompasses all universal and natural laws that uphold and support life and phenomena. In the fourth factor of Four Foundation of Mindfulness (*satipatthana*), we contemplate Dhamma (the truth of the teachings) in *dhmma* (mental objects and phenomena). In a Dhamma economy, the well-being of people and the planet, ethical livelihood and mindful cooperation will take precedence over harmful greed, ill-will based competition, and heedless ignorance. Developing wholesome qualities of mind and inner liberation will receive at least equal value as outer democratic institutional structures. New value-oriented measures like Gross National Happiness (GNH), the index started by the king of Bhutan in 1972, the Happy Planet Index (HPI) promoted by the New Economic Foundation, or the Global Peace Index will be good measures for Buddhist economics in place of old measures like Gross National Product (GNP). The marginalized aspects of the economy, like the village, the informal economy, and the unpaid work of mothers, caregivers, and community volunteers; the preservation of commons; and external costs to the environment need to be fully integrated into Dhamma Economics.

As David Loy brilliantly points out, the three unwholesome roots of personal “ego” *dukkha*, namely, greed, ill will, and delusion arising out of a persistent feeling of “lack” get socially embedded and institutionalized and play out in myriad ways through what he calls our collective “wegos.” Buddhist social theory, he says, has so far been stronger on diagnosis (first two noble truths) than solutions (last two noble truths).⁴ This paper is my humble attempt to go deeper into the diagnosis of the collapse of the mind-made system called capitalism, discuss how part of it is constructed conceptually in the human mind and institutions, and explore how can we apply Dhamma to correct our course. A diagnosis of the root causes (*hetu*) and conditions may help us collectively to find skillful ways (*upaya*) to address and alleviate mass social *dukkha* in our world now. The noble eightfold path was not only

meant for renunciant monks and nuns; it was also meant for the awakening and transformation of the larger society and civilization as a whole.

The Buddha calls right (skillful) view the forerunner of the path (*pubbanga*), which gives direction and efficacy to the other seven path factors:

Bhikkhus, just as the dawn is the forerunner and first indication of the rising of the sun, so is right (wholesome) view the forerunner and first indication of wholesome states. For one of right view, bhikkhus, right intention springs up. For one of right intention, right speech springs up. Then...right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration springs up. For one of right concentration, right knowledge springs up. For one of right knowledge, right deliverance springs up.⁵

There are two kinds of right view: conceptual right view and experiential right view. The first comes from a clear understanding of the Dhamma, based on contemplation of the meaning of the teachings by the Buddha. It imparts the germ of wisdom that is penetrated in one's immediate experience, as Bhikkhu Bodhi says. It also entails understanding the middle way of balance and abandoning extreme views and attachment to false views. "And what is right view? Knowledge with regard to *dubbka*, knowledge with regard to the origination of *dukkha*, knowledge with regard to the cessation of *dukkha*, knowledge with regard to the way of practice leading to the cessation of *dukkha*: This is called right view."⁶

In the Buddha's time, society was falling under the oppressive authority of Brahmanism, social injustice, obligatory rituals, sacrifice, and segregation of the lower castes. By relinquishing his throne, the Buddha eschewed the path of aggression that was customary to the warrior caste he was born into. He broke with social tradition by leaving the comfort of his palace, his wife, and newborn son in search of enlightenment, a path generally reserved for *brahmins*. The Sangha he established was open to all castes and the Buddha called his followers *patasotagama* and *patasotagamini*, "those who go against the stream."⁷ Free-market capitalism has become the new theology and economics has become the new religion of the free market. Whenever something is falling apart, like our economic system, it is a good time to turn towards it, learn about the causes and conditions (co-dependent arising), and gather insight on our individual and collective *kamma* and our interdependence as a learning community. Going against the stream means going against the decadent and ego-driven culture of our time by freeing our minds from the fetters of delusion.

Skillful action (*kamma*) is a primary factor that contributes to happiness in this life and the next. The Buddha realized the mind's role in determining the moral quality of actions. His analysis of the process of developing skills showed him that skillfulness depends not so much on the physical performance of an action as on the mental qualities of perception, attention, and intention that play a major part. Of these three, intention is the essence of the act, since it constitutes the decision to act, while attention and perception inform it. Whenever something is falling apart, like our economic system, it is a good time to turn out toward it, learn about the causes (dependent arising), and gather insight on our collective *kamma*, as a community.

Capitalism is an economic system in which the means of production (resources) are privately owned and operated for private profit. There are five kinds of capital: natural capital, human capital, infrastructure capital, social capital, and financial capital. This financial monetary system has come to dominate, globalize, and leverage all other forms of capital. The two interlocking blind spots and sustaining causes in modern capitalism have their origin in "fractional reserve banking" and the practice of "usury," now described as the capital cost and time value of money. The entanglements within this

system have been continually compounded during the past 300 years. As democratic governance was developing and the industrial revolution was in full swing during the 18th and 19th centuries, a deep mistrust of the Church, monarchy, and government and wars kept people divided. The nature of “fiat money” (legal currency) was not clearly and widely understood by the people, their governments, or the monarch. A few wealthy moneylenders and merchant bankers with connections to the European royalty capitalized on this mass ignorance early on.

The first companies, such as the East India Company around 1600 CE, secured their charters from the monarchies or governments for the purpose of exploration, trade monopolies, and ruthless colonization. The initial stock offering of Bank of England (called the Mother of All Central Banks, including the American colonies) around 1700 CE, said, “The Bank has benefit of interest on all moneys which it, the bank, *creates out of nothing*.” The power to control a nation’s money was transferred from the governments of the people and privatized through a scheme called “fractional reserve banking,” which created the illusion that money is secured by gold.

The English tally system (money as account of tallies), made of long pieces of wood, provided the bulk of money supply for more than five centuries (1100-1650 CE), before bank notes arrived. The early American colonies experimented with debt-free public money issued by the provincial governments and the peace and prosperity it generated made the Bank of England nervous. Benjamin Franklin wrote, “In the colonies there is not a single unemployed person, neither beggars, nor vagabonds”. He said, “ You see, a legitimate government can both spend and lend money into circulation (*debt-free*) while banks can only lend (*as debt, bearing endless usury*); they can neither give away, nor spend but a tiny fraction of the money people need.”⁸ British financiers (such as Rothschild, with roots in Germany) funded the opposition to the American War for Independence, the war of 1812, and both sides of the American Civil War. Lincoln attempted to foil the bankers’ plan to split the Union by issuing debt-free greenbacks to pay the soldiers.⁹ Hitler took that cue from Lincoln to uplift Germany from a crushing depression to a world power within five years. Germany financed its entire government and war operation from 1935 to 1945 without gold and without debt, and it took the whole capitalist and communist world to destroy Germany’s power and bring Europe back under the heel of the bankers.¹⁰

The Federal Reserve system, the central bank of the United States, formed after a series of financial panics ending with the 1907 Banker’s Panic, following a 50 percent fall of NYSE. The Bretton Woods Conference of 1944 among over 40 major industrial nations led to monetary policy agreements, establishing the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, and making U.S. dollar the reserve currency of the world. In 1971, the U.S. government unilaterally suspended the convertibility of the U.S. dollar to gold. This created great volatility in the foreign exchange market and prompted a shift from a fixed to a floating currency exchange system, making the domestic currency of many countries vulnerable to speculation. Many developing countries saddled with IMF and World Bank loans needed debt relief after the price of oil quadrupled in 1974. This happened soon after the OPEC oil producers agreed with the U.S. requirement to sell oil in dollars. Oil effectively replaced gold as the “backing” for the U.S. dollar.

Economist, Central Bank official, and complementary currency advocate Bernard Lietaer said, “Your money’s value is determined by a global casino of unprecedented proportions: Over \$1.3 trillion is traded per day in foreign exchange markets, which is 100 times the trading volume of all stock markets globally. Nearly 96 percent of these transactions are purely speculative; they do not relate to the “real” economy of actual goods and services. This highly unstable monetary situation has resulted in the many foreign exchange crises that have affected no less than 87 different countries over the past 25 years, as in Mexico, South-East Asia, Russia, and Argentina.”¹¹ There are over 4000 complementary

currencies in the world today and it is growing. The oldest local currencies known to be in continuous use are the WIR in Switzerland (1934) and the Labor Banks in Japan.

Money originated as a great social and community innovation, perhaps led by women, to overcome the limitation of direct exchange or barter, as trade and commerce grew with the development of agriculture, urban settlements, and central marketplaces. Originally, money (as credit) was not a usury-bearing debt or I.O.U.. Cash or coin functions in reality not as a promissory note (I.O.U.), but a socially accepted token of trust, a transferable acknowledgment receipt, or thank you note (ITU) with which members within a community can freely exchange goods and services. Cowrie shells were used for centuries in Africa, China, and India as currency. They were viewed as a symbol of womanhood, fertility, birth, and wealth. Wampum beads were the currency of native Indians in North America. The idea of a gift economy evolved from mothers and elders. With the rapid expansion of cities and urban-industrial economy, the knowledge of “currency as commons,” as I see it, was wiped out, along with the destruction of native and indigenous cultures. Modern fiat currency evolved from “gold receipts” for gold kept with goldsmiths and early bankers. Gold was heavy and unsafe to carry for trading purposes. Currency receipts kept recycling as money, because few bothered to come back for their gold. Soon goldsmiths started to issue more credit receipts than they had reserves for. Thus, fractional reserve banking was born.

Usury (*riba*) is the practice of making profit out of money via exorbitant interest without any use of labor. Modern banking, finance, and usury seem to have their roots in ancient Sumeria (Mesopotamia), as evidenced by archaeological findings in the city of Uruk.¹² Historically, usury has been a source of corruption, slavery, and economic instability. This ancient mind virus, or meme, has been institutionalized through modern fractional reserve-based central banking, making the life of people and the planet unsustainable. The code of Hamurabi (1760 BCE) mentions slavery and the Bible refers to it as an established institution. Usury was denounced by Plato, Aristotle, Cato, Seneca, Plutarch, Solomon, Aquinas, Mohammad, Moses, Philo, and the Buddha for its power to deceive people, corrupt society, and create invisible slavery. The *Mahacattarisaka Sutta* describes several dishonest means of making money – by practicing deceit, treachery, soothsaying, trickery, and usury – as wrong livelihood.¹³ The power to issue, hoard, and control currency lies at the heart of history’s great empires, conquests, crusades, and wars. Modern-day currency wars just play out on fast-paced computer terminals.

With right understanding of currency, the concept of Basic Income Guarantee (BIG) can be used as the most powerful tool to break entrenched poverty and inequality everywhere. It is a social security or social credit payment to all citizens from the government of the people. It has the potential to meet the U.N. Millennium Development Goals. Gandhian economic thinking of self-sufficiency, simple *ashram* (commune) living, and revitalized village economy-inspired movements, like voluntary *dana* of land (*bhoo-dan*) in India and *dana* of labor as in the Sarvodaya Shramadana movement founded by A. T. Ariyaratne in Sri Lanka. The latter is a shining example of world’s largest Dhamma-based people’s development movement for the poorest of the poor.

Namibia, a nation of two million people with ample mineral and marine resources, adopted a market-based economic system after achieving independence from apartheid-era South Africa in 1990. Despite political stability, it could not break the vicious cycle of mass unemployment, inequality, and poverty. After years of internal and external political resistance, notably from the IMF, in January 2008 a pilot project was adopted in a settlement named Otjivero. All residents below the age of 60 years received a Basic Income Grant of N\$100 (USD \$12) per person per month, with no strings attached. Within six months, malnutrition among children and school dropout rates dropped more than 50 percent. After 16 months, the majority could increase their productivity and income dramatically.

Average household income from wages went up by 19 percent – from farming by 36 percent and from self-employment by 301 percent.

In the Buddha's time, there were two systems of governance: monarchy and small city republics. He did not prefer one over the other, but advised that the state needs to be administered in terms of the ethical rule of Dhamma. He also advised kings on the ten guiding principles (*dasa-rajadhamma*) for a Wheel Turning Monarch (*chakkavartin*). Among other things, a *chakkavartin* must not cling to wealth and property, but should give it away for the welfare of the people. Such a ruler must be ready to sacrifice name, fame, and even life in the interests of the people. He or she should promote peace, not deceive the public, nor oppose the will of the people, nor obstruct measures conducive to the will of the people.¹⁴ Contemplate how this relates to contemporary thinking on wealth and private property, and the conduct of our elected leaders, high officials, and CEOs.

In this paper, I have outlined an overview of how financial capitalism developed and came to dominate over other forms of real capital, natural wealth, real economy of people, households, and the planet. Thich Nhat Hahn recently spoke about “the disease of capitalism,” warning that “without collective awakening, a catastrophe will come.” If the compounding ills of usury, fractional reserve banking, debt-based currency, cancer of speculation, and true nature of money are not widely understood, then we will miss the opportunity to contribute and participate in the current conversation about new economic paradigms and system change. “From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications. Whether or not there is the arising of Tathagatas, this property stands – this regularity of the Dhamma, this orderliness of the Dhamma, this/that conditionality.” Ignorance is a dependently co-arisen phenomenon.¹⁵

Sustainability as a goal and social responsibility cannot be left to corporations, governments, or the United Nations. H.H. Dalai Lama spoke of taking universal responsibility for the well-being of humanity and planet. We cannot leave the job to international banks, corporations, and global institutions. Long-run sustainability of environment, human life, and capacity development are incompatible with short-term financial goals and the current delusional monetary system. The Buddhist social engagement path has the potential to unite all practitioners into one community under one Dhamma and one Sangha. The study and practice framework for Dhamma economy may include the Four Noble Truths, the Three Marks of Existence, the Doctrine of Dependent Arising, and some idea of the workings of *kamma*. The Buddha said, “It is through not knowing, not understanding, not penetrating, this doctrine [dependent arising] that this generation has become entangled like a ball of string... unable to overpass the doom of the Waste, the Woeful Way, the Downfall, the Constant Faring on.”¹⁶ The conditions needed for this intentional system-change experiment to flower with co-emergent wisdom is to host contemplative gatherings where we can direct and sustain our attention to some of the issues raised in this article. By not clinging to any views or outcome, we can conduct our own intentional inquiry, making the effort to dig deeper to awaken *prajna*-based healing solutions from within.

NOTES

¹ E. F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: Economics As If People Mattered* (1973), p. 52

² *Bhogganga*, Sutta Nipata 46.1.

³ “Thich Nhat Hahn,” interview by Joe Confino, *The Guardian*, Aug. 26, 2010.

⁴ David R. Loy, *The Great Awakening: A Buddhist Social Theory* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003).

⁵ Anguttara Nikaya 10:121.

⁶ Digha Nikaya 22.

⁷ Richard Reoch, “Going Against The Stream, Personal And Social Radicalism Of Buddha,” *Daily News*, Sri Lanka, Dec. 8, 2009.

⁸ Ellen H. Brown, *Web of Debt: The Shocking Truth About Our Money System And How We Can Break Free* (Third Millennium Press, 2007), pg 41.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Emry Sheldon, “Billions for The Bankers, Debt For The People,” Lord’s Convent Church, America’s Promise Broadcast, 1982.

¹¹ Bernard Lietaer, *Future of Money: Beyond Scarcity and Greed* (London: Random House, 2001).

¹² Glynn Davies, *A History Of Money From Ancient Times To Present Day* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002).

¹³ Madhyama Nikaya 117.

¹⁴ Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 1959.

¹⁵ *Paccaya Sutta*, SN 12.20.

¹⁶ K.S. II, p. 64.

Disability Access to Buddhist Temples

Diana Cousens

In 2006, after the H.H. Dalai Lama performed the Kalachakra Initiation at Amaravati, I went with many of the Tibetans who attended on pilgrimage to sacred places around India. At the famous Buddhist cave sites of Ajanta and Ellora. I was intrigued to see that a palanquin service was offered at Ajanta. This meant that older visitors with mobility problems could be carried around the temples by four Indian bearers holding a stretcher with a chair. It seemed an ingenious, local response to the problems of physical access for the disabled. The caves are located in a high place, with stairs and steps to climb, and a palanquin allowed access for everyone.

In less well-visited places, however, even at Ellora, another cave temple site at a small distance from Ajanta, bearers carrying palanquins were not available. In such circumstances, physically disabled people may not be able to enter the temples. It seems to me that, as Buddhists who wish to make the Dharma available to as many people as possible, it is a basic requirement that temples are accessible to those who can no longer walk independently and who rely on wheelchairs or crutches or other walking aids.

Although I observed the presence of palanquins at Ajanta and their absence at Ellora in 2006, I did not think about it again until 2009, when I was invited to join a reference group as the Buddhist representative on the Multifaith Disability Project, funded by the Victorian Government (Australia) and the Uniting Church. The Project sought to put the issue of disability access on the table and show a way forward for all faith communities. After two years of preparation and consultation, the Project produced a DVD and a report.¹ It worked with the Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Ba'hai communities.

The report made numerous recommendations, where were set in the context of some basic principles and legislation. The basic principles relate to human rights issues: disabled people should not be discriminated against and values of equality, dignity, diversity and self-determination, or choice are affirmed. According to the Victorian Government State Disability Plan, the Principle of Equality recognizes that “people with a disability are citizens who have the right to be respected and the right to have equal opportunities to participate in the social, economic, cultural, political and spiritual life of society. As citizens, people with a disability also have equal responsibilities towards Victorian society and should be supported to exercise these.”² The significant point in this sentence is the idea that disabled people have the right to equal opportunities to participate in the spiritual life of society. Being able to enter a temple is surely a basic right in this context.

The report looked at ways disabled people were both included and excluded, suggested strategies to increase participation, recorded personal experiences and emphasized the importance of leadership in the faith communities to promote positive change. Inclusion was taken to mean not only physical access, but also an attitude of inclusiveness that was not prejudiced against the disabled or which held low expectations of the disabled. It was recognized that obstacles to participation come about because of attitudinal, structural, and personal circumstances. The disabled do not want to be pitied or treated charitably, they seek equal acceptance. Overly protective family members sometimes kept the disabled away from faith activities for fear of exposing them to negative treatment. As a result, they were not able to participate. It was also noted that the disabled report many negative attitudes towards disability that were supported by biased interpretations of sacred texts. Faith leaders acknowledged the problems and the need for improvement. They all affirmed values such as justice,

hospitality, and compassion. Many good things are happening, particularly around improving the existing environment and there is an opportunity – as will be evident in this paper – to share ideas, strategies, and resources.

If we, as Buddhists, affirm the value of compassion, then it is surely our role to start where we are, as we are, and assist all beings towards enlightenment, in whatever way is possible and acceptable. If we look at our sacred texts and interpret disabilities as arising from some kind of karmic punishment, then we fail to see the value of the person with the disability and the fact that everyone may at some stage of their life experience a loss of ability due to aging and sickness. It is intellectually lazy to judge others. There are always extraordinary examples of people with limitations who exceed others in their wisdom and understanding. Surely, we must look beyond the outer form when relating to others.

The issue of disabled access is an issue that touches on the principles of equal opportunity, self-determination, diversity, and human rights. In terms of principles, it is a big issue. However, as a Buddhist for nearly 30 years, until I joined this committee, I had not put the issue at the forefront of my concerns. I was the Centre Director for a Tibetan Buddhist Dharma center in Melbourne for ten years and routinely hired halls and teaching spaces that were inaccessible to people on crutches or in wheelchairs. Access would occasionally cross my mind, but not very often, even though one of our center members who uses crutches – and sometimes a wheelchair – would occasionally complain that she found it hard to get up the stairs. Similarly, I learned from this committee that other religions also provided uneven levels of access. The newest and largest churches, temples, synagogues, and mosques are required by government regulations to provide disability access. These places will have ramps to key areas, such as prayer halls. Older, smaller, and more informal places of worship, such as a large proportion of Buddhist centers, lack disability access. So, what should we do?

I did a quick audit of ten Buddhist temples in a nearby suburb and found that most provided disability access to the teaching spaces, but none provided access to toilets. Similarly, meeting rooms where the temple committee met were often inaccessible. I consulted my friend on crutches, Jocelyn Hughes, about what Buddhist temples needed to consider in improving our situation. I knew that what would not work would be to go back to the temples and tell them that they needed to immediately spend hundreds of thousands of dollars fixing their facilities. We needed to come up with a more broadly based approach.

As a committee member of the Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils, I put the need for a policy paper on the agenda for the Annual General Meeting in 2009 and the FABC agreed to the need for a plan. I made it plain that it was not my intention to tell the temples what to do, but we did need to raise everyone's awareness of the issue, and then provide the temples with a policy and resources and encourage them to come up with their own creative responses. It may be useful to make a point about culture here. In the top-down world of Buddhist hierarchy, getting the politics right on these kinds of questions is vital. It is not the role of the FABC or of any layperson to tell the monk abbots who are in charge of temples how to run their temples. So my emphasis in this project is on raising awareness and providing resources.

I became aware of the concept of a disability audit through membership in the Reference Group and sat down with Jocelyn to talk through the types of things that she thought would be helpful. She said it would be really helpful if, when she rang a temple or a center, there was someone there who could tell her whether the temple was wheelchair accessible or not. She said it would be really helpful if, when she went to a temple, there was someone who was responsible for greeting and assisting a person in a wheelchair. Similarly, it would help if, on temple and center websites, they identified whether halls, toilets, and meeting rooms were accessible by the use of a logo, similar to the types of logos that are used for motels, indicating whether they have a swimming pool or other facilities. She

also mentioned that it would be very helpful if temples offered distance education programs, so that those who simply cannot face the difficulties of attempting to go to a temple could access educational materials from home. So I adopted all of Jocelyn's advice and worked it into the policy document for the FABC.

Through membership in the Reference Group, I also became aware of the significance of people with disabilities having the opportunity for leadership roles within their faith communities. It was obvious that, if a temple committee always meets on the top floor of a building without a lift, then people in wheelchairs will not be able to be on the committee, because they cannot get to the meeting. I adapted a pre-existing disability audit document and added a number of special features suitable for the purpose of access to Buddhist temples. These include such things as making sure that the entrance to the building is free of hazards such as shoes. Rani Hughes, Jocelyn's sister, is an occupational therapist and she checked the audit and suggested a few changes, as did a member of the FABC Committee. The policy and audit were adopted as policy nationwide by the FABC in 2010.³

The next step is to get it out to the temples. On this count, I realized that we would need to have the policy translated into the languages most commonly used by members of temples in Australia. To achieve this, I applied for funding from the Victorian Multicultural Commission for translation and publication and funding was provided. The document is now published in seven languages: English, Chinese, Khmer, Lao, Sinhalese, Thai, and Vietnamese. It was immediately placed on the website of the Faith Communities Council, funded by the state government and the churches, to provide a model for non-Buddhist communities. The document is to be launched at the Multifaith Disability Conference to be held by the Uniting Church in Melbourne on May 17, 2011. It will then be circulated to the Buddhist temples of Victoria. The document and the translations have just been made available to the FABC.

We are at the start of a new process in raising awareness of disability issues in the Buddhist community. Considering that in Australia many of our most devout temple members belong to an older generation of migrants and are therefore likely to have mobility issues in the not too distant future, putting in place strategies to assist the disabled community is in the interests of temples in both the short and long term. If we have a mission to benefit all beings, then it would be a great oversight to exclude some of our own members from the blessings of attending temples.

NOTES

¹ Andy Calder, “‘To Belong, I Need to be Missed’: Disability and Inclusion in Faith Communities,” Report of the Multifaith Disability Project, published by Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, Melbourne 2010.

² Ibid., pp. 8-9.

³ Diana Cousens, *Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils, Statement of Intention, Provision of Access to Places of Worship for the Buddhist Community*, Buddhist Council of Victoria, Melbourne 2011.

Mother Nature and the Nature of Mothers: On the Environmental Impact of Gender Essentialism

Hsiao-Lan Hu

There seems to be a significant convergence of Buddhism and modern environmental ethics.¹ Ian Harris notes that some writers would even go so far as to suggest that “of all the major religious traditions, Buddhism is the best equipped to form the heart of a new global environmentalist ethic.”² Indeed, Buddhism teaches compassion for *all* sentient beings, Buddhist masters typically advocate a life of self-restraint and moderate consumption, the Buddhist deconstruction of a separate, autonomous Self implicitly refutes anthropocentrism,³ and the Buddhist teaching of interdependent co-arising (Pāli: *paticcasamuppāda*; Skt: *pratītyasamutpāda*) is often presented to be the interconnectedness between humans and the non-human world.⁴ The Buddhadharma does seem to be a natural ally of environmentalism.

Many Buddhist teachers and leaders advocate for environmental preservation and restoration.⁵ When talking about environmental issues and ecological crisis, they often employ the imagery of Mother Nature/Earth.⁶ The relationship between Earth/Nature and human beings is likened to the relationship between a human mother and her children because both “mothers” sustain human life.⁷ However, the employment of the imagery of Mother Earth or Mother Nature rarely stops at the comparison of the life-sustaining function of mothers. Very often we see the imagery progresses to the ways in which Mother Earth, like any human mother, is “naturally” self-sacrificing and humbly enduring abuses from irresponsible and ungrateful children who take whatever they want without any consideration of the consequences of their behaviors. For instance, Ven. Shengyan said,

The earth is as kind as a mother who puts up with all the wayward behaviors of her children. And yet we human beings just take whatever we want, exploiting, destroying, and polluting Nature in whichever way we can. Now that we have pushed nature beyond her limits and caused disasters, we try to put the blame on nature by describing the disasters as the attack from the earth.⁸

The Dalai Lama expresses the same sentiment, “Until the latter half of the twentieth century, Mother Earth was able to tolerate our sloppy house habits. However, our environmental recklessness has brought the planet to a stage where she can no longer accept our behavior in silence.”⁹

I am not sure if people will be persuaded to respect Nature and protect the environment with this imagery of Mother Earth. For all we know, many people take their mothers for granted all their lives, or do the minimum for their mothers, or have some emotional difficulties with their mothers, or even resent their mothers for some childhood experiences. Quite a few Western feminists have cautioned against the use of the imagery of Mother Nature.¹⁰ I am continuing their critiques and further pointing out that (1) the imagery has an essentializing effect, suggesting that the proper role for women is the self-sacrificing mother who *should* reproduce and then silently endure all adversities brought about by her wayward, ungrateful children, and (2) this essentializing effect is highly problematic not only in terms of gender justice and mother-child relationship, but also in terms of environmental sustainability.

The Buddhadharma emphasizes experience, and it is possible that these Buddhist masters are speaking from their individual and collective experiences, without any intention to essentialize the female gender. After all, the societies in which these masters grew up *are* patriarchal, and in patriarchal

societies it *is* a common experience that women sooner or later become mothers who are enduring and self-sacrificing. However, coming from Buddhist masters who seldom address gender issues in their dharma talks, the imagery of Mother Nature/Earth no doubt stands out as the masters' expectation of the proper feminine, which is the life-giving, nurturing, self-sacrificing, and adversity-enduring mother. Connecting human mothers with Nature, the imagery suggests women are Nature embodied and it is the "nature" of women to be mothers. Inasmuch as being mothers is considered the natural function of all women, it becomes "unnatural" and, in fact, socially unacceptable, for women not to reproduce¹¹ or not to sacrifice themselves for their children. As such, women are expected or even pushed by society to be mothers, regardless of their individual temperament or their own critical judgment as to what is appropriate for their own lives, for society, and for the environment.

Is it really the "nature" of women to reproduce, and do all women who have reproduced "naturally" manifest the "motherly" characteristics mentioned above? More importantly, even if it could be said that all women are biologically programmed to be mothers, should they all be expected or even pushed to be mothers? From the perspective of the Buddhadharmā, what is "nature" anyway, and should "nature" dictate human behaviors?

Buddhist teachings, practices, and institutions clearly show that Buddhist traditions do not hold whatever is biologically programmed is right. The Buddhadharmā teaches that one should not mistake the physical body and its functions to be the permanent, unchanging Self. In the Mahāyāna rendition of the same concept in the *Heart Sūtra*, "Form is Emptiness, Emptiness is Form."¹² That is, forms are interdependently co-arisen and are empty of any inherent essence or "nature." Moreover, Buddhist practices themselves indicate that some of the biological or animalistic tendencies should be abandoned, or at least restrained. For instance, one may be prone to aggressive behaviors due to one's high level of testosterone, but Buddhist masters would always emphasize reducing aggression and generating loving-kindness through practices. Likewise, one may be biologically programmed to be lustful, but Buddhist masters have always advised followers to practice precepts and rein in their desires. Why then should all women be expected to be mothers simply because they are born with the female reproductive organs? Furthermore, if all women are expected to be mothers just because they are endowed with reproductive organs, should it be said that all men are expected to be fathers as well since they are born with reproductive organs, too? Why then do all branches of Buddhism have celibate male monastic orders which, in fact, have been the center of Buddhist practices and studies throughout history? The very elevation of the celibate monastic order as the center and model of Buddhist life itself suggests that, as feminist Buddhist theorist Rita Gross puts it, "biological reproduction may interfere with helping the world or realizing one's highest potential."¹³

The Buddhadharmā does not limitlessly and blindly glorify reproduction. Reproduction, from a Buddhist perspective, is simply a continuation of ego and an outcome of the self-centered desire of self-perpetuation.¹⁴ This should not be taken to the extreme and interpreted as hating the world or denying human sexuality. Rita Gross points out, "Buddhism does not require its members to reproduce as a religious duty. Nor do most forms of Buddhism regard sexuality negatively, as an evil to be avoided unless linked with reproduction."¹⁵ The Buddhadharmā does not find sexuality and the continuation of life in this world in and of themselves problematic. What is problematic is the unconscious or subconscious repetition of the behaviors that generate and perpetuate *dukkha* (Sanskrit: *dukkha*) for ourselves and for each other.

The patriarchal social expectation of all women being self-sacrificing reproducers is one of the blind human behaviors that generate and perpetuate *dukkha*. It produces *dukkha* for the women who do not, cannot, or did not want to, have children. Once it is considered the "nature" of all women to reproduce, a woman cannot not get any respect unless she gives birth, even though she may have

excelled in other endeavors that are equally worthy, such as teaching, healing, counseling, caring for the earth, and engaging in social activism to alleviate suffering. She is either subtly pushed away from endeavors unrelated to motherhood, or is denied altogether the right to choose what is better for her own life and for the whole society. Even if she has been socialized to become a truly self-sacrificing mother who devotes all of her life to her children without seeking anything in return, she may still suffer much due to her intense attachment to her children, particularly male ones, who are the sole purpose of her life as dictated by the patriarchal culture.¹⁶

The patriarchal expectation of all women being mothers also creates *dukkha* for the children thus begotten. “Driven by a desire for self-perpetuation,” Gross observes, “parents often try to produce carbon copies of themselves, rather than children who are allowed to find their own unique lifeways in the world. The suffering caused by such motivation to reproduction is frequently unnoticed and perpetuates itself from generation to generation.”¹⁷ When a woman’s value is predicated upon her ability to produce children, preferably male children, for the patrilineal family, she can easily fall into the behavioral pattern of being possessive of her male children and manipulative of her husband, for it is only through her husband and her male children that she can amass resources. And she may create much *dukkha* for her female children, too, demanding them to conform to the woman’s “nature” and be as self-sacrificing as she has been. In addition, when a woman who does not have the emotional capacity and social skills of a caregiver is forced into motherhood by societal pressures, her children might be neglected. And when a woman who, out of personal considerations, does not want to have children is forced into motherhood, a certain level of resentment might be unconsciously projected onto the children, leading to many forms of emotional violence, such as putting the children down when they achieve what she once wished to achieve, or being overcritical of the children because they represent an aspect of herself that she does not really want.

The blind social expectation of all women being mothers, moreover, is detrimental to the environment. Much of the environmental crisis results from the combination of excessive population growth and excessive consumption enabled by modern science.¹⁸ It is undeniable that, as environmental biologists Jack Trevors and Milton Saier state, human overpopulation is “the single most important driving force responsible for all of our environmental concerns.”¹⁹ Growing at 80 million people per year,²⁰ we human beings have come to a point where our overpopulation and overconsumption are not only ruining the environment and destroying other species, but also endangering our own future on the planet. As Gross analyzes, one can imagine three alternatives when it comes to the correlation between the ecosystem, consumption, and population: “a sufficiently small population living well on a stabile, self-renewing resource base; an excessive population living in degraded conditions on an insufficient resource base; or the present pyramid of a few people living well and large numbers of people barely surviving.”²¹ With the cessation of suffering, or at least the alleviation of suffering, as the central and unwavering goal of the Buddhadharma, Buddhists cannot morally opt for the second or third scenario above, due to the massive suffering those scenarios entail. Once we see the connection between overpopulation and the suffering in two-thirds of the world, “to continue to encourage or require everyone to reproduce their family lineage under current conditions is irresponsible.”²² To essentialize women as mothers, then, is also irresponsible.

It is particularly irresponsible to essentialize women as mothers in affluent industrialized countries where overconsumption is the norm, for it is a fact that a person in a rich country consumes and pollutes much more than a person in a poor or “developing” country. That is to say, every birth in a rich country is much more detrimental to the environment than a birth in a poor country.²³ Take carbon dioxide emission for example, according to the United Nations Development Programme’s report in 2007/2008, the 19 million people in the state of New York generate more carbon emissions

than the 766 million people living in the 50 least developed countries, and an average air-conditioner in Florida emits more CO₂ in a year than a person in Afghanistan or Cambodia in his/her whole lifetime.²⁴ Due to the increase of CO₂ emission, climate disasters such as severe tropical storms and floods, are clearly on the rise. Between 2000 and 2004, an average 326 climate disasters were reported each year, doubling the yearly average between 1980 and 1984. Around 262 million people were affected by such extreme weather events each year, with over 98 percent of them living in developing countries.²⁵ Over-reproduction and over-consumption in industrialized countries thus contribute greatly to environmental damage and to the human suffering in developing countries.

Over-reproduction in poor countries is detrimental to the poor people themselves,²⁶ particularly women and girls. Women are more likely to be affected by extreme weather events than men due to women's "limited access to resources, restricted rights, and a muted voice in shaping decisions."²⁷ Floods typically claim more women's lives than men's since women's mobility is more restricted and they are less likely to have been taught how to swim. When Bangladesh was hit by a cyclone and a flood in 1991, for example, the death rate of women was five times higher than that of men.²⁸ Moreover, when the poor affected by climate shocks have no alternative but to cut nutrition and pull children out of school, it is girls' nutrition that suffers the most and it is the girls that are pulled out of school.²⁹ Malnutrition and educational deprivation have long-term consequences and further lock the already disadvantaged females in poor health and poor earning potential.

The co-arising of overpopulation, consumption, pollution, environmental degradation, and human suffering is undeniable. Therefore, in order to preserve, or should I say salvage, our environment, we need to not only cut our consumption, but also reduce our population.³⁰ I want to make it clear here that I am *not* suggesting any forceful governmental control of population, such as the Chinese government's "one-child policy" in China proper and its forced sterilization in Tibet. Rather, I am arguing that, given the quintessential Buddhist perspective of interdependent co-arising, a Buddhist ecological discourse must include more careful reflection and deliberation about reproduction and parenthood. That means, on the individual level, motherhood should not be coerced or pressured by patriarchal societal expectations.³¹ It should not be entered into as if that is the *only* thing that females are born to do. To tackle with the problem of human destruction of Nature from the root, Buddhist teachers need to promote the idea that "only children who can be well cared for physically, emotionally, and spiritually, should be conceived."³² And the promotion of such a concept is hinged on de-essentializing women's role as mothers. Thus viewed, it is counterproductive for environmentalists, Buddhist or non-Buddhist, to continue employing the imagery of Mother Nature.

Buddhist environmentalist discourses so far have been strong in terms of advocating for life of simplicity, analyzing greed, critiquing over-consumption, urging universal responsibility, and offering structural analysis of "developmentalism."³³ It seems now, in light of the interconnection among gender essentialism, reproduction, over-population, and environmental degradation, Buddhist environmentalists need to stop employing an imagery that has an essentializing effect on women and practically pushes all women to be mothers. The imagery of Mother Nature is not necessarily helping the ecological cause, and it is definitely not helping in terms of alleviating suffering.

NOTES

¹ Lambert Schmithausen, "The Early Buddhist Tradition and Ecological Ethics," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 4 (1997): 15-16; Steven C. Rockefeller, "Buddhism, Global Ethics, and the Earth Charter," in *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds*, edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker and

Duncan Ryūen Williams (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 316-21; Malcolm David Eckel, "Is There a Buddhist Philosophy of Nature?" in *Buddhism and Ecology*, pp. 327-33; Sunyana Graef, "The Foundations of Ecology in Zen Buddhism," *Religious Education* 85:1 (Winter 1990): 42-50.

² Ian Harris, "Buddhism and the Discourse of Environmental Concern: Some Methodological Problems Considered," in *Buddhism and Ecology*, p. 378.

³ Alan Sponberg observes, "The different levels in the Buddhist cosmology, while indicating spiritually significant differences in awareness and consciousness, do not entail the theocentric and anthropocentric perspective and privilege so familiar in our own [Western] cultural tradition. They represent, rather, the range of progressively greater degrees of awareness and ethical sensibility available to all life-forms." Alan Sponberg, "Green Buddhism and the Hierarchy of Compassion," in *Buddhism and Ecology*, pp. 358-59. However, Lewis Lancaster suggests that there have been traces of anthropocentrism within early Indian Buddhism. See Lewis Lancaster, "Buddhism and Ecology: Collective Cultural Perceptions," in *Buddhism and Ecology*, pp. 10-11; also Schmithausen, "The Early Buddhist Tradition and Ecological Ethics," pp. 24-28. On the other hand, Rita Gross points out that the Buddhist concept of "precious human body," which may be misinterpreted to suggest anthropocentrism, is by no means due to human rights over other forms of life. Rather, it is due to "the human capacity for cultural and spiritual creativity leading to enlightenment." See Rita M. Gross, "Buddhist Resources for Issues of Population, Consumption, and the Environment," in *Buddhism and Ecology*, pp. 296-97; also Lambert Schmithausen, "Buddhism and the Ethics of Nature: Some Remarks," *Eastern Buddhist* 32:2 (2000): 45-46.

⁴ For examples, see Joanna Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self* (Berkeley, California: Parallax Press, 2007) and *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory: The Dharma of Natural Systems* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991); Ian Harris, "Buddhism," in *Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy*, ed. J. Baird Callicott and Robert Frodeman (Detroit, Michigan: Macmillan Reference USA, 2009), pp. 122, 124; David Landis Barnhill, "Relational Holism: Huayan Buddhism and Deep Ecology," in *Deep Ecology and World Religions: New Essays on Sacred Ground*, edited by David Landis Barnhill and Roger S. Gottlieb (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), pp. 83-91; Eckel, "Is There a Buddhist Philosophy of Nature?" pp. 342-44; Rita M. Gross, "Interdependence and Detachment: Toward a Buddhist Environmental Ethic," in *Soaring and Settling: Buddhist Perspectives on Contemporary Social and Religious Issues* (New York: Continuum, 1998), p. 79. See also Barbara Paterson's study of Daisaku Ikeda's philosophy concerning environment in "Ethics for Wildlife Conservation: Overcoming the Human-Nature Dualism," *BioScience* 56:2 (February 2006): 147-8. Alan Sponberg offers a very thoughtful critique of the over-emphasis on interrelatedness at the expense of Buddhist developmental practices. See Sponberg, "Green Buddhism and the Hierarchy of Compassion," pp. 364-74.

⁵ See, for examples, John Stanley, David R. Loy, and Gyurme Dorje, eds., *A Buddhist Response to the Climate Emergency* (Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 2009); Allan Hunt Badiner, ed., *Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology* (Berkeley, California: Parallax Press, 1990); and the Dharma teacher/scholar signatories on [http://www.ecobuddhism.org/index.php/350_target/350_target/signatories_main/signatories_teachers]

⁶ For examples, see Dalai Lama, “Universal Responsibility and the Climate Emergency,” in *A Buddhist Response to the Climate Emergency*, pp. 22-3; Gylawang Karmapa XVII, Orgyen Trinley Dorje, “Pure Aspiration, Bodhisattva Activity, and a Safe-Climate Future,” in *A Buddhist Response to the Climate Emergency*, p. 81; Thich Nhat Hanh, “The Eyes of the Elephant Queen” [http://www.ecobuddhism.org/wisdom/interviews/thich_nhat_hanh]; Thich Nhat Hanh, “The Bells of Mindfulness,” in *A Buddhist Response to the Climate Emergency*, p. 265; Shih Shengyan, “Ziran lunli (Environmental Ethics),” in *Xin liulun* (Six Ethics of the Mind) (Taipei, Taiwan: Dharma Drum Cultural Center, 2010), pp. 36-46; Khondung Gyana Vajra Rinpoche, “Dharma & Ecological Responsibility” [http://www.ecobuddhism.org/wisdom/interviews/khondung_gyana]; David Tetsuun Loy, “The Evolving God?” [http://www.ecobuddhism.org/wisdom/interviews/david_loy]; Wes Nisker, “The Evolution Sutra” [http://www.ecobuddhism.org/wisdom/interviews/wes_nisker]

⁷ Dalai Lama, “Universal Responsibility and the Climate Emergency,” p. 22.

⁸ Shengyan, “Ziran lunli (Environmental Ethics),” p. 45.

⁹ Dalai Lama, “Universal Responsibility and the Climate Emergency,” pp. 22-23.

¹⁰ For examples, see Ellen Cronan Rose, “The Good Mother: From Gaia to Gilead,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 12:1 (1991): 77-97; Karen J. Warren, “Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections,” *Environmental Ethics* 9 (Spring 1987): 3-21; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman/New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (New York: Seabury, 1975).

¹¹ In the early Buddhist literature, there were accounts of women being ridiculed by society until they bore sons. See Isaline Blew Horner, *Women Under Primitive Buddhism: Laywomen and Almswomen*, reprinted (Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975), pp. 4-5.

¹² *Heart Sutra. Taisho*, Vol. 8, Nos. 251-255.

¹³ Gross, “Buddhist Resources for Issues of Population, Consumption, and the Environment,” 301; Rita M. Gross, “Buddhist Values for Overcoming Pro-natalism and Consumerism,” in *Soaring and Settling*, p. 116.

¹⁴ Gross, “Interdependence and Detachment,” 80-1; Gross, “Buddhist Resources for Issues of Population, Consumption, and the Environment,” pp. 302, 304; Gross, “Buddhist Values for Overcoming Pro-natalism and Consumerism,” pp. 116-20.

¹⁵ Gross, “Buddhist Values for Overcoming Pro-natalism and Consumerism,” 109; Gross, “Buddhist Resources for Issues of Population, Consumption, and the Environment,” p. 293.

¹⁶ *The Sutra of the Son and His Five Mothers* is a text describing the suffering of a mother in pre-modern times when infant mortality rate was very high. *Taisho*, Vol. 14, No. 555b. The English translation can be found in Diana Y. Paul, *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in the Mahayana Tradition*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 68-70. From a Buddhist point of view, motherhood is necessarily filled with suffering due to the mother’s strong attachment to her children. See Paul, “The Mother,” in *Women in Buddhism*, pp. 60-67.

¹⁷ Gross, “Buddhist Resources for Issues of Population, Consumption, and the Environment,” p. 304.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

¹⁹ Jack T. Trevors and Milton H. Saier, Jr., “UN Climate Change Conference, Copenhagen 2009: Whatever Works?” *Water Air Soil Pollut* 207 (2010): 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1. In an earlier article Trevors put the number at 75 million people per year. See Jack T. Trevors, “Total Abuse of the Earth: Human Overpopulation and Climate Change,” *Water Air Soil Pollut* 205 (2010 Suppl 1): S113.

²¹ Gross, “Buddhist Resources for Issues of Population, Consumption, and the Environment,” p. 292. Gross further notes that “The tragedy of pronatalism is that although excessive populations could be cut quite quickly by voluntary means, lacking those, they probably will be cut by involuntary means involving great suffering—diseases, violence, and starvation.” *Ibid.*, p. 294; Gross, “Buddhist Values for Overcoming Pro-natalism and Consumerism,” 110; Gross, “Interdependence and Detachment,” p. 90.

²² Gross, “Buddhist Values for Overcoming Pro-natalism and Consumerism,” p. 118; Gross, “Buddhist Resources for Issues of Population, Consumption, and the Environment,” p. 304.

²³ Gross, “Interdependence and Detachment,” p. 82.

²⁴ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2007/2008: Fighting Climate Change: Human Solidarity in a Divided World*, pp. 43-44 [http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr_20072008_en_complete.pdf] See also Rebecca Todd Peters, *In Search of the Good Life: The Ethics of Globalization* (New York and London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 114-15.

²⁵ UNDP *Human Development Report 2007/2008*, pp. 25-31, 73-89.

²⁶ Gross, “Interdependence and Detachment,” p. 82.

²⁷ UNDP *Human Development Report 2007/2008*, pp. 81-82.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 81-2, 76-7.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

³⁰ Trevors and Saier “UN Climate Change Conference, Copenhagen 2009: Whatever Works?” in Lancaster, “Buddhism and Ecology,” pp. 12-3.

³¹ Gross, “Buddhist Resources for Issues of Population, Consumption, and the Environment,” p. 293.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 293; also Gross, “Buddhist Values for Overcoming Pro-natalism and Consumerism,” p. 109.

³³ For examples, see Stanley, Loy, and Gyurme Dorje, eds., *A Buddhist Response to the Climate Emergency*; Stephanie Kaza, ed., *Hooked!: Buddhist Writings on Greed, Desire, and the Urge to Consume* (Boston, Massachusetts: Shambhala, 2005); Sulak Sivaraksa, *Conflict, Culture, Change: Engaged Buddhism in a Globalized World* (Boston, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 2005); Allan Badiner, ed., *Dharma Gaia*.

The Mind of the Sentient Beings As the Ontological Grounds for Ecological Awareness

Nancy Feng-chu Cheng

Effective solutions to ecological problems are always based on a correct and usually deep understanding of environmental issues. In forming such an understanding, ecologists and environmentalists have found that they have no choice but to begin the task by re-examining the worldview that we have inherited from the western tradition of rationalism and scientism, due to their dominant influence over the way modern people deal with nature or environment. To counteract this false worldview, they suggest that building a new consciousness of the self is of critical importance because the self serves as the reference point that critically influences how we understand the world. From this point of view, ecological or environmental problems are interpreted as more ontological than epistemological in nature. Therefore, human consciousness is the central concern in a major ecological trend called radical ecology, because human consciousness has great potential to determine the future course of the earth, as well as affect the beings on it, in a profound way.

Radical ecology is radical in the sense that it does not interpret ecological problems as being the result of “improper” use of nature as a resource. Instead, for radical ecologists, that the most serious problem is that, in thousands of years of recorded history, people have never studied themselves, but have concentrated on studying the environment, taking for granted the idea that the outer environment should accommodate to human purposes. Based on ecologists’ important new insight, some specialists in radical ecology, such as ecopsychology and deep ecology, all seek to renew our knowledge of human consciousness by exploring the spiritual side of the self. In the following discussion, I will limit my discussion to deep ecology as an example to illustrate how the spiritual side of the self is explored in the study of ecological issues.

Arne Naess,¹ a Norwegian philosopher and the founder of deep ecology, claims that “self-realization” is the ultimate way to resolve the present ecological dilemma. He forcefully states that the source of ecological degradation is fundamentally a problematic conception of the relationship of the individual self with the ecocentric Self. As a result, the most important mission we have is to realize this ecocentric Self, which means that we need to incorporate the individual self into the ecocentric wholeness. In his “Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World,” Arne Naess summarizes his understanding of the nature of the self as: (1) each human being has the potential of broadening his or her egoistic self into the ecological Self; (2) this process of self-broadening is completed through identification, not only with the human society, but more importantly, with nature as a whole; and (3) the completion of this self-realization means a joyful co-existence of all beings, human and nonhuman.² Here Naess proposes a vision that is achieved through harmonious identification among beings. If all beings in the world can identify with and be incorporated into each other, then it will mean that certain shared characteristics must exist in all life forms. These communicable characteristics make it possible to imagine or, more exactly, to *empathize* with, an identity other than one’s own. Similarly, Bill Devall, also an active supporter of deep ecology, interprets the cosmological, ecological self as a being saying “I am a forest being.”³ Bill Devall’s ecological self is interpenetrated with a nonhuman being, echoing Aldo Leopold’s appeal to “thinking like a mountain.” However, it must be emphasized that this self is not impersonal but transpersonal. It is a transcendence of the egoistic self rather than a denial of human personality. With this mechanic of transcendence, the anthropocentric mindset is modified into a non-anthropocentric imagination, in which the center is shifted from the human world to the broader ecological system.

Deep ecology makes an important contribution in pointing out that each human's *being* is the pivotal issue. However, if we want to explore the nature of this self, including its structure, its transformation, and its usefulness in the real world, we will have to search for other resources, because there is no comprehensive discussion found in deep ecology regarding this self.⁴ To make this idea of an ecological self more concrete and practicable, the concept of the "mind of sentient beings" in the Yogacara school of Mahayana Buddhism provides a rich source.

The "mind of sentient beings" is a technical term applied in *The Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna*,⁵ an important source of Mahāyāna doctrines. According to this treatise, the mind of sentient beings should be understood as being made up of two mutually inclusive aspects: the aspect of the Absolute and the aspect of *samsāra*. The aspect of the Absolute denotes the ontological status of the mind, while the aspect of *samsāra* reveals its dynamic side in the form of changing phenomena. As a result, the mind of sentient beings, as Hakeda claims, is not the individual mental faculty nor the mind contrasted with matter. Rather, it symbolizes the metaphysical principle which reveals itself ontologically as the "aspect of the Absolute," which unites all interdependent phenomena in the world, which manifest themselves in the aspect of *samsāra*.⁶ On this view, the main mission of human life is to transcend the worldly aspect and incorporate the self into the universal or ontological principle known as the mind of the sentient beings.

Based on this understanding, Buddhism can be understood as a non-teleological religion that concerns itself with the art of being, rather than praising individual enlightened beings. As a result, the Buddha is not regarded as a deity who possesses any inherently superior qualities in comparison with other beings in the world; instead, the Buddha is interpreted as being "the universe itself."⁷ It is a universal consciousness which transcends any limited, individual perspective. Moreover, the author emphasizes the dimension of will in this universal principle by identifying it in the form of mind. It is believed that, in Buddhism, there is a will, individually and collectively, to cease all illusory sufferings and reach *nirvana*. In other words, there is an inherent tendency towards freedom in the human mind, which is known as Buddha nature.

To understand how this will is carried out, we need to examine the aspect of *samsāra*, the dynamic side of the mind of sentient beings. For Buddhists, the causes and conditions of sentient beings' existence in *samsāra* are unrelated to the outer environment, but instead are directly linked to the inner world:

That a man is in *samsāra* results from the fact that his mind (*manas*) and consciousness (*viñāṇa*) develop on the ground of the Storehouse Consciousness (*citta*). This means that because of [the unenlightened aspect of] the Storehouse Consciousness, he is said to be in possession of ignorance [and thus is bound up in *samsāra*].⁸

In the Yogacara school, consciousness is categorized as mind, consciousness, and storehouse consciousness (*alaya-viñāṇa*), denoting different functioning levels of phenomenal misperceptions.⁹ The misperception or wrong view of the real nature of human consciousness is due to ignorance, which is the cause of painful *samsāra*. Ignorance is a sort of false belief based on conceptualized logic of dualism, that is, the belief in the logic of a substantiated self and the logic of a substantiated world. These beliefs are constructed through perceptions and stored in the storehouse consciousness that continues life after life. This life-transcending continuity of dualism is described in *The Awakening of Faith* as the "beginningless defiled dharma. This kind of dualistic dharma contaminates the inherently pure mind. The Zen master D. T. Suzuki calls it as an "inability to know,"¹⁰ a loss of the ability to know that all beings are non-separable and interdependent through the mind of the sentient beings.

Fortunately, according to *The Awakening of Faith*, the *alaya-vijnāna* “is grounded on the inherently pure *Tathāgata-garbha*.”¹¹ In the storehouse of consciousness, there is the seed of enlightenment (*tathāgata-garbha*), in addition to countless memories, thoughts, and intentions. It is the pure *tathāgata-garbha* that grants an individual mind the ability to transcend its phenomenal self. Given its characteristics of harmonious co-existence with the *tathāgata-garbha* and *samsaric* perceptions, the *alaya-vijnāna* can be interpreted as full of potentiality and possibility for spiritual enlightenment, because it is where *nirvana* and *samsāra* interact. In other words, it is the locus for “awakening.” As a result, it is important to know that in the Yogacara school of the Mahāyāna tradition, the phenomenal illusions of the mind are not regarded as stains that need to be removed, but rather as the space in which the mind experiences suffering, learns from it, and finally transcends it.

When the mind conquers its phenomenal limitations and enters into the state of *nirvana* through diligent practice, three types of greatness are present. They are: (1) the “greatness” of the essence, for all phenomena are identical with Suchness and are neither increasing nor decreasing; (2) the “greatness” of the attributes, for the *tathāgata-garbha* is endowed with numberless excellent qualities; and (3) the “greatness” of the influences, for the influences [of Suchness] give rise to good causes and effects in this world and the next.¹² Through these three types of “greatness,” Buddha nature is realized as borderless in its being and its influence.

This borderless and omniscient Buddhahood is the bedrock of “spontaneous acts,” which are identified as benevolent acts that benefit all sentient beings. Ecologically speaking, the capacity for spontaneous action occurs when an individual gains the wisdom of the “mind of sentient beings” and brings an end to the discriminating consciousness of human/non-human. With this imagination of the ecological self, ethics gradually becomes less a duty than a natural outflow of spiritual commitment, which is profoundly meaningful for carrying out environmental ethics. As Arne Naess’ persuasive argument shows:

We need environmental ethics, but when people *feel* they unselfishly give up, even sacrifice, their interest *in order to* show love for nature, this is probably *in the long run* a treacherous basis for conservation. Through identification they may come to see their own interest served by conservation, through genuine self-love, love of a widened and deepened self (emphasis added).¹³

For Naess, environmental ethics should be anything but a duty that one forces upon oneself. If practiced deliberately solely due to moral pressure, environmental ethics may create more serious problems in the long run, even though it may be temporarily effective in solving environmental problems. We can say that concern for the environment should be based on psychological recognition rather than merely on moralistic dogmatism.¹⁴ Bill Devall agrees with Naess, proposing the concept of “ecological realism,” which suggests that we change our behavior “more simply with richer ends through encouragement.”¹⁵ “Moral duties” should only be mentioned occasionally. For him, the central idea of ecosophy is the alliance of ontological enlightenment and environmental ethics. In this respect, the Yogacara recognition of the spiritual and ethical potential in the “mind of sentient beings” provides the needed ontological grounds for inspiring a spiritual commitment to environmental responsibility, which is absolutely the most fundamental form of ecological awareness.

NOTES

¹ As one of the most important figures of deep ecology, Arne Naess has been influenced by many different people and philosophies, especially Gandhi, Spinoza and Buddhism. Therefore, there is a strong reason to believe that the philosophy of self-realization in Buddhism and deep ecology are cross-referential. For a detailed discussion, please refer to Deane Curtin's "A State of Mind Like Water: Ecosophy T and the Buddhist Traditions," *Beneath the Surface: Critical Essays in the Philosophy of Deep Ecology*, ed. Eric Katz, Andrew Light, and David Rothenberg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), pp. 253-54.

² See Arne Naess, "Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World," *The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology*, ed. Alan Drengson and Yuichi Inoue (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1995), pp. 13-14.

³ Bill Devall, "The Ecological Self," *The Deep Ecology Movement*, op cit, p. 104.

⁴ Lack of concrete argumentation is the weakness of deep ecology. This weakness makes it difficult to persuade people of its potential to effect a collective change. For example, in *Agency, Democracy, and Nature: The U.S. Environmental Movement from a Critical Theory Perspective* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), Robert J. Brulle argues that this kind of ecosophy has little impact on the political and social dimensions (p. 206). The main reason is that deep ecology focuses on influencing the individual self without extending its influence to the collective consciousness. It seems that deep ecologists are not that interested in social reform. Taylor thus argues that deep ecology seems reluctant to extend its concern to the human sphere, vacillating "between overtly hostility toward the human community in general and a vague appeal to the extension of the human community to the broader natural world" (quoted in Brulle, p. 206).

⁵ Unless otherwise specified, all quotations are from Yoshito S. Hakeda, trans., *The Awakening of the Mahāyāna, Attributed to Aśvaghoṣa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967). For a smooth reading, the book title will be shortened to *The Awakening of Faith* hereafter in this essay.

⁶ See *The Awakening of Faith*, p. 29.

⁷ Akira Sadakata, *Buddhist Cosmology: Philosophy and Origins* (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing, 1997), p. 127.

⁸ *The Awakening of Faith*, p. 46-47.

⁹ According to Hakeda and Suzuki, *citta*, *manas*, and *vijñāna* are synonymous to a certain extent. Hakeda further points out that it was not until the Yogacara School of Buddhism that the concept of "mind" was developed into the five perceptions (five *cittas*), the ego-conscious mind (*mano-vijñāna*), and the Storehouse Consciousness (*Alaya-vijñāna*). See Hakeda, p. 47; and D. T. Suzuki, trans., *Aśvaghoṣa's Discourse in the Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna* (Chicago: The Open Court, 1967), p. 75.

¹⁰ D. T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism: First Series* (New York: Grove Press, 1949), p. 133.

¹¹ *Awakening of Faith*, p. 36. In D. T. Suzuki's translation of *The Awakening of Faith*, he clarifies the meaning of *alaya-vijñana* in his commentary. According to his studies, the term *alaya-vijñana* can be translated by at least two Chinese terms: *wu mo shih* (the not-disappearing mind, in the sense that it continues after death) and *tsang shih* (the mind that hoards or preserves in the sense that it preserves the seed for enlightenment). The seed of enlightenment is the *tathāgata-garbha*.

¹² See *The Awakening of Faith*, pp. 29-30.

¹³ Naess, “Self-Realization,” p. 17.

¹⁴ Alan Drengson and Yuichi Inoue, eds., *The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1995), p. xxii.

¹⁵ Devall, “The Ecological Self,” p. 106.

Compassion towards Mother Earth: “The Earth Does Not Belong to Human Begins, Human Beings Belong to the Earth”

Bhiksuni Chuehmen

Most people know what compassion is and most also practice compassion. Seeing people in distress, suffering hardship in living or sickness, many feel sympathy and sorrow for them and would like to help in one way or another. This is particularly the case when the media has been broadcasting any world disaster, a large number of people would respond enthusiastically wanting to help and donate generously. But the question is: how many have the in depth understanding and perseverance required? For example, when parents are over-tolerant and pamper their children, giving them too much – is this compassion? A few months ago, when the newly appointed Justice Minister of Taiwan simultaneously sentenced five people to death for extremely serious crimes to death, there was a huge outcry from some human rights groups in the West, raising questions about compassion and the criminal justice system. Compassion and wisdom need to be balanced, as do the sufferings of sentient and insentient beings.

In this paper, I want to delve into the many forms of compassion that we come across in our daily lives. However, after the March 11 Japan earthquake and tsunami, I feel that focusing on compassion towards nature is also important. In recent years, global warming has become more apparent and natural disasters, resulting in massive destruction, are occurring one after another in different parts of the planet as a result of our collective karmic actions towards Mother Earth. The November 2007 report of the IPCC (the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) clearly states that most of the global warming over last 50 years has been due to human influences. Human beings claim to be the most intelligent of all sentient beings. Regrettably, human beings are also the creators of these global destructive factors.

Now facing a destroyed natural environment, an unbalanced ecological system, and a wounded planet, how can humanity not be compassionate in its actions to save the Earth? Our land, mountains, rivers, forests, meadows, and our social environment all play a very important part in our survival and for the survival of future generations. In this paper I wish to urge that we show more concern and compassion in our actions toward the insentient aspects of our planet, because we are responsible for the wounds of the Earth.

Compassion in Buddhism

Compassion is a term that comes to mind whenever Buddhism is mentioned. H.H. Dalai Lama says, “If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion. These things are very useful in our daily life, and also for the whole of human society.” The founder of the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order and Buddha’s Light International Association, Venerable Master Hsing Yun gives some similes of compassion: “Compassion is like a Mani pearl that clears our vision, shines through illusions, turns complexity into simplicity, and transforms chaos into peace.... Compassion brings hope to our future in this world.... Compassion is an endless source of energy that puts life into all beings in this world. It is what makes life worth living....”¹

Reading the thoughts on compassion by these two great Buddhist leaders, we easily understand that, broadly speaking, the Buddhist perspective of compassion is more than just giving to the poor or providing social welfare to the unemployed or inspiration to help those who are suffering; it is also

exhibited in the form of wisdom and integrity in everything. For human beings to exist on earth, we need the land to support us. We also need sunlight, air, and water in order to survive. Human survival is inseparable from the four elements: earth, water, fire, and wind. All living beings are interrelated through dependent arising. We live interdependently with people and other beings, sentient and insentient, as one family. The sun, moon, and stars in the sky shed their rays on all without distinction. The mountains and ravines, high and low, in endless succession, all rare and strange creatures, regardless of species, complement each other. The Buddhist law of dependant arising tells us that everything in the world depends on causes and conditions to exist. The universe is an integrated, coexistent system. All living beings possess the potential for awakening.

In Mahayana Buddhism, when the Buddha attained enlightenment under the *bodhi* tree, he proclaimed the potential to attain Buddhahood.² The Buddhist doctrine of equality views all beings as equals, advocating that not only do humans and animals deserve love and care, but also that mountains, rivers, and the great earth need to be protected. In the *Sutra of Sadaparibhuta Bodhisattva*,³ this bodhisattva would not indiscriminately dispose of waste, because he did not want to pollute the land. He spoke every word with caution, so as not to frighten the land. He took every step carefully, fearful of hurting the land. Sadaparibhuta Bodhisattva's sense of environmentalism is shown through his compassion to care for everything.

Buddhism not only emphasizes treating human beings with compassion, but it also teaches us to cultivate compassion towards the great land and vast ocean. The precept of no killing, in its broadest definition, also means no deforestation; no stealing also means no unlawful logging.

The Earth is Covered with Wounds

Science and technology have provided satisfaction for the human need to know, but the excessive demands of science and technology have resulted in the extreme exploitation of natural resources, resulting in the eventual destruction of the earth itself. Throughout history, humanity has been faced with natural disasters, but now the situation is critical. Earthquakes, tsunamis, flooding, droughts, hurricanes, forest fires, severe storms, and landslides are occurring too often. Glaciers and permafrost are melting, devastating droughts and flooding strike humanity and ecosystems. These events signify that the Earth is covered with wounds and weeping: "I am seriously ill!"

In earlier times, humans cut down trees for shelter or to cook food for their survival, but today unlawful and excessive logging has become a socio-political and commercial issue, as a result of excessive consumerism. "Forests once covered half of the Earth's landmass. Now they cover less than one tenth. When trees are cut down and burned, that carbon is released as carbon dioxide. Stripped of its tree cover, the soil leaks CO₂ and sometimes methane, which is many times more potent. Deforestation is a double blow to the climate, which loses a carbon sink and gains nothing but more greenhouse gases."⁴

The emission of carbon dioxide and methane that results from human activities – namely, home appliances, air-conditioners, industry, transportation, agricultural gases, and power stations – is another cause of global warming. Last summer (2010), the heat and severe drought in Russia triggered about 550 separate wildfires. Consequently, carbon monoxide levels were two to three times higher than the level considered healthy. According to the Moscow Health Department, heat stroke and complications from poor air quality caused the number of deaths per day to increase from about 360 per day to about 700 per day. A satellite image released by NASA showed large swaths of the region surrounding and south of Moscow to experience land surface temperatures that were up to 12C degrees higher than average temperatures for the same dates from 2000 to 2008.

Overfishing leads to an overall degradation of ocean life. About 90 percent of large predatory fish are already gone, which results in two serious problems. First, we are losing species as well as entire ecosystems, resulting in overall stresses to the ecological unity of our oceans, which are now in danger of collapse. Second, we are at a risk of losing valuable food sources that many people depend upon for social, economical or dietary reasons.⁵

These are just a few of the environment problems humanity faces today. The 2012 apocalypse prophecy foretells the end of the world. Will this really happen? According to Buddhism, living beings go through cycles of birth, old age, sickness, and death. Thoughts in the mind go through the process of arising, existing, changing, and extinction. The weather passes through spring, summer, autumn, and winter, while the world experiences the stages of formation, existence, decay, and extinction. It is certain that there will be an end to the world in times to come. But according to the Buddhist perspective of time, “the age of the end of the Dharma” is still many thousands of years away. There may be disasters due to earth, water, fire and wind, but as long as we cultivate the right conditions, love and cherish our blessings, accumulate merits and virtue, and look after the earth, then we can prolong the earth’s survival. The future of the earth still depends on human behavior, as does everything in the world, due to the law of cause and effect.

We Are Responsible

A Native American named Chief Seattle spoke these words in 1853, when the United States Government inquired about buying tribal lands for new settlers:

Will you teach your children what we have taught our children? That the earth is our mother? What befalls the earth befalls all the sons of the earth. This we know: the earth does not belong to [human beings], [human beings] belong to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does it to himself.

Such an environmental ethic seems unfamiliar today. Most of the global warming over the last 50 years is due to human influences.

Now we realize that the Earth is covered with wounds. Thus, it is urgent that humanity wake up. The earth we live on is a universe of its own within the vastness of space. Everything in this world has life. We should not only cherish our own life, but also cherish the lives of others, sentient and insentient. We must love and cherish the causes and conditions of our existence, and “be one” and “coexist” with all things. Some may doubt this, saying “We can’t do much” or feel that they are helpless to prevent massive destruction caused by the indiscriminate dumping of toxic, biomedical waste materials and the production of nuclear power. This may be correct, but we are still indirectly involved in this production. There exists a conflict between environmental preservation and human demands for a more luxurious material lifestyle. Most people still see physical comfort as their priority, which leads to an endless pursuit for more and more material things: improved living conditions (freezers, air conditioning⁶), easier transportation (some families with many vehicles at the same house), and excessive consumption to satisfy senses (eating too much meat and fish, luxurious lifestyles, indiscriminate waste, and so on). Therefore, the question is not how much we can do, but, most importantly, whether we have the heart to cut down our own materialism.

Changing Our Attitudes and Lifestyles

Humanity's greed and negligence are directly and indirectly affecting the whole environment. To save our Mother Earth requires everyone to become self-aware and practice a broader definition of compassion. We need to change our attitudes and lifestyles and, in meeting our physical needs, practice intelligent consumption, moderation, and contentment. The value of life lies in compassion and loving-kindness, while the meaning of life is to cherish. If we cherish and take good care of things, their usable lifespan becomes longer. We need to take responsibility for the future of our global village and the living conditions of coming generations. In daily life, there are still many things we can do with minimal effort. For example, instead of using disposable paper plates and plastic utensils, we can use reusable ones. We can use our own shopping bags; recycle paper, aluminum cans, and plastic bottles; promote tree planting and conserve resources, including electricity and water.

Due to humanity's excessive materialistic cravings, negligence, and neglect of environmental preservation, the law of nature has been violated. If we are moderate and contented with living simply, love and cherish our blessings, and cherish our conditions, possessions, and lives, we will be in a better position to save the Earth. We all have a responsibility to contribute to environmental preservation. In March 1992 during the annual Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA) General Conference, a motion was passed to promote "environmental and spiritual preservation." Over the years, BLIA members and monastics from Fo Guang Shan have been engaged in planting millions of trees.⁷ Residents of Fo Guang Shan's principal monastery in Dashu (near Kaohsiung) and its branches have also been promoting recycling as part of their daily life. One of Fo Guang Shan's branch temples is known as the "Environmental Temple," because supporters and volunteers raised funds to construct the temple by collecting refuse materials and recycling them. Trash is not necessarily bad. Recycled trash can create a new life.

Preserve the Land for All Children and Love It

All living beings depend on the earth to survive and the Earth is the home of humanity. The earth protects our lives and supplies us with resources for survival. Without the earth, where would humanity and all living beings live? Thus, when the earth is facing devastation, we as "masters" of the myriad creations on this earth must be the first to protect the environment by caring for wildlife and nature, not killing carelessly; practicing effective conservation, planting trees, preventing excessive deforestation, protecting water resources, disposing of waste properly, using things sparingly, and recycling goods.

As Chief Seattle once said, "As we are part of the land, you too are part of the land. This earth is precious to us. It is also precious to you. One thing we know: there is only one God. No man, be he Red Man or White Man, can be apart. We are brothers after all."

At this Buddhist conference, let us, as spiritual women, inform and inspire others in environmental and spiritual preservation, "To cherish what we have to eat and wear, not because it is our wealth, but because it is our blessings."⁸

NOTES

1. *The Buddhist Perspective of Compassion*, by Venerable Master Hsing Yun

2. "Everything on earth possesses Buddha nature" and "sentient and non-sentient beings are integrated with wisdom."

3. Taisho Canon Vol. 3, No. 174.
4. Extracted from the Allianz Knowledge website.
5. Over-fishing – a global disaster website – Pepijn Koster.
6. Green-house gas emissions by air-conditioning and freezers, carbon dioxide emitted by vehicles have been the main causes of global warming.
7. The UN has declared 2011 the International Year of Forests to better protect the planet's lungs. Forests regulate the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the climate that shapes our lives. Forests also provide more than one in six humans with a living as part of a 270 billion dollar-a-year industry. By protecting trees we also protect ourselves. (Allianz Knowledge website)
8. *Environmental and Spiritual Preservation*, by Venerable Master Hsing Yun.

Susan Su-chen Wu

Some of the recent academic scholars in the ecology and environmentalism have noted the importance of religious worldviews in shaping human attitudes toward the environment. In David Orton's comments, "religious beliefs help shape how various cultures impact their environments. Therefore an important part of any deeper ecological work is trying to understand how the various religions relate to the natural world, the place of humankind within it, and how to ecologically engage with this."¹ Given the challenges of the environmental problems, I assert that Buddhism is the foundational model of a religious world-view for resolving the root of the global ecological crisis. It provides a definite way of perceiving the relationships between self and the world and between men and nature. I felt the need for a more positive account of the interrelated character of reality in the light of the function of consciousness working, and to study its effect on environmental problems.

In Buddhist teachings, the working of consciousness points to a radically different way of experiencing reality that affects deeply how we related to the world. It may offer a critical perspective in support of its ecological significance. As Brian Brown has commented, "Mahayana Buddhism is revealed as a religious tradition asserting that human consciousness is of paramount importance to the self-reflective whole."²

The *Lankavatara Sutra*, one of the earliest and most influential texts of Mahayana Buddhism, is famous for its doctrine of the primacy of consciousness,³ also known as the doctrine of Consciousness-only school.⁴ According to tradition, these are the actual words of the Buddha as he entered Sri Lanka, formerly called Ceylon.⁵ Consciousness-only means that all phenomenal existence is fabricated by consciousness. All objects in the external world are just "representations" in our consciousness. No external objects exist in reality, only "mind-only" (*cittamatra*).⁶ The *Lankavatara Sutra* gave definitive teachings to earlier Mahayanist concepts such as the five *dharmas*, the three types of being (*svabhava*), the *alaya* consciousness, *tathagata-garbha* (the potential for perfect awakening), and self-realization (*pratyatmaryajnanagocara*), or inner perception.

The Deep Ecology movement is an ongoing program to affect the social order in a way consonant with its worldview. Considered the spiritual dimension of the environmental movement, Deep Ecology calls for the development of an ecological consciousness. By helping to change human consciousness away from human-centeredness, this movement stresses the interconnectedness of all things on Earth and in the rest of the universe. It suggests that people shift their approach away from an anthropocentric perspective to an eco-centric perspective, in view of critical environmental issues.

Self-realization (*pratyatmaryajnanagocara*), the central theme of the *Lankavatara Sutra*, refers to attaining insight into one's inmost consciousness. Deep Ecologists also claim that all living beings have the potential for self-realization. The central spirit of self-realization in the *Lankavatara Sutra* and Deep Ecology overlap to a great degree. My paper investigates the ecological spirit of self-realization as taught in the *Lankavatara Sutra* and Deep Ecology. Here I want to retrieve the ecological wisdom of the *Lankavatara Sutra* and Deep Ecology as a response to ecological issues, since the state of self-realization in both, to an extent, can show a path to an ecological worldview through developing ecological awareness. I hope to provide the general public with a fresh perspective on the nature of self, mind, and our relationships and interactions in the world. Figuring

prominently in the development of Zen Buddhism, the *Lankavatara Sutra* was translated from Sanskrit into Japanese by the foremost exponent of Zen, Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki. Moreover, he translated this *sutra* into English, based on the Sanskrit text. This text is the focus of my dissertation research.

In the *Lankavatara Sutra*, whether or not a person reaches the state of self-realization or not depends primarily on the functioning of the eight types of consciousness, a uniquely Yogacara formulation. The eight types of consciousness are the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mental consciousnesses, *klistamanas*, and *alayavijnana*. This theory of eight consciousnesses attempts to explain all the phenomena of cyclic existence.⁷ Self-realization is made possible by the presence of the *tathagata-garbha* in every sentient being. *Garbha* literally means “womb” or “something hidden within;” it is the seed of awakening from which fully-enlightened beings evolve. In the *Lankavatara Sutra* (p. 60), the Buddha explains perfect knowledge to Mahamati, saying, “It is realised when one casts aside the discriminating notions of form, name, reality, and character; it is the inner realisation by noble wisdom. This perfect knowledge, Mahamati, is the essence of the *tathagata-garbha*.”

This *sutra* and the *tathagata-garbha* concept are based on the principle of interdependent arising, a basic Buddhist concept meaning that every effect is produced by a cause and therefore there is never a first or “original cause.” The *sutra* further says that “all things” are “un-born.” The seed of Buddhahood is neither eternal nor transient, neither made nor not-made, and neither describable nor indescribable. It is beyond all measure and cannot be categorized. This view stresses that ultimate truth transcends the relative categories of being and non-being:

Mahamati, according to the teaching of the Tathagatas of the past, present, and future, all things are unborn. Why? Because they have no reality, being manifestations of Mind itself, and, Mahamati, as they are not born of being and non-being, they are unborn. Mahamati, all things are like the horns of the hare, horse, donkey, or camel, but the ignorant and simple-minded who are given to their false and erroneous imaginations, discriminate things where they are not; therefore, all things are unborn.⁸

The “unborn” view of things argues that nothing has ever been brought into existence through causal relations. Dependent arising is viewed as synonymous with the idea of the “unborn,” a basic Buddhist concept that is a characteristic view of the *Lankavatara Sutra*. The concept of *tathagata-garbha*, or Buddha nature, expresses the idea that things are “unborn” and have the potential to reach Buddhahood. Everything in the universe is inherently unborn because everything is dependent on causes and conditions. When one understands the essence of “unborn,” then one will recognize the equality and sameness of all phenomena. In this state, one will be freed from desire and from notions of the dualities of self and other, and existence and non-existence. It is here that non-discriminative knowledge is achieved and non-duality penetrated.

The *tathagata-garbha* doctrine in the *Lankavatara Sutra* also interpreted as an expression of the concept of *pratityasamutpada*, the doctrine of interdependent arising. In the realm of ultimate truth in the *Lankavatara Sutra*, the pure *alayavijnana*, which is equated with *tathagata-garbha*, plays a critical role in its ontology. In the *Lankavatara Sutra*, the *tathagata-garbha* is free from wrong judgments and efforts at discrimination that stir up all kinds of defilements. When liberated from the defilements of ignorance that conceal it, *tathagata-garbha* becomes manifest as the cosmic body of the Buddha (Dharmakaya), also known as the innately pure mind, a religiously conceived notion. Sentient beings seek to perfect their consciousnesses as that totality, in and through the human mind. This journey is made up of progressive insights of the human mind into the nature of reality. The path to

enlightenment for sentient beings is known as moving from embryonic self-awareness (*tathagata-garbha*) to perfect self-awareness. The implication of this identification of the *tathagata-garbha* as Dharmakaya is critical for articulating the cosmology of the *Lankavatara Sutra*. By purifying the *alayavijnana* and realizing the *tathagata-garbha* that is inherent in human consciousness, beings awaken to the true reality of the relativity of all things. They become free of the discriminations of the world of relative truth. With the noble wisdom of non-discrimination, enlightened beings enter into the realm of ultimate truth, comprehending the teachings of *tathagata-garbha*, with the doctrines of the “unborn” nature of things and the non-duality of sentient beings embodied in principles of interdependent arising.

Realizing the *tathagata-garbha* helps sentient beings reach the state of self-realization. In this sense, the state of self-realization means “knowledge of non-judgment or non-discrimination, a kind of direct perception or the knowledge of thusness or suchness (*tathatajnana*).”⁹ When discriminations based on dualistic thinking cease through realization, this realization is effected by the cultivation of noble wisdom. “The ego (*atma*) characterised with purity is the state of self-realisation; this is the Tathagata's womb (*garbha*) which does not belong to the realm of the theorists.”¹⁰ The realm of self-realization described in the teachings of this *sutra* requires an internal transformation of consciousness, by which defilements are utterly eradicated and merit and wisdom are brought to perfection. The realm of ultimate truth displayed in the *Lankavatara Sutra* displays the concept of ecological interdependence. The realm of this truth is presented as non-dual, interrelated, and interdependent. By this realization, one recognizes that all phenomena are embedded in and supported by a network of relationships – to the human community, to animals and plants, to the world. The central spirit of self-realization in the *Lankavatara Sutra* guides the path to an ecological worldview through the transformation of ecological consciousness. If people achieve self-realization through the awareness and transformation of ecological consciousness in this way, then they will respond to environmental issues with different perceptions. It is clear that developing the mind, to which the *Lankavatara Sutra* repeatedly refers, is essential for developing a wise and healthy perception of and moral vision regarding the natural environment.

Deep Ecologists claim that all living beings have the potential for self-realization. In Stephan Harding's view, the ultimate norm of Arne Naess' ecosophy is precisely self-realization. In an interview, when asked to explain self-realization in his arguments, Arne Naess said, “It is the realization of the deeper and broader self. It is identification with or seeing something of yourself in others.... Your feelings are somehow adapted to the others with whom you identify. . . It can extend to the whole of humanity.... You can identify yourself with pets, with other animals, with plants and other natural elements. Through identification with others you find self-realization. The term includes personal and community self-realization.”¹¹

The term “deep” is significant. It suggests an attitude of “deep” questioning of human beings' consciousness and beliefs. In Deep Ecology, gestalt ontology is presented. The term “*gestalt*” means looking at the interrelated whole. In Arne Naess's interpretation, “We need a gestalt ontology, to get rid of subject, object and something in between, the ‘me-it’ relationship.... To see the whole set. All is one.” This perspective of *gestalt* is known as the idea of holism, a view of interrelatedness in the world. In Rothenberg's eyes, Deep Ecology is viewed as an entirely new philosophy, a new horizon, a direction for progress in ontology, a poetic way of being in the world.”¹² With the understanding of *gestalt* ontology, Deep Ecologists believe that people will reach a state of self-realization. Naess claims that self-realization (“selfv-realising” in Norwegian) is a continuing process of recognizing that the self is not limited to the person, but extends to all the intermeshed processes in the world within which our minds and bodies live.” Self-realization in

Naess sense means broadening and deepening our sense of self beyond the narrow ego to identify with all living beings. The self to be realized for humans is not the ego self, but the larger ecological Self. This self/Self distinction has affinities with Mahayana Buddhism, wherein “self-realization” is an expansion of personal consciousness to include the well-being of all beings on Earth. “Self-realization” for humans, he says, can be achieved in a variety of ways. His own approach is to extend his sense of identification to a larger sense of Self. By developing this wider identification with the rest of things in nature, one can cultivate greater compassion for non-human beings and thus realize their true potential. This explains how people can expand and identify the Ecological Self and reach the state of Self-realization raised by Naess. By a new explanation and expansion of the Self concept, human beings will make themselves aware of their own self-imposed limitations, based on their epistemological standpoints, and hopefully to stimulate self-reflection about their relationship with the natural world and the meaning of their existence.

Through this “Self-realization” presented both in the *Lankavatara Sutra* and Deep Ecology, one recognizes that each living being is embedded in and supported by a network of relationships – in relation to the human community, animals, plants, and the world. If people achieve self-realization through awareness and a transformation of ecological consciousness in this way, they will respond to environmental issues through a different lens.

NOTES

¹ See David Orton, “Reflections on Buddhism and Deep Ecology.”
[<http://home.ca.inter.net/~greenweb/DE-Buddhism.html>]

² Brown, “*Toward a Buddhist Ecological Cosmology*.”
[<http://www.nembutsu.info/brown01.htm>] Accessed March 28, 2007.

³ Taken from Peter Della Santina’s *The Tree of Enlightenment*, Taiwan: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 1997, pp. 149-155.

⁴ Edward Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1973), p. 164.

⁵ *Lankavatara Sutra*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lankavatara_Sutra]

⁶ M. Alan Kazlev, “The Vijnanvada Conception Of “Consciousness-Only.”
[<http://www.kheper.net/topics/Buddhism/consciousness.htm>]

⁷ Taken from Peter Della Santina, *The Tree of Enlightenment* (Taiwan: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 1997), pp. 149-55.

⁸ *Lankavatara Sutra*, op cit, pp. 55-56.

⁹ Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra* (London: Routledge, 1930), p. 106.

¹⁰ *Lankavatara Sutra*, p. 282.

¹¹ From *Self-realization and Society*, an interview by Arne Naess and Helna Norberg-Hodge. Arne Naess, Professor Emeritus at the University of Oslo, is the author of *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*.

¹² David Orton, "Reflections on Buddhism and Deep Ecology."
[<http://home.ca.inter.net/~greenweb/DE-Buddhism.html>]

Animal Release in Taiwanese Buddhism: When Buddhist Ethics, Animals, and Ecology Meet

Chialuen Chen

The outcomes of animal release involve issues of religion, ecology and environment, animal rights, and policies. For many Buddhists, animal release is not only a religious practice, but also a means to alleviate personal afflictions. The practice of animal release has been quite popular in the history of Chinese Buddhism. In the sixth century CE, Emperor Liang Yuandi (552-555) started to build pavilions for releasing animals. Later, Emperor Tang Suzong set up 81 release pools across the country. With this official support, animal release was once a flourishing Buddhist movement. Since the Sung Dynasty, many well-known Buddhist masters have promoted animal release, e.g., Yongming-yansho, Cyun-zuensh, and Yunqi-zhuhong).¹ Many Buddhists believe that releasing animals can help neutralize *karma*, heal illness, collect merit, and prolong life. This is why traditional animal release practice has continued to the present day in almost every Buddhist tradition.

During the last two decades, large-scale planned animal release events have become flourishing religious activities in Taiwan. However, the ecological impact and enormous animal casualty rates that result from frequent animal release events have drawn the attention of environmentalists, animal rights activists, scholars, and the government. They claim that these large-scale animal release events not only result in casualties among animals, but are also harmful to the environment. In the media, they often report the serious side effects of animal release and request people to stop releasing animals. According to their investigations, more than 750 animal release events are held every year, that is, about 2.1 events per day. The cost of releasing about 70 million animals each year is estimated to be USD70 million. The China Preserve Life Association (CPLA), a large, well-known release group, documented that 57 kinds of fresh water and marine animals (19,020,888 in total) and 18 other species (256,326 in total) had been released from 2004 to 2008. From January to November 2009, released animals included 50 kinds of fresh water and marine animals (20,181,290 in total) and 17 other species (1,064,648 in total). Hence, animal release has led to a thriving commercialization that has attracted a great deal of criticism.

Ecological concern in Taiwan has grown in recent decades. Many Buddhist groups have stopped practicing animal release because of controversial outcomes. The surveys estimate that only between one-fourth and one-fifth of religious groups currently practice animal release. Tibetan Buddhist groups and Pure Land groups are more inclined to practice animal release than other groups.² Taiwanese Buddhist groups have diverse viewpoints and reactions to animal release and its religious and ecological consequences. This paper attempts to clarify the reasons why certain Taiwanese Buddhist groups practice planned animal release and others do not. How do releasers justify the casualties among released animals? How do releasers respond to the contradictions between religion and ecology, animal release and social critiques? Buddhism is regarded by philosophers as a “green” religion, but the consequences of planned animal release events often contradict the values and concerns of ecology. Animal release is a key point for exploring the compatibility between Buddhism and ecology. Most of the data for this paper was collected in semi-structured interviews with abbots and representatives of Buddhist groups. From January to April, 2006, I interviewed members of 27 groups, among which 16 groups practice animal release and 11 groups do not. My questions included whether they participate in animal release events or not, why they do or do not conduct these events, and how they evaluate specific ideas related to religion, animal risk, and its ecological impact.

Generally, there are two kinds of animal release. Animal release by chance is when one saves

animals from capture or imminent death in an unexpectedly situation. In principle, no Buddhist would be against this kind of animal release. What is controversial is planned animal release, which is usually practiced in a ceremony on a large scale, collectively and periodically. There are various forms of planned animal release, however. Some are conducted as an independent events, some follow traditional rites, some sending animals to shelters, and some are conducted overseas (Chen 2010: 111-117).

The forms of planned animal release reflect specific responses to animal risk, ecological impact, and social criticism. For example, for the purpose of avoiding negative consequences of traditional planned animal release, people only donate the money to their masters. The entrusted master personally manages the details and process of release and transfer all the merits to donors afterward. Usually, these masters buy sea animals from fish men when their boats come into the harbor, pays for the fish, and also pays the fees for sailing back to sea to release the fish from the boat. However, because people do not feel personally involved, this form of animal release is much less common than traditional, planned animal release.

Some Buddhist groups also conduct animal release events in other countries, such as Tibet, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, China, the U.S., and Canada. Oversea animal release event not only to avoid inspection and criticism, but are also an efficient strategy to recruit new members in the local area. In one case, when members of Ling Jiao Mountain Buddhist Society attended an international Buddhist conference in Sri Lanka in 2005, they learned that animal release in Sri Lanka involved buying cows destined for the slaughterhouse and donated money to a monastery to arrange such a release.

Animal release events may be held independently or followed by traditional Buddhist rites, for example, a seven-day recitation of the Buddha's name retreat, the Medicine Buddha rite, the Land and Water rite, and celebration days of the Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*. Because of their great numbers and frequency, these forms of animal release are blamed as the main sources of risking animals' lives and damaging the environment.

Reasons for Animal Release

The rationale for animal release is based on Buddhist views of life. I summarize the reasons and motivations for animal release in three types: a means to purify bad karma and collect merit, a practice motivated by compassion, and a technique to cultivate compassion. These three types are not absolutely exclusive, although the religious meanings among them differ. Further, there is not consensus among Taiwanese Buddhists about these reasons.

Buddhists hold that everyone has accumulated *karma* from previous lives. It is important to purify bad karma and collect merits to improve this and future lives. Among proponents, animal release is considered an efficient and necessary way to address these needs. Opponents respond by refuting the logic of these claims.

Those who explain that animal release is motivated by compassion and altruism point out that these are fundamental principles of Buddhist ethics. Since all sentient beings have been our parents, brothers, and sisters, it is wholesome to wish to relieve their suffering and prevent them from being slaughtered. Again, opponents raise specific arguments to counter these claims.

Others who support animal release claim that the practice is a means to cultivate compassion, develop a peaceful mind, and express respect for life. Opponents argue that there are other means to cultivate compassion, such as promoting vegetarianism, supporting animal rights legislation, caring for homeless dogs, and preserving wild animals.

Buddhism.

Paradoxes of Animal Release

Animal release involves numerous risks to animals before release, during the transport, during the ritual, and after release; the animals may even pose a threat to other animals where they are released. Planned animal therefore generates two paradoxes. The first paradox is that, whereas the purpose of animal release should be saving animals' lives, it may cause casualties among the animals. The second paradox is the question of whether or not animal release is a good way to collect merit. Do releasers commit the *karma* of killing while conducting animal releases? If so, is animal release purely good karma? Questions about how to deal with the side effects or unintended consequences of planned animal release are unresolved Taiwanese Buddhists.

Some releasers try to reduce the risks to animals by going to markets, restaurants, or fish shops instead of pre-ordering animals or by conducting animal release activities on an irregular basis, skipping the celebrations of Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*; or changing the place of release each time to prevent recapture. However, Hsu and Shao (2007) found that the casualty rates among released wild birds without pre-order is higher than for those that are pre-ordered, because the trapping time influences wild birds' abilities to fly and look for food, and the trapping time for pre-ordered wild birds is shorter than for those that are not pre-ordered.

How do releasers resolve the paradoxes of planned animal release and justify their practices? Releasers argue that the worst way to die is to be slaughtered or cooked to death. Animals who die during release undergo much less suffering. Furthermore, they emphasize the importance of connecting released animals to the Dharma through the ritual of homage to the Three Jewels and teaching the Dharma, which imparts blessings to the released animals, helps liberated them from rebirth and the three lower realms (hell, animal, and hungry ghost), and may even help them upgrade to the western pure land. Therefore, genuine animal release helps connect animals to the Dharma, so the released animals acquire a better next life.

The second paradox concerns how to weigh the merit of saving lives and causing the death of animals that results from animal release activities. Do the merits of saving animals outweigh the demerit of animal casualties? Releasers emphasize the importance of motivation to resolve this paradox. They argue that pure intentions result in positive consequences of *karma*, while unintentional or unconscious actions are neutral. However, these arguments are controversial. How can there be no bad *karma* if some animals can be expected to die during release, even when one intends to save rather than harm them?

Other controversies surrounding planned animal release pertain to ecological problems. Ecologists and environmentalists claim that frequent and large-scale animal release events have had a significant of ecological impact, for example, the capture of wild animals, invasion of habitats, imbalance in the food chain, and a decline in biodiversity in Taiwan. Some releasers even prefer to release imported large birds, which has threatened the survival of native species.

The most popular animal for release is fish. Most releasers purchase fish in the market, restaurants, and cultivating ponds. Almost all of fish are commercially cultivated, including the imported ones. In this way, releasers may avoid some of the dangers of capture before release, but do not reduce the ecological impacts. Besides, the pollution of large amount of dead fish threatens the water quality. Ecological problems resulting from the released animals have been very serious. The great deal of similar species, imported, and cultivated fish threaten the survival of wild fish, especially in the places of dam reservoirs, lakes, and rivers.

From the perspectives of ecologists, animal release definitely threatens ecological preservation. Even the released animals are native to Taiwan, when they are delivered to other places; become

denizens in the local place of release. Social critics do not understand why certain religious groups, including Buddhists, folk religion groups, and new religious groups, insist on conducting animal release, since animal release entails high animal risks and a negative ecological impact. From the perspectives of releasers, animal release is an efficient way to purify bad karma and to embody compassion; it is beyond the comprehension of secular society. Ecology concerns the sustainability of each species, not each sentient being, and the balance of hierarchical ecological systems.

Ecology is creating new paradigms in academic circles and society at large. Most people have little or only a partial understanding of ecological issues. Especially, most Buddhists devote themselves to Buddhist practice to ensure a better future life or liberation. Do they have time or the desire to concern themselves with environmental issues in the temporal world? Should Buddhists give up practices that are harmful to the environment or continue to defy social expectations? Should ecological or environmental protection be required to Buddhist engagement? This is an inevitable and essential issue for Buddhists to consider in contemporary society.

NOTES

¹ Chunfeng Yu, "Refraining from Killing and Animal Release: The Ecological Contributions of Chinese Buddhism," in *From Tradition to Modern: Buddhist Ethics and Modern Society* (Taipei: Tungda Press), 142-43.

² Chialuen Chen, "To Do or Not to Do Animal Release in Taiwanese Buddhism: The Intertwining of Religious Ideas, Animal Risk, and Ecological Risk," *Taiwanese Sociology* 20 (2010): 109-111.

The Mystical Mass Migration of Elephants in Catastrophic Cambodia: Moral Chaos, Sanctuaries, and Voluntary Displacement

Napakadol Kittisenee

Six years ago when the tsunami smashed into the coastal rims around the Indian Ocean, taking a toll of nearly 230,000 lives, I was intrigued with a piece of news spreading in Thailand reporting a local account that special signals by local animals warned of the catastrophe to come. Preeminent among them were elephants, who left their familiar forests early before the tsunami hit. As those engaging in biological research surely know, there must reason to explain why creatures leave their habitats behind for annual migrations, as many birds and wild animals do during cold weather, when they set out toward promising sanctuaries for land and food in faraway tropical destinations. These patterns are not exactly accidental. As seen by the elephant alarm in tsunami-swollen areas, many creatures displace themselves from their homes, not due to dietary logic, but for survival.

Journey and Life in Transition

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell (1968) explored comparatively the various mythologies of the world that speak of “monomyths,” great journeys of archetypal heroes.¹ These sacred adventures always begin with a call for the protagonist to set out on a wonderful voyage or important passage toward a marvellous realm. This sacred signal is not necessarily admirable, however; the characters often face unbearable suffering when faced by decisions about whether to stay or go. The decisive moment is distinctively different from the ordinary desire to travel; it is a critical transition in which the voyagers know nothing of what awaits them.

A prominent female writer named Jean Shinoda Bolen (1994), inspired by Campbell’s exceptional work, wrote *Crossing to Avalon: A Woman’s Midlife Quest for the Sacred Feminine*.² Recently divorced, she received mysterious invitation letters from one of her readers encouraging her to make her way to sacred sites in Europe. By taking this unexpected opportunity, she subsequently encountered serendipitous experiences that helped awaken her soul to a new, relieved, and healed state.

Painful, unpredictable choices like these are anthropologically known as “liminal,” a word rooted in the Latin work “limen,” meaning “door.” In Khmer idiom, it is said, “When looking forward, we can see only the forest.” This is a way mitigating the risks of setting out on a journey a place where something “dark and deep” creepily awaits. Entering the “door” is thus not always a pleasant choice, but in some cases, this option is necessary to escape from brutal reality.

Chaos and Voluntary Displacement

One afternoon, while the rows of pilgrims moved forward according to the sound of the gong, I had heard a peculiarly interesting story of migration. As we walked along, the numerous pilgrims noticed rare genres of plants on both sides of the route – genres distinct from those in other areas we passed through. Syvorn³ and another Khmer monk recalled the myth of elephants’ migration: “In the past, this area was primarily thick forest, with an evergreen carpet covering several provinces, including Prey Veng, Kampong Cham, Kratie, Mondol Kiri, Stung Treng, and Ratana Kiri. Once upon a time, it was the residence of a large herd of elephants. Later, in 1975, they moved northward through the wilderness, subsequently crossing the border into Laos, and eventually settling down in northeastern

Thailand.”

“Then why did they migrate, anyway?” I asked. “It is said that they knew what is going on in the country, the *ukruttakamm*,” she replied without hesitation. *Ukruttakam* is a Khmer term signifying an unbearable disaster or great tragedy. The *ukruttakam* she mentioned in her story was the genocide that took millions of people’s lives in Cambodia. She maintained that a herd of special creatures knew very well about this disaster and that was why they decided to escape from this unbearable reality.

I have tried to figure out the biological history of this event, but have not found any solid, authoritative evidence to certify as fact the details of her narrative. Recognizing these limitations, instead of investigating the accountability of the data, I chose to pay attention to the content of story and seek out the particular ways the story was “read,” in order to make sense of it.

Taking the context and storyline into close consideration, the myth reveals a compelling interpretation of the facts. The elephants’ sensitivity and displacement were triggered not by human dangers, but by natural ones, specifically the special signals that occurred in the case of the tsunami. It is worth highlighting the way in which the narrator invented meaning for her myth. She explained that the major reason for the elephants’ exile was the massacre and the moral chaos that prevailed at the time.

As a Theravada Buddhist society, abstinence from killing is the first and most fundamental precept, has long been embodied in Khmer culture. How can we make sense of this genocide? The random killing of those suspected to be the enemies of the regime included even monks who gave sermons on this precept to the laity. These monks also became targets for eradication. More importantly, the central faith that children had for their parents, whom they had for ages regarded as the most trustworthy persons in their lives, was banned and rejected, replaced by an ideological view of the “old generation” as lagging and a major obstacle for “progress” in society. This view is diametrically opposed to the fundamental Buddhist prescription to be virtuous persons who must express gratitude (*kataññu*) as a way to realize and recognize the goodness of others, showing particular respect toward those who brought them up. These moral obligations were brutally challenged during this chaotic period. Ideological “revision” resulted in brutally severe realities, which was finally transformed into a myths ripe with moral interpretation. It is therefore understandable that the myth of the auspicious elephants arose. The elephants, who are symbols of natural prosperity and social pride, had to voluntarily displace themselves from their familiar habitats to a distant location, so far away that they could not see the bloody homeland they left behind.

Sanctuaries

The mass migration of the elephants seems to be a mirror image of the human displacement from Cambodia that occurred beginning in 1975, when the Khmer Rouge military forces won a victory over other political factions that then ruled Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia. At the time, however, everybody celebrated with the army, based on its claim of having liberated their homeland from the massive secret bombings of the U.S. Air Force from 1970 to 1975), as they tracked the route of the Viet Cong in the countryside. Since these rural areas of Cambodia were populated, many civilians died alongside their smashed monasteries and burned residences.

Shortly after the initial happy announcement, the liberators ordered all inhabitants of Phnom Penh, including people of many different backgrounds and people from the provinces who had earlier fled the bombings in their native places and migrated to the capital. These people, who had fled their homes with nothing, gathered outside designated spots in the capital and were later coercively displaced and forced to labor in numerous communes scattered throughout the provinces, which became notorious as the “killing fields.” Those who died at the time were not only eliminated by the Khmer

Rouge cadres, but also encountered starvation, receiving only a very small portion of food as “involuntary farmers.” Those who survived these traumatic times mostly escaped to the forest wilderness and then settled down on the Thai side of the border with the new status of refugees or displaced persons. The camps along the Thai-Cambodian border from 1975 to 1999 hit an historical record in migration studies in the region. Like the mystical herd of elephants, large numbers of Khmers left their ancestral lands that were aflame and fled to the deep forest until they found the “sanctuaries.”⁴ where lives were protected and valued.

Repatriation and Rematriation

The refugee camps along the border remained for more than two decades, until finally many Khmers were relocated to promising, developed countries like the United States, France, Canada, and Australia, while others were repatriated to their homeland and provided with rehabilitation services. “Repatriation” literally means returning people to their place of origin or citizenship. The word stems from the root *patri*, or father, which denotes a sense of leadership, formal status, and official state of being. The word *matri*, or “mother,” which implies mothering, caring awareness, and nurturing, is absent from this formal replacement of the displaced to their native lands. Edward Said maintained that displaced personhood is never washed away once a person has been coercively moved from one’s place of origin.⁵ The myth of the mystical mass migration of elephants during the chaotic years of Cambodian genocide reflect something similar. The narrator of the story added that the sensitive herd of special creatures never returned to their place of departure. Despite the fact that today most displaced Khmers have already been physically repatriated, they still certainly look forward to “rematriation,” the process of restoring the meaningfulness of life, caring, and nurturing.

NOTES

1. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968).

2. Jean Shinoda Bolen, *Crossing to Avalon: A Woman’s Midlife Quest for the Sacred Feminine* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994).

³ This story was related by the female organizer of the pilgrimage. I was there in March 2010 following the pilgrims to collect data in Svay Rieng, a border province in the east of Cambodia, which is connected to Vietnam.

⁴ It is worth-mentioning that the term ‘sanctuary’ is employed both in religious studies and conservation, Biological studies. This shows how material culture is interwoven with human’s perception of nature.

⁵ Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

“May All Sentient Beings Be Well and Happy”: Let’s Make it a Reality for Our Animal Friends

Karma Tashi Choedron

Humankind has interacted with the animal kingdom since the dawn of humankind itself. In fact, Darwin’s theory of evolution claims that all life on Planet Earth is related. Buddhism concurs and explains the differences between life-forms according to the degree of sentience. Darwin declared that human beings are more evolved than the so-called “lower” forms of life in biological terms whereas Buddhism considers human beings the most fortunate of beings in the six realms of existence, due to their high capacity for awareness. Nonetheless, both science and Buddhism stress the inter-relatedness of all life-forms in terms of our genetic and physical make-up.

Mahayanist Buddhist philosophy goes a step further through a very strong assertion that there has not been a single being which has not been our mother since time immemorial. Buddhism expounds the ideal of *bodhicitta* or the spirit of enlightenment whereby one takes the bodhisattva vows to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings in all six realms of cyclic existence. Hence, since all sentient beings have been our mother and each and every living being has been most kind to us throughout our existence in *samsara*, we, as sincere Buddhist practitioners have a moral responsibility to repay their kindness by not only liberating all beings from cyclic existence, but pave the way for all sentient beings to achieve supreme enlightenment. The reality of animals in Buddhist countries today tells a very different story. Animals continue to suffer tremendously in Buddhist countries, often at the hands of Buddhists themselves.

This paper analyzes the plight of animals in Buddhist countries. The premise is that there are disparities in Buddhist countries between lofty ideals – *metta* (loving kindness) and *karuna* (compassion) – and reality – the lack of kindness toward animals. This paper hopes to raise awareness amongst Buddhist women in particular and all Buddhist practitioners in general about how to bridge the gap between wanting all beings to be happy (“aspiring *bodhicitta*”) and actually working for the benefit of animals (“engaging *bodhicitta*”) in our daily lives through the practice of generosity, the first of the six perfections, and the good works of selected Buddhist organizations dedicated to animal welfare. The paper is designed to invoke genuine compassion in the hearts and minds of fellow Buddhist practitioners by highlighting how we collectively and individually contribute to the suffering of our animal friends.

Animals: Do We Really Know Who They Are?

Animals are living beings who just like humans, feel pain and tremble at the rod of death. Deeply understanding this basic bond between humans and animals, we must never kill nor cause to kill.¹ The proposed Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare has attempted to describe the concept of animal welfare to the United Nations as thus: “...to recognise that animals are sentient and can suffer, to respect their welfare needs, and to end animal cruelty – for good.”² Sentience can be understood first and foremost as a level of conscious awareness, supported by the capacity to have feelings and to experience suffering and pleasure.³ This is the reason why in Buddhism, beings are commonly referred to as “sentient beings,” to stress the fact that all living beings possess sentience, albeit to different degrees. The difference is the level of awareness, not feeling.

Buddhism categorizes animals as being part of the three lower realms of *samsara*, i.e., the cycle

of birth and death. It is a largely unfavorable place in the six realms of existence which constitute samsara. The animal realm, according to Buddhism, is an undesirable realm where beings are subject to the suffering of slaughter, bondage, and stupidity. As unfavorable as existence as an animal life may be, it is not permanent nor devoid of value. One of the core teachings of Buddhism is on the impermanence of all conditioned phenomena and the law of karma and rebirth. One's place in samsara is therefore not permanent and one ascends or descends any of the six realms of existence according to one's deeds. Hence, animals are only beings occupying temporary existence as humans are but guests in the human body. Moreover, according to the Mahayana *tathagatagarbha* doctrine, all beings possess Buddha nature and can therefore achieve awakening.

The Human Concept of Animals

The way we treat animals has its roots in the cultural and spiritual traditions that shape our lives. This means we need to explore the roots of environmental ethics to understand how different humans view nature and its inhabitants. This way, we can understand why some people treat nature with utmost respect and why many others do not.

Environmental ethics is a relatively new field. Contemporary environmental ethics prompts critical thinking of the moral standing of the myriad of species that exist in this world and challenges age-old anthropocentric views of the environment. The central debate in environmental ethics is that between anthropocentrism and biocentrism.⁴ Anthropocentric views on the environment have their roots in Christian ethics, secular Western ethics (Kantian and utilitarianism), and modern economic theory.⁵ Ecocentricists focus on the instrumental value (usefulness) of nature. They argue that protecting flora, fauna, and even systemic processes such as the carbon cycle are valuable in a moral sense.⁶ Biocentricists focus on the intrinsic value of nature. They argue that organisms have moral standing, regardless of whether they have sentience, because they have the ability to develop and flourish.⁷ Postmodern environmental ethicists advocate a holistic, rather than an individualistic, environmental ethic. They argue that the well-being of the ecological community as a whole should be the primary ethical goal or principle of an environmental ethic.⁸

Buddhist Attitudes towards Animals

The core of environmental ethics in Buddhist teachings is compassion (Pali; Skt: *karuna*) and loving kindness (Pali: *metta*, Skt: *maitri*) towards all living beings.⁹ *Metta* is the genuine wish for our own happiness and the happiness of others while compassion is the wish for oneself and others to be free from suffering. Buddhism emphasizes *ahimsa*, the principle of non-violence or non-harm – a powerful concept to curb human's violent tendencies towards other beings.

Buddhism, through the five precepts advocates respect for life and property, the rejection of a self-indulgent lifestyle and the notion of truthfulness for the benefit of oneself and of the community.¹⁰ Buddhism teaches that the heaviest karmic offence is that of taking the life of another being. Utmost importance is placed on non-killing and it forms the first of the five basic precepts for lay Buddhists. According to the Noble Eightfold Path, fishing, hunting, setting one animal on another, rearing animals for flesh, selling meat or dealing with weapons and arms are not considered as right livelihood and are regarded as extremely unwholesome as they lead to the destruction of life. In the *Kutadanta Sutta* (Pali canon), the Buddha denounced the slaughtering of animals for religious sacrifice. Animal slaughter entails an offence in the Buddhist *Vinaya* as well.¹¹

Mahayana Buddhism places great emphasis on generating *bodhicitta*, which can be defined as a

‘primary mind wishing to attain enlightenment for the benefit of others’.¹² Bodhicitta, or a supreme altruistic wish is the attitude based on the great compassion wishing to remove the suffering of others, and the recognition that, to be of greatest benefit to both oneself and others, it is ideal to attain enlightenment, i.e. Buddhahood. It is the motivation with which the Mahayanist engages in all practices. Shantideva categorized *bodhicitta* in two general categories, the “aspiring bodhicitta,” i.e., the mind that aspires to be awake, and “engaging bodhicitta,” which is the mind that ventures to do so.¹³

The Realities of the Animal World

Both Buddhism and our own experience of the world tell us that most animals undergo tremendous suffering. However, many people are unaware of the types and degree of suffering the sentient beings are subjected to. The following are common types of suffering endured by millions of animals in the world today.

First, we consider factory farming. Traditional farming systems, once mutually beneficial to people, animals and the environment, have now been transformed into factory systems. The majority of the world's farm animals currently live in miserable factory conditions, raised using production line methods that subject them to intense suffering. Factory-farmed animals live short, barren lives, spent in cages, crates, overcrowded sheds and narrow stalls without any guarantee of a humane death. Crammed together in conditions that prohibit natural behaviour, animals are neither able to eat, stretch nor socialize. In extreme cases, especially true for chicken farming, chickens literally never see the light of day. Antibiotics are used to keep them alive long enough to produce food. Animals become physically and emotionally ill, leading an artificial life, while waiting their final destiny, death.

Second, animals are used as beasts of burden. Horses, donkeys, and mules are used in many countries for cultivating land and transporting goods and people. But despite their loyal service, in many countries work horses suffer in numerous ways. They often receive little or no veterinary care, are kept in poor conditions with a lack of nutritional food, overloaded, forced to pull carts, and worked for long hours in high temperatures, without rest or water.¹⁴

Third, the plight of stray animals has aroused concern throughout the world. Dogs and cats are common stray animals, with monkeys and cows adding to the list of stray species in developing countries. Three quarters of the 500 million dogs around the globe are strays. Stray animals suffer in various ways, often due to human abuse and apathy. Stray animals, seek food and shelter in human communities, making them vulnerable to human cruelty. Frequently suffering from hunger and illness, strays scavenge for food and vie for the limited resources, often resulting in fights; the injuries sustained are rarely treated. Thousands of puppies die in agony from diseases including rabies and distemper. Many countries resort to culling strays, by poisoning, electrocuting or shooting stray animals, especially dogs, causing the animal great pain and suffering. The root of the problem of stray animals is abandonment of pets by their owners or animals which are owned but allowed to roam freely. These strays multiply in number which further perpetuates the cycle of suffering.¹⁵

Animal welfare is a relatively alien concept in Asia with the majority of its population struggling to meet their basic needs. Even though people in traditional Buddhist countries have the advantage of one of the richest spiritual traditions in the world and are familiar with Buddhist concepts of non-harming, animals in these countries continue to be abused in various ways. People from traditional Buddhist countries, which are also some of the poorest countries in the world, have low income per capita and little access to clean water and sanitation.

Thailand

Many tourists pay high prices to seek out the “experience of a lifetime,” taking elephant safaris and watching elephant shows, without knowing the brutal truth behind this “entertainment.” The reality is that most elephants are trained in atrocious ways. Gruesome methods to break the elephants’ spirits are employed to ensure that elephants obey human control. Elephants are chained in pens so that they cannot move and undergo systematic torture for weeks at end, including beatings and food and water deprivation. Most circus, zoo and trekking elephants are captured from the wild, which is a real challenge for conservation efforts to safeguard this flagship species of Thailand. The practice continues today and many tourists, travel agencies and tour operators are still ignorant that they are directly contributing to the problem of capturing endangered species, e.g., the Asian Elephant, and selling them into a life of hardship, trauma, abuse, and neglect in captivity.

Thailand already has about 2,400 domestic elephants and since demand for these animals in traditional skills such as logging and labour has declined over the years, owners sometimes loan them out for begging from tourists and locals in major Thai cities. Apart from causing distraction and being traffic hazards for city dwellers, these emotional, intelligent, and sensitive beings endure poor living conditions and a life of hardship, being sold from one owner to another for the rest of their lives.

Illegal wildlife trafficking has a devastating impact on animal welfare and species conservation through eco-tourism. Apart from elephants, various other wildlife species are trafficked from neighbouring countries and sold in Thailand. Consumers are largely unaware that buying trafficked animals is a form of animal abuse and contributes to loss of biodiversity. Trafficked animals such as pangolins, pythons, the Malayan Sun Bear are trafficked from neighboring Malaysia, elephants from Myanmar and many other reptile species from neighboring countries end up in Thai markets such as the Jatujak (or Chatuchak) market in downtown Bangkok. Appalling conditions cause the majority of animals to die in transit. When they reach their destinations, they are placed in horrendous situations. Jatujak market is a popular tourist attraction. The market sells cute and cuddly dogs and cats for the ever growing middle-class Thais who indulge in pet-grooming, and is also a direct contributor to wildlife trafficking and subsequent loss of wildlife species in neighboring countries. The pets live in pitiful conditions, caged in shops with little ventilation and excessive heat, without adequate food and water. A little further down the lane, one sees the nauseating sight of cock-fighting, ignoring the Buddhist teachings of loving kindness and compassion.

Another shocking case of animal abuse in Thailand is the Tiger Temple in Kanchanaburi, a major tourist attraction with 15 tigers for viewing and petting. The temple has gained immense popularity over the years, but a two-year investigation revealed that the temple houses the animals in very poor conditions. The tigers are released from cramped cages only when tourists pay to have their picture taken with the animals. If Buddhist monastics, who have precepts to safeguard the lives of sentient beings, are involved in animal cruelty, then there is little need to mention why ordinary laypeople use animals to earn a livelihood.

How to Help Animals?

Mahayana Buddhism places great emphasis on vegetarianism. According to the *Brahma Net Sutra*, meat-eating is a violation of the secondary *bodhisattva* vows. Deliberately eating the flesh of any sentient being goes against the spirit of great compassion. The *Lankavatara Sutra* explicitly states that “all meat-eating, in any form, in any manner, and in any place, is unconditionally and once for all, prohibited for all.” Meat-eating is frowned upon, even in Tibetan Buddhism. Meat-eating generates negative karma for those involved in the killing, preparation and consumption of meat. As the Bhutanese Agricultural Minister, Lyonpo Kinzang Dorji, said: “If we really want to stop the sale of meat

and ban the slaughter of animals, we have to stop eating meat. If we stop eating meat, there will be no demand for meat. If there is no demand for meat, there will be no need to slaughter animals.”

We can also refuse to support animal-based tourism. As a responsible and informed tourist, one should stop patronizing tourist areas which are known for their ill-treatment of animals. One can also help to convince friends not to patronize such places which abuse animals. For example, if enough tourists stop demanding to ride elephants when they visit Southeast Asia, then the elephant owners will stop offering rides. Tour operators and travel agents who promote such tourism must be told that this is unacceptable. When the demand stops, so will the supply. Adopting pets from animal shelters is another good idea. Hundreds of thousands of animals are killed every year because they cannot find homes. Instead of buying animals and encouraging the brutal animal industry, one can opt to adopt a rescued stray from animal shelters and help give them a new lease of life. This kind act will not only help to save the life of one animal, but reduce the stray animal population and also make room for other strays to be rescued as animal shelters are usually small and cramped and therefore, fast adoption of rescued animals will ensure that other strays too can get new homes. One can also be an independent pet rescuer and rescue strays and temporarily shelter them in one's own home while waiting to rehome the strays. One such group of independent pet rescuers are a group of Buddhist women called the Metta Karuna Independent Pet Rescue Team in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia which have saved the lives of more than 100 strays since its inception in 2005.

His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand's compassion towards stray dogs is heart-warming. His Majesty has adopted many handicapped, stray and abandoned animals and is well known for his concern for the welfare of animals and wrote a story of one such adopted street dog, his beloved Tong Daeng. This has been published in a best-selling book, the proceeds of which are helping to fund several royal animal welfare projects. The King's initiatives in promoting animal welfare have helped stimulate local people to care more for their dogs. When the buying stops, so does the killing.

Individuals are not helpless. In this modern age, remarkable progress has been made in terms of communications. Many of the numerous animal welfare organizations that work to stop animal cruelty are online. One can sign up as a member on these websites, read the information on animal abuse and sign petitions started by such organizations which put pressure on governments to stop animal abuse or to improve legislation on animal cruelty. Petitions are another way of expressing opposition to cruel means to earn a profit.

One can also boycott products that are produced through the suffering of animals. For example, women who use cosmetics must know the origins of the cosmetics by checking labels and whether the products have been tested on animals or not. One can also write to the companies to protest against animal testing on consumer products. If enough people put pressure on such companies, then these companies will be forced to look for alternative ways of testing their products without using animals.

As one's compassion develops, one can directly help animals by working or volunteering in animal welfare organizations. Some outstanding individuals, through the power of their compassion, have started their own foundations to champion for animal welfare. One such individual is Soraida Salwala who founded the Friends of the Asian Elephant in 1993, a Thai non-government group which cares for injured or mistreated elephants. Many Buddhist organizations have also started animal sanctuaries. There is a society for the protection of animal welfare in almost every major city of the world and one can volunteer there. Opportunities to support all these organizations are plentiful either cash or in kind.

Liberating animals which are about to be killed is an important practice, especially for people

with life-threatening diseases. This practice is usually recommended to prolong one's life, based on the premise that if one saves the life of another, one's own life would be saved. It is best to liberate animals which one can look after by oneself. Usually people buy birds, fish and tortoises and release them only to be caught again by hunters. Some even release them in environments not suited to the natural habitat of these animals. Therefore, one must use one's wisdom when practicing compassion for the benefit of sentient beings. Buddhist organizations or Dharma centers can organize events to raise awareness amongst devotees on the benefits of animal liberation. Animal liberation involves all of the six perfections, i.e. generosity, morality, patience, enthusiastic perseverance, concentration and wisdom, especially generosity whereby one gives protection from fear to animals which not only brings happiness to the animal which is liberated, but also creates causes for one's own future happiness.

Generosity is one of the six perfections and giving Dharma to sentient beings is considered the highest form of charity. If one wishes to save a certain being, but it is beyond one's capacity, then one can recite mantras or chant prayers for them. For example, if one sees animals that are about to be slaughtered, but is unable to liberate them all, one can plant the seed of enlightenment in the mindstream of the animals by single-mindedly reciting the Buddha's name so those creatures can hear it.

Conclusion

It takes only one individual to make a difference in the lives of animals. Even if only one person in a family, monastic community, or organization sincerely practices compassion and loving kindness, it will have a beneficial effect on others. In addition to the benefits of *metta* meditation and other practices, one must actualize the “engaging *bodhicitta*” and not confine one's compassion and loving kindness to the meditation cushion. Our actions will ultimately have profound effects and spread the light of compassion and loving kindness in our respective countries. In conclusion, I quote the words of Mahatma Gandhi, the leading proponent of *ahimsa* in the 20th century: “The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.”¹⁶

NOTES

¹ N. Thera, *The Dhammapada* (Taiwan: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 1993), Verses 129-130.

² Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare.

³ Ibid.

⁴ R. Attfield, *Environmental Ethics: An Overview for the Twenty-First Century* (Cornwall: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).

⁵ W. Fox, “A New Philosophy of our Time?” In *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology* (Cornwall: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), pp. 252–61.

⁶ A. Light and H. Rolston, *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology* (Cornwall: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).

⁷ C. Palmer, “An Overview of Environmental Ethics,” in *Environmental Ethics*, op cit., pp. 15–37.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ R. Misra, *Environmental Ethics: A Dialogue of Cultures* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 1995).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ P. Ratanasara, *The Buddhist Concept of the Environment and Individual* (Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Maha Vihara, 2001).

¹² V. Losang, *Importance of Bodhicitta: Great Capacity Beings. Teachings based on the Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand-A Lam Rim text by Pabongkha Dechin Nyingpo* (Kuala Lumpur: Losang Dragpa Centre, 2007), p. 3.

¹³ Shantideva, trans. S. Bachelor, *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* (A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life) (New Delhi: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1998), p. 3.

¹⁴ WSPA, Working Horses, 2011.

¹⁵ WSPA, Stray Animals, 2011.

¹⁶ M. K. Gandhi, *The Moral Basis of Vegetarianism* (London: The London Vegetarian Society, 1931).

Compassionate Action: Working with AIDS in Cambodia

Beth Goldring

This paper attempts to explore the relationship of Buddhist teachings and traditional practices in relation to compassionate action in the world. For the past almost twelve years, my own extended experience of this relationship has been within Brahmavihara/Cambodia AIDS Project, which I founded in 2000 and which works with destitute AIDS patients in Phnom Penh. Currently there are ten of us on staff; everyone except me is Cambodian. Seven of my staff have AIDS. Our work has three parts, of which the most important is chaplaincy: emotional and spiritual support for patients and their families. We also do social work referrals and some material support, in the interstices where other organizations do not work. In addition to traditional Buddhist practices, our chaplaincy works extensively with Reiki, Healing Touch and other forms of energy. Our experience is that these help provide entry into meditative states for people too ill and weak to study meditation or meditate independently. Here is one story of what I mean by this:

In the Maryknoll hospice, Kunthea is dying, with cancer in addition to her AIDS. Souen, our staff member and Kunthea's old friend, has been visiting virtually every day. We have more or less freed Souen from seeing other patients; she is also going in on her own time.

Today, Ramo, my translator, and I have come down to the hospice to talk to the director about something. We stop in to see Kunthea before Souen gets there. Kunthea is crying. Her diaper, terribly loose because her legs and buttocks are sticks, is leaking, and someone has said something unkind to her. We clean her up, saying calming words, and begin to do some Reiki. I am working at her swollen feet; Ramo at her back and shoulders. I try to do some Reiki with her stomach, hugely swollen from the tumor, but the tissue is utterly unresponsive. Kunthea keeps saying she wants to sleep, but she is restless, not able to stay in one position even for a full minute.

Ramo and I hang in there, doing what we can, until Souen arrives and climbs into bed with Kunthea. Then we go to our meeting. When we are finished we look in on Kunthea again. Souen has covered her with a blanket and, still sitting by her head, is softly chanting the Buddhist precepts to her. A tremendous peacefulness fills the room and emanates from it. Ramo joins Souen while I go about other business.

Later, Ramo tells me that it was impossible to know when Kunthea passed from sleep into death. He and Souen, both of them fully attentive to her, became aware when she had gone, but did not know when she stopped breathing (there is usually some short time between the two events). The transition was seamless.

It occurred to me later that if all our work for eleven years had produced nothing other than this one, seamless death, it would have been totally worthwhile.

I want to be a bit theoretical for a while and look at the question of what formal Buddhist practice contributes to the work we do and how that work is a testing ground for our understanding of Buddhist teachings. At one level, this is a simple question. We are a Buddhist organization. We study

meditation and the Buddha's teachings and work from our understanding of them. Keeping as close as possible to traditional Khmer Theravada Buddhist teachings, we chant and meditate daily before going to see patients; chant for patients and for the dead and dying; give money to families for traditional seven-day ceremonies following deaths; and give Buddhist precepts and eight-precept ordinations. We have repaired mortuaries, placing Buddha statues and paintings in them, and cleaning and chanting regularly; and have conducted ceremonies to heal places haunted by ghosts. We study Smut, a specific and beautiful form of Khmer chanting, designed to arouse and heal painful emotions within the context of Buddhist *sammega* and *pasada*. My staff has an annual ten-day *vipassana* retreat. Buddhist practices, both among ourselves and with the patients, provide the container within which we continually operate.

We train in the precepts, the *paramitas* and the Four Noble Truths, as well as in other aspects of the Buddha's teaching. The training in the precepts and *paramitas*, designed first to provide safety by preventing us from doing harm and second to help us develop the necessary qualities of character for the development of insight, are also profoundly important in allowing us to continue what is sometimes extraordinarily difficult and painful work over time, and be strengthened rather than weakened by it.

When I began this work, my unofficial supervisor and the head of the Maryknoll project used to say to me: "If it is not life affirming for you, it will not be life affirming for the patients." I used to respond: "Just because it is hard doesn't mean it isn't life affirming." He would agree. After some years there was a kind of sea change and I began to experience a deep intimacy and peacefulness with patients, even under the most difficult and terrible circumstances. Even later, I began to trust and expect this intimacy to emerge. All of us currently on staff have long, deep familiarity with time, sometimes moments, sometimes longer, when both we and the patients (and families) are being held in something profound, wordless, intimate, and deep, when we are as much the recipients as the agents of sustaining compassion.

It is this experience of time and compassion that sustains the work and sustains us within it. All our training, all our work on the development of character and insight, all our religious practices, have both their testing ground and their fulfillment in this intimacy.

Ieng Sung, a 28-year-old male from a Vietnamese-Cambodian family, died on June 13, 2010, in the TB (tuberculosis) ward of the Khmer Soviet Friendship Hospital, chained to his bed because he was from the prison. In addition to AIDS, Sung had tuberculosis, with huge lumps on the sides of his neck; for months they were open sores. Just before he became essentially unable to speak, Sung started missing his family terribly. He hadn't seen or had word from them in years. Pheap, our director, and I went to find them. When we reached his neighborhood, the neighbors told us that everyone, except one brother, was dead. They told us this story:

In 2005 or so, Sung's father went to a neighbor's house at night, ostensibly to borrow some money to help another neighbor who was having a difficult labor. The father was accused of burglary and was beaten up very badly, especially around the head. When the family took him to a clinic, they were told it would cost \$600 to take care of him. They brought him home to die. None of his five sons went to visit him as he lay dying. In revenge, the father cursed all of them, wishing that they would all die quickly.

Two years later, Sung's mother, whom the neighbors described as *sloat* – a very strong word meaning both polite and gentle – died, possibly of cancer, without any medical treatment. Nobody had the money to go to the prison and tell Sung. Three other brothers also died, mostly of AIDS. The only living brother is a gang lord in a nearby slum. The house the family

rented had been occupied by another family for years.

We didn't tell Sung this story, for fear it would cause him to abandon all hope. So we told him the family had moved away. He called us liars, saying his mother would never move away from that place. Shortly afterwards his condition deteriorated to very near death.

We were lucky at that time to have Jayvy, a Vietnamese-American volunteer. She sat with Sung for hours, doing healing energy work, holding his hand, speaking Vietnamese and singing lullabies, making contact with him in the language and rhythms of his deepest childhood experience. In addition, we got Sung the best caregiver we knew and my staff visited pretty much every day, sometimes for hours on end, chanting, doing Healing Touch and Reiki, just sitting with him. In the end, Sung died peacefully and gently. Posthumously, his TB was diagnosed as multi-drug resistant. Had it been diagnosed earlier, he might have lived.

Our experience of deep intimacy is not restricted to our work with patients, but is understood as the supporting fabric of every aspect of our lives. However, it is in the work with patients that it is most often fully tested. It is here that we not only experience the intimacy, but also experience, see, and explore the barriers that keep us from it. The more fully we become capable of experiencing this intimacy, the more aware we become of the many times when we are preoccupied, annoyed, resistant, distracted, and unable fully to be present. "The patients are our teachers," is a favorite saying of one of my oldest staff members. The longer we work, the more fully we realize how deeply it is we who are in the patients' debt

What our formal study and practice of Buddhism provides us with is both a container to hold this experience and a means of understanding it. Without the container, we would quickly reach and exhaust the limits of our own strength in the work; without the understanding, we would not know what to do with the experience as it occurs. Because we work in extreme situations, directly in contact with life and death, frequently under terrible conditions, we often fail. But because we study the Dhamma, not only formally but with our whole hearts, we live continually in the possibility of transcending our failures and sometimes in the experience of that transcendence.

A Buddhist Nun's Encounters with the Charter for Compassion

Bhiksuni Cheen

Would you “acknowledge that we have failed to live compassionately and that some have even increased the sum of human misery in the name of religion?”¹ As Buddhists and Buddhist communities, have we been compassionate in thought, speech and action? Have we “encouraged a positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity?”² Have we “cultivated an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings – even those regarded as enemies?”³

If you flinched with even just a flash of doubt at any of those questions, you will embrace the Charter for Compassion wholeheartedly. If there were more genuine compassion, then many more conflicts in our minds, speech, and actions, and many more battles around us – in our communities and around the world – would surely have dissipated. For this, a wounded former nun made a wish: “I wish that you would help with the creation, launch, and propagation of a Charter for Compassion, crafted by a group of leading inspirational thinkers from the three Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam and based on the fundamental principles of universal justice and respect.”

Karen Armstrong is the former Roman Catholic nun. Though she is one of the most provocative, original thinkers on the role of religion in the modern world today, Karen left a British convent to pursue a degree in modern literature at Oxford. In 1982 she wrote a book about her seven years in the convent, *Through the Narrow Gate*, that angered and challenged Catholics worldwide; her recent book *The Spiral Staircase* discusses her subsequent spiritual awakening after leaving the convent, when she began to develop her iconoclastic take on the great monotheistic religions.⁴

Relating one of her “raw and painful” memories, Karen explains, “I entered in 1962 as an ardent, idealistic, untidy, unrealistic, and immature teenager, and left seven years later, having suffered a mild breakdown, obscurely broken and damaged.”⁵ I believe Karen Armstrong’s passion for compassion grew exponentially after her traumas, or as Lord Byron said, “The dew of compassion is a tear.”

In the post-9/11 world, Karen is a powerful voice for ecumenical understanding. She has written more than 20 books around the ideas of what Islam, Judaism and Christianity have in common, and around their effect on world events, including the magisterial *A History of God* and *Holy War: The Crusades and Their Impact on Today's World*. Her latest book is *The Bible: A Biography*. Her meditations on personal faith and religion (she calls herself a freelance monotheist) spark discussion – especially her take on fundamentalism, which she sees in a historical context, as an outgrowth of modern culture.⁶

Karen Armstrong’s plea for understanding among the religions was given wings and made public when her wish for a Charter for Compassion was granted by TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design) in 2008. The Charter for Compassion became an open and collaborative effort. Late in 2008, people of all nations, all faiths, all backgrounds, submitted their own words for inclusion in the Charter. In February 2009 the words of the world were collected and given to the Council of Conscience, a gathering of high-level religious leaders and thinkers, who crafted the final document. On November 12, 2009, the Charter for Compassion was unveiled worldwide. Henceforth, the Charter for Compassion has developed into a broader, innovative, and modern movement.

I recall the first time I learned about Karen Armstrong and watched her TED wish. I thought, “What a fabulous idea, too bad it is only for the Abrahamic religions!” As some of you might be thinking now, I thought, “And what does it have to do with me, a Buddhist?”

The second time I saw Karen Armstrong, she was much closer in proximity. I was a few

months fresh out of a devastating eviction from the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association and at my mother's home in Seattle. Karen was in Vancouver BC with His Holiness the Dalai Lama at the 2009 Peace Summit organized by the Dalai Lama Center for Peace and Education. I thought, "Fabulous, she's connecting with His Holiness. Maybe that means the Buddhists!" That was a dark time in my life and realized that the only way to bring joy into my life was to help others. As the Dalai Lama points out, after all, "If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion." Furthermore, I identified with Karen's woundedness, admire her brilliant mind, and have come to understand that unless there is peace among the Abrahamic religions (such as in the Middle East), there will be no peace.

Along with the support of Northwest Interfaith Community Outreach and the Dalai Lama Center for Peace and Education, I applied for Compassionate Action Network to become an organizational Partner to the Charter for Compassion and organized a well-attended launching of the Charter for Compassion in Seattle in November 2009.

Immediately after the launch, I was representing the City of Seattle as an ambassador to the Parliament of World Religions. I recognized how important it would be for the Charter for Compassion to have a prominent presence on that world stage and made a number of suggestions to connect the Charter for Compassion and the Council of the Parliament of World Religions. I was pleased that Sister Joan Chittister of the Charter's Council of Conscience held a group Q & A and that I had a chance to speak extensively to Dr. Chandra Muzaffar and others in Melbourne, Australia. Consequently and through more weaving, more cross-pollination occurred between the Charter and the Parliament, resulting for instance in the collaboration of the Compassionate Cities and the Peace Cities campaigns and networks.

The Compassionate Seattle campaign began upon my return from the Parliament. Compassionate Action Network officially launched a tipping point campaign using The Point on December 31, 2009. Jon Ramer, the then Executive Director of Compassionate Action Network, made a deal with the Seattle City Council and the incoming mayor that if 1,000 people support the Compassionate Seattle campaign, the City would sign a proclamation of it becoming a Compassionate City. The campaign tipped and April 24, 2010, was the designated date for Compassionate Seattle: It's Up to Us!

On behalf of Compassionate Action Network, I had introduced the idea to Karen on a video conference coordinated by Global Tolerance, the then public relations arm of the Charter and who really made open communication and the implementation of ideas possible. I later invited Karen to attend the Seattle event. She was more than happy – she was so willing to come to Seattle in person, she paid her own travel costs.

In the planning of the event that was meant to bring organizations and volunteers to one another, we learned that Fetzer Institute became the new Managing Partner to the Charter for Compassion. Fetzer was the key to the financial solvency of the Compassionate Seattle event and the flourishing of the Compassionate Cities campaign that is about to lift off in full force at the time of this writing. It has also brought in a wider spectrum of supporters for the Charter, including those of other traditions and sectors, such as Chade Meng Tan, the Buddhist jolly good fellow from Google, Fred Luskin of the Stanford Forgiveness Project and Mathieu Ricard (via a separate video); they spoke on the first anniversary of the Charter at TEDPrize@UN.

In the next two years, the Fetzer Institute will be focusing on three key communities with regard to the Charter: (1) the interfaith community, (2) young adults, and (3) the compassionate cities. Seattle will serve as a model and connector with regard to all three, including for example, offering a template and resources for other cities around the world to become a Compassionate City. It's more

than a piece of paper. It's possible to make the signers and the municipality accountable with it. Seattle is leading the way in conducting surveys to measure and compare the before and after of the Seattle proclamation, develop Compassionate Response Teams and building a Compassionate Cities Institute. Circles of Compassion continue to grow and can occur anywhere too for studying and applying the Charter and Karen's Twelve Steps to Compassion.

"Compassion is the best idea humanity has ever had," Chris Anderson, the curator of TED, is often quoted as saying. Whereas Jeanne Tsai of the Stanford CCARE (Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education) discovered that compassion brings about hope. Comparing compassion among a control group with no training, a group in an improvisational theater class, a mindfulness meditators group and a group trained in compassionate meditation, Tsai learned that the participants in the mindfulness meditation and compassionate meditation groups were equally compassionate and more so than the other two groups. In testing whether these participants were more compassionate because of the training or that they were self-selective, Tsai found that self-selection is involved and the distinguishing feature among the compassionate meditators is that they were more hopeful about themselves and the world.⁷ To me, this further supports the fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) data on the beneficial results of being compassionate. Being compassionate makes us happy.

Women, especially, are more like to be empathetic. Simon Baron-Cohen explains the terms, "male brain" and "female brain", as shorthand for psychological profiles based upon the average scores obtained when testing women as a group, or the average scores obtained when testing men as a group. The psychological profile of a male brain is that it is more systematizing while the psychological profile of a female brain is that it is more empathizing.⁸ Note that this is not a dangerous generalization about women or men and certainly not about one type of brain being better or worse than the other as if there were only two types.⁹

For Buddhist women, specifically, it is our vow to help all beings. The Charter for Compassion is essentially the Golden Rule that is present in every religion and every tradition: "Do not do unto others what we would not want done unto ourselves." This is particularly congruent with the law of cause and effect, "One who, while himself seeking happiness, oppresses with violence other beings who also desire happiness, will not attain happiness hereafter."¹⁰ The idea that we subscribe to a declaration, then act on it may appear to be more western in cultural orientation, but I would argue that it is also something like a vow. And this particular vow has been affirmed by more than 60,000 individuals worldwide at the time of this writing. It is an easy bridge already built and can be used for intrareligious and interreligious individuals and communities to create merit, wisdom and joy together.

"Look at the *bodhisattvas*", the deva in the *Vimalakirti Sutra* explained to the unenlightened disciples of the Buddha, "the flowers do not stick to them, because they have already cut off all thought of distinctions." We know the *bodhisattvas*' compassion to be "boundless as the empty sky", and that it "has no gradation,"¹¹ Freed from much of the institutional and national ties, the Charter for Compassion is brilliant in resisting the creation of an organization; hence many more initiatives and ideas related to compassion can be made possible.

Show your support by taking action. Meditate on behalf of a troubled spot in the world, engage in dialogue of another faith tradition, celebrate with a community in need, build a compassionate Sangha, or a city of compassion! "Dream no small dreams for they have no power to move the hearts of [wo]men."¹²

This is an opportunity to express compassion beyond our usual boundaries and share Buddhist understandings of compassion with more people too. Inroads are now being made between contemplative science and compassion through neuroscience research and something is gnawing in me

about how there is a particular role that Buddhist women can play in bridging compassion across the many sectors that we so cleverly manage at the same time. Women may be the peace-bearers for our times!

Paul Ekman calls “tribal-bound compassion” the problem of our time, of our century. Until we untangle ourselves from this limitation, until we focus on global compassion and love all beings like our own children, we may end up destroying ourselves.¹³ It is time to go beyond ourselves, our opposition against inner and outer enemies and be really strong – strong enough to be compassionate.

Compassion “is the strength that arises out of seeing the true nature of suffering in the world. Compassion allows us to bear witness to that suffering, whether it is in ourselves or others, without fear; it allows us to name injustice without hesitation, and to act strongly, with all the skill at our disposal. To develop this mind state of compassion...is to learn to live, as the Buddha put it, with sympathy for all living beings, without exception.”¹⁴

NOTES

¹ Karen Armstrong and the Council of Conscience. *The Charter for Compassion*. November 2009. <http://charterforcompassion.org/share/the-charter>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ <http://charterforcompassion.org>.

⁵ Karen Armstrong. *The Spiral Staircase: My Climb Out of Darkness* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), p. xi.

⁶ <http://charterforcompassion.org>.

⁷ His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Jeanne Tsai, Phillippe Goldin, and Erika Rosenberg at Session Three: CCARE Research and Experiments on Compassion of the Scientific Explorations of Compassion and Altruism Conference. Stanford University: October 15, 2010.

⁸ Simon Baron-Cohen. *The Essential Difference: The Truth About the Male and Female Brain* (Basic Books: New York, 2003).

⁹ For an elaboration on this caution, see the author’s article: <http://thecompassionnetwork.blogspot.com/2010/12/remember-to-exercise-during-holidays.html>.

¹⁰ *The Dhammapada*. <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhism/dp10.htm>.

¹¹ Burton Watson, trans., *The Vimalakirti Sutra* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1893).

¹² Attributed to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: <http://www.iwise.com/qCGep>.

¹³ His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Paul Ekman, *Emotional Awareness: Overcoming the Obstacles to Psychological Balance and Compassion* (New York: Times Books, 2008).

¹⁴ Sharon Salzberg. *Loving-Kindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness* (Boston: Shambhala, 2008).

Teaching Dhamma in Prison

Ranjani de Silva

As a member of the welfare committee of the prison system, I was able to arrange a Dhamma teaching program for the women in Welikada Prison in Colombo. Of a total of about 500 women who were in remand, some of whom had been sentenced to life in prison. The death penalty was not operating in Sri Lanka at the time of their sentencing. I received special permission to take two Buddhist nuns with me to visit the women's section in the prison once a week. This program continued for about two years.

As we entered the gate, some of the imprisoned women welcomed the nuns and quickly arranged the room with mats and chairs to listen to the Dhamma. I personally went around to groups of women seated in the corners of the room and persuaded them to come forward. Some of the women were quite aggressive and did not wish to join the gathering. The nuns began the program by giving the women the five precepts. Then the nuns asked each of them which precept or precepts they violated that caused them to be in prison. All the women came forward with their stories and expressed sadness about what had happened. In fact, every one of them had violated more than one precept. The nuns then advised the women to keep the precepts while they are in prison. The women agreed that it would be possible and said they would try.

In this presentation, I will share some of the women's stories and how the Dhamma has benefitted them. The women were very happy to meet the nuns and often shed tears as they related their sad stories, expecting some consolation and spiritual healing from the nuns. Interestingly, behind most of the women in this prison, there was a man who was responsible for their crimes.

Candles, Flowers, and a Bodhi Tree

On the prison premises, there is a *bodhi* tree and, nearby, a small shrine room. Every morning and evening, some women gather to make offerings and chant. Many women circumambulate the *bodhi* tree, making prayers that they will be relieved of their miseries. For some women, this is the only way to find some peace and hope. The women light candles, offer flowers, and invite nuns to conduct *pūja* at the shrine as they start the program. .

Seelawathi, the most popular woman in the prison, was found guilty of killing the woman who was sleeping with her husband. She was sentenced to life imprisonment and was kept in solitary confinement. But she was found to be so honest and disciplined that she was given work in the office, where she attends to the many minor duties required of the administrative staff.

Seelawathi told us that she had committed a dreadful act of violence. For awhile, she tolerated her husband carrying on with this woman, neglecting her and their two children. Finally, when she could not stand the situation any longer, she took an axe to the woman while she was sleeping with her husband, resulting in the woman's death. She asked us many times how she could expiate the karmic consequences of taking a human life. She said that she observed the five precepts in daily life, but in this situation she was not able to control herself. She said that when she works in the garden, she is careful not to kill even a worm. She is not so worried about her punishment in this life, but she continually asked what she can do to escape the consequences of the unwholesome act she committed and avoid the sufferings of cyclic existence (*samsara*).

Our nuns consoled her and told her that, from now onwards, she could keep the precepts

carefully, be mindful, and learn from her past experience. The nuns relate the story of Angulimala, a prince who took the lives of 999 people while making a chain of a thousand fingers for his teacher. As he ran after the Buddha in an attempt to kill him and get the last finger to complete the chain, the Buddha, with his power of compassion, approached him and gave him teachings. From that moment on, Angulimala practiced the Dhamma diligently and became an *arahat*.

The women in prison love to listen to this *sutta*. Our nuns also chant the *Metta Sutta* and the women all join in the chanting. The nuns teach them how to meditate on loving kindness and they all meditate together for a few minutes before ending the program.

There were some educated women who had committed crimes similar to Seelawathi's. A tall, large woman named Charlotte had been the wife of a doctor. Her story was very complicated, but the essence is that her husband provoked her to commit an act of violence. By nature, she was a good woman, very helpful and willing to learn. Since she could read and write, she took a leadership role and was helpful in conducting our programs. She was prepared to listen and follow the teachings.

Successes and Challenges

My friend Jaye was an assistant commissioner of the Girl Guide Association. She was a good teacher and initiated a program to teach women in prison. The women were required to take the Girl Guide Oath, which includes a promise to be honest and helpful in all their words and deeds and to do their best to serve others.

Sakyadhita Sri Lanka's program and the Girl Guide program worked well together. The women were very happy and were willing to become better citizens. After some women were released, we conducted a follow-up program and visited some at their homes. Many of the women and their families were very happy and grateful. But many others were very violent, aggressive, and seemed to prefer being in prison. After being released and sent home, they returned to prison after committing the same offence. In most of these cases, the women were found guilty of selling drugs and their husbands were behind it. Some women became addicted to drugs and had their friends outside the prison throw stones over the wall with packets of drugs tied to them. Once, a stone thrown over a high prison wall landed on the baby room and damaged the roof.

In prison, there were pregnant women and some women with infants. Some women gave birth to their babies in prison and the welfare committee set up a baby room with all the facilities. Cots, nets, beds, and other baby items, as well as medicines, vitamins, and milk powder were provided to them. Children under six years old stayed with their mothers in prison. A pre-school and a play area were made available for these children. A midday meal was provided to these children by the welfare committee. Buddhist stories were read to the children and the nuns provided counseling for the mothers.

A few years later, I saw Buddhist women from other associations visiting the women in prison to provide counseling. They also helped them with legal advice. Some Buddhist women lawyers have offered their help free of charge. Most prisoners are in prison due to poverty. They do not have the means to pay even a small amount of money in fines to win their release. Many do not have funds to pay lawyers to defend them.

Some Catholic sisters visit them often. They do counseling to prison women and offer their help. The Muslim community also helps members of their community by providing financial help to pay for lawyers and to pay fines to get them released. In the men's section of the prison, thousands of prisoners have benefitted from a regular meditation program conducted by Buddhist monks.

Sarvodaya is another well-known organization that works for the well-being of society. They

invite male prisoners to their center for a full-day program of meditation and Dhamma teachings conducted by a monk and provide other facilities, too. The prison management transports the prisoners to these programs in their buses. All the prisoners are given white sarongs and shirts for the occasion. When I visited to observe this program, I could not believe that the men were prisoners. The hall was full and all the men were seated and meditating so quietly and serenely that they all looked like *upasakas*. The program was very successful and the prisoners were very happy to attend. Among the prisoners who benefitted were some educated, professional men who became transformed through Buddhist meditation and gained insight.

On full moon days, some prisoners even observe eight precepts. Full-day religious programs are conducted, including Dhamma talks, meditation, and chanting. The monks conduct programs for men and the nuns conduct programs for both women and men.

Religious leaders have the ability to greatly benefit prisoners and reform them. The nuns who participated in this program always remember teaching Dhamma in prison as one of the best programs they ever conducted. It is important to realize that most of the women in prison are innocent and have become the victims of other criminals. These women need lots of compassion. They are mothers who have young children to care for. If they can be reformed and sent back to their families, that will be a great service to society.

The Triangulation of Vectors Where “Time Stops”: The Source of All Suffering

Barbara Wright

The Metta Map was developed during my 30-year career as a clinical psychologist and Buddhist practitioner. The intention of the Metta Map is to provide a multi-dimensional tool for exploring and experiencing various elements of the Dharma in a multitude of applications. I have used the Metta Map in a variety of conflict resolution scenarios, including corporate, academic, judicial, family therapy, individual, youth gangs, populations with chemical dependencies, and others. I have also used the Metta Map effectively with these populations in relationship to their perceived traumas and tragedies, versus situational challenges, which are also created through perception.

In this paper, therefore, we will define “trauma” in two separate ways: first, as the sudden and abrupt assault on an individual, family, or organizational system such as an extended family, a business, a city, or a government. This can come in the form of an auto accident, a personal attack such as rape, a fatal illness, the loss of a business, home, or life savings, or a military invasion. The second definition, and the one most often neglected, is insidious, prolonged insult and assault with a cumulative and deleterious effect, to an individual, family, or system. For the individual, this can come in the form of chronic neglect, domestic violence and abuse, protracted poverty, or chronic illness. For the group, it can be the result of corruption in a corporate or governmental system that erodes the spirit of its community or the occupation of a foreign invading military force. In this second definition, it is at the unique moment when the accumulation of this unwelcome intruder or collection of intruders reaches the nexus breaking point for the individual, family, or system that it actually becomes trauma or tragedy. In Buddhist language, the circumstance has mutated from the impermanent process of normal life to a fixed sensation induced by the delusion of permanent reality.

The body of my presentation explores how the Metta Map provides victims of both of these kinds of trauma and their coaches with a methodology to use as a tool to diminish the consequences of trauma, and to provide a path out of, or at least reduce, suffering. In the tradition of Buddhist psychology, the signature elements of intention, impermanence, and compassion have been effectively incorporated into the Metta Map to teach and transmit the Dharma, and to mitigate the effects of negative life events. The goal is to maintain the awareness and presence to life’s challenging circumstances, and to prevent falling into the abyss of a fixed negative life orientation, which then becomes the focus of identification as “self.” For example, if one asks the question, “Who are you?” the answer might be: “I am a rape victim,” “I am a tsunami victim,” “I am a cancer patient,” or “I am a refugee.” In these identifications, the person has lost the multi-dimensional reality of their humanity, and has attached themselves to the toxic or negative situation in which they find themselves, even though it is only one aspect of the whole individual.

When using the Metta Map, we identify three forms of intelligence. Intelligence, as described in this system, is the way one takes in, processes, and expresses information. First, there is the level of Mind Intelligence, which is characterized by the cognitive manipulation of ideas and constructs that are intellectually received and processed, and are attached to ego. The knowledge of the mind is the essence of our shared reality (e.g., “We are all sitting in a large room.”). Second, there is the level of Heart Intelligence, which is characterized by emotional knowledge, the expression of which is energetically greater than intellectual knowledge. Heart Intelligence is the essence of our humanity (e.g., “Some of us may feel lost in a large room, and others may take comfort feeling the sense of community.”)

Third, there is the level of Energy Intelligence, which is primal imprinted knowledge, the

experience prior to language, the foundation of our experience, imagination, intuition, and the engine that empowers action, both internal and external. Energy Intelligence is the essence of desire and creativity, and is the repository of *karma*. (e.g., “Being in this room is a physical expression of my conscious and pre-conscious commitments.”)

When using the Metta Map, the intention is to illustrate how people see themselves in all Three Levels of Intelligence at that moment in time. The next step is to address the Map with a precise intention related to how or where they would ideally like to be on the Map. With this intention, individuals navigate the Metta Map, either on their own or with the assistance of a mentor or coach. The goal is to chart the path out of their current circumstance or identity and to move towards their preferred place or condition. In doing so, it is important to keep the Buddhist precept of not doing harm to oneself or others, and to utilize Right Speech while expressing oneself on the Map. In this process, we are cultivating Right View by getting more clarity and preparing for Right Action, which develops success by approximation while moving through the issues at hand. In doing so, one will be more skillful dealing with conflict, both internal and external, thereby reducing stress levels, suffering, or traumatic conditions that inhibit the spaciousness of thought and emotion. This skillfulness increases the array of possibilities for a more desirable outcome.

The Metta Map is a sacred tool. When we use it, we need to approach it with purity of mind and a commitment to letting the process reveal the truth of the issue we seek to understand. Through this process we seek a reduction, resolution, or reconciliation to any identified conflict or trauma.

The structure of The Metta Map is framed in a vertical and horizontal matrix with the Three Levels of Intelligence displayed on the vertical grid. This matrix of activity exists in a continual horizontal, vertical, and spatial flow. It is like looking at a three-dimensional chess board or a cube.

The horizontal components of the matrix are: Freedom, Action, Center, Doubt, and Rules. They represent a continuum that flows from left to right, and also from right to left. This flow expresses the movement of intelligence, with its five gradients, from a state of freedom and the absence of fear to one of constraint and rules driven by and sustained by fear. The flow of the levels on the Metta Map can move in all directions, with the degrees of attachment to each square profoundly affecting the relationship an individual has to the situation or problem at hand. This attachment gives a dimension of depth to the square, which we may refer to in either percentages or degrees. One's relationship to each square can be either positive or negative, depending on perception.

While looking at the Metta Map, the squares on the top, or Mind Level of Intelligence, are “I Have an Idea,” which represents Freedom of thought. “Thinking About It Differently” is the Action of expressing that freedom. The Center, “Understanding,” reflects the knowledge of the idea and of how to think about it differently, and then the caution or Doubt that exists as we move toward the right hand side into the square of “Not Possible.” Rules, like every square, can be either positive or negative; there are rules that are enduring and reliable, and there are rules that have become obsolete and restrictive.

When we come to the middle level of Heart Intelligence we start with the uninhibited state of the Freedom square of “I Believe.” From this, we move to the Action square, which is “Trusting.” The center of the Map is “compassion,” which moves into “vulnerable” through doubt or caution. On the far right side we find the square of “Emotionally Disconnected,” which is that state when the heart moves into the Rules of fear. This may seem un-*metta*-like; however, in the wisdom of the heart, there are times that in order to get right view, one must temporarily emotionally disconnect – not a place to stay too long, but sometimes necessary.

On the lowest row of the Metta Map, which is the Energy Level of Intelligence, the square on

the far left in the Freedom column is when the energy is unbound and The Sky is No Limit.” You know you’re there, because in Action “Time Stops.” The center square is “Commitment,” and the degree of commitment you have to anything is the engine, or the amount of energy you have that drives the whole process. When in Doubt, one enters the “Defensive” square, and when moving into the Rules of fear we reach the square of “Zero Tolerance.”

Trauma, as described above, is expressed on the Metta Map when a *triangle of events* is experienced as frozen, and anchored in the square of “Time Stops.” Tragedy and trauma become fixed in time through a variety of triangular configurations and combinations of squares on the Metta Map. By “anchor,” we mean that the common denominator of any “triangle of trauma” is “Time Stops.”

One of the most familiar stories from Buddhist literature illustrates this triangle and its remedy. Kisagotami, a young woman married to a rich man, gave birth to a son. Unfortunately, the son died while he was still a toddler. The mother was overcome by grief and couldn’t accept the fact that he was dead. This is a perfect example of a familiar tragedy, which on the Metta Map is found on the farthest right-hand column. In her mind, life’s rules are broken with the death of a child. She became emotionally disconnected in her grief and had zero tolerance for the pain she was suffering. In her grief, she carried her dead son in her arms and went about the city looking for medicine to cure him of death; at this moment time stopped. On the Metta Map, when time stops, all reality fades and tragedy becomes a “triangle of trauma.”

After Kisagotami lost touch with reality, she encountered a wise man who told her to go see the Buddha. She went before the Buddha and begged him to restore her child to life. The Buddha, in his commitment to relieve suffering, and with great compassion and understanding, said, “If you bring me some mustard seeds from a house where there has never been a death, then I will do as you ask.” Inviting Kisagotami to action, while knowing that it is not possible, the Buddha sent her forth. On the Metta Map we see that he has great compassion for her vulnerability, and trusts in the wisdom of his Dharma.

Kisagotami was full of hope as she went from house to house in search of mustard seeds. The people were more than willing to give her the seeds, but when she asked if there had been a death, at each house she was told that indeed there had been. Soon she realized that most families had mustard seeds, but none had not been visited by death. With this insight and understanding she re-defines her rules, develops compassion for herself and others, and is able to move from pain so severe that time stops and develops a new commitment to living. She has broken her “triangle of trauma.”

At this point, Kisagotami perceived the impermanent nature of human existence, and asked the Buddha for ordination as a *bhikkhuni*. With the Buddha’s energetic help, and through her meditation practice, she attains arahantship. Looking at the Metta Map, we see that Kisagotami deepened her commitment, expanded her compassion, clarified her understanding, and eventually stepped off the Map into enlightenment.

The following tragic episode from modern history will illustrate another “triangle of trauma.” It will also demonstrate how the indomitable human spirit makes it possible to come out of the horror of blame, shame, and guilt, and become iconic heroes.

The “House of Sharing” is the home in Seoul, South Korea, that was founded in 1992 for the living survivors of the comfort women who were forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese armed forces during World War II. There are currently nine women in residence.

On the Metta Map, before coming forward these women lived on the far right hand side in the fear of societal rules, and were abandoned into emotional disconnection. They had zero tolerance for themselves, for their perpetrators, and for the society that had rejected them. The world of shame where time had stopped for sixty years made healing not possible. The vectors of rules, emotional

disconnection, zero tolerance, and the anchor of time stops created a “triangle of trauma” for these unfortunate women.

These nine amazing women represent an unknown number of survivors who are still alive. They stepped out of the shadows and into a renewed commitment to life. Through the support of various Buddhist organizations, they are no longer standing alone. They now have compassion for themselves and their sisters around the world, they receive expressions of compassion from their visitors, and they trust and believe that their story is being told. They have shattered the “triangle of trauma” that held them in the grip of lonely, hopeless suffering for 60 years.

These nine women were able to think about things differently, and now understand that their life has meaning and purpose. They have become a voice against sexual slavery around the world, with the intention that such an atrocity should never happen again.

The *balmoni*, or grandmothers, of the House of Sharing have stepped into the 21st century in their endeavor to share their story, and they even have a Facebook page that features the art they produce as a method of therapy, and which screams of their suffering. Every Wednesday at noon they show up to protest at the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, believing that their voices have meaning and are heard. They are heroes in old age.

The women of the House of Sharing broke their “triangle of trauma” and now walk the middle path of the Metta Map in commitment to life, compassion for themselves and others, and understanding that their life has meaning. They are role models for all of us.

Regrettably, the plight of the *balmoni* is not a unique historical artifact; “triangles of traumas” continue to exist in every corner of the world, whether it is child soldiers, political prisoners, trafficked women and children, victims of domestic violence, or forced laborers. We all know too many stories, and we must not forget them or be frightened by them. It is our intention that the example of the compassion of the Buddha can be nurtured for the relief of suffering beings everywhere.

Gender, Buddhism and Education: Dhamma and Social Transformation Within the Theravada Tradition

Emma Tomalin

This paper is a condensed version of a chapter in a forthcoming book, *Gender, Religion and Education in a Post-Modern World*. In this paper, we will explore the role that Buddhism plays in maintaining gender disparity in education, as well as promoting agendas for reform. Our focus is on three “types” of interrelated education that have a relevance to contemporary Buddhist practice and societies: the role of education within a monastic setting; the significance of religious education within lay Buddhism; and the role that Buddhist education can play in social transformation. In particular, our aim is to reflect upon the ways in which each of these types of education are gendered and the implications of this for female Buddhists, both in terms of their spiritual as well as their social development. While these three aspects of education are relevant across different Buddhist traditions and within different Buddhist locations, we will only consider them within Theravada Buddhism, and will particularly focus on women’s experiences in Thailand and Cambodia.

In this paper, we argue that although education plays an important role within Buddhist traditions and the aim of Buddhist teachings is to educate the individual, whether male or female, to overcome suffering (*dukkha*), in practice, women have had less opportunity to learn and practice the Dhamma. We argue that this has nothing to do with women’s ability to practice Buddhism, but instead can be seen as part of a trajectory found in many religious traditions whereby women are often denied access to institutions that are typically occupied by men. Moreover, since Buddhist women in many contexts are not in a position to undertake serious textual scholarship that aims to uncover gender bias and promote interpretations that are more gender equal, the patriarchy within the lived tradition remains largely unchallenged. An important element of this paper is the exploration of different discourses about the role of *bhikkhuni* and *mae chi*, through an examination of their relationship to monastic and lay female education. Ultimately, we ask, what is the relationship between this reassertion of women’s traditional ordination rights and female empowerment through education?

Buddhism, Gender, and Education within Thai Monastic Settings

Until relatively recently, girls in Thailand have experienced an educational disadvantage compared to boys, evidenced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).¹ Although the UNDP states that Thailand has already achieved one of the Millennium Development Goals in relation to education and is highly likely to achieve the other,² the quality of educational provision is currently a concern, as is the provision of education for children in the poorest households. Several scholars, both Thai and Western, have implicated Buddhism as one explanatory factor for the historical inequality between genders, particularly in the poorest areas.³ While young boys were able to spend time living in temples (*wats*) as “temporary monks,” where they received a free religious (Dhamma) and general education, this opportunity was denied to girls. Ordination as a “temporary monk” continues to be an important Thai rite of passage for young men and brings with it social merit as well as additional educational and spiritual advantages, over and above those provided by the state. As this opportunity is not afforded to girls, the result is that poor girls have a more limited choice of educational (and spiritual) guidance and arguably have a greater responsibility to support the family financially. Here we explore further how there has been an influx of poor, rural girls migrating to urban areas, such as

Bangkok, in order to provide for their extended families, some working in the sex trade.

The Thai activist Ouyporn Khuankaew makes a similar point when she argues that:

The number of prostitutes in Thailand is almost equal to the number of monks. If young, rural girls could be given the same opportunity as the boys to enter a monastic life, they would have access to education and at the same time be able to repay spiritual gratitude to their parents. These opportunities could provide girls and women with proper monastic education and spiritual guidance so they can become important spiritual guides for the rural folks, particularly other women and girls. Due to male dominance within Thai Buddhism, however, girls and women have been deprived of such an opportunity. Consequently, they have been victims of different forms of violence against girls and women, such as domestic violence, rape and forced prostitution.⁴

However, why would poor families prefer a monastic education for their daughters compared to a “free” state education? This argument relies on the assumption that a monastic education would have added value for poor girls, since it also has implications for the trade-off between schooling and migration. While Khuankaew does not fill in the gaps here, her case would seem to rely on the fact that currently poor girls are denied the same opportunities as poor boys to enter the monastery, if they should choose to, and also that, if this were an option for girls, is it likely that some poor families would choose it, due to the considerable religious merit and prestige gained through this particular educational route.

The debate about girls being able to enroll as temporary monks in Thailand is often linked to discussions about the revival of the *bhikkhuni* ordination. It is argued that the creation of a respected and recognised community of fully ordained female monastics in Thai Buddhism could eventually enable the institutionalization of education within the temples for girls as well as boys, improving both social and spiritual outcomes for girls and women.

Support for the revival of the *bhikkhuni* ordination draws attention to the ways in which gender hierarchies within Buddhism have a broader cultural impact upon social attitudes that disempower women and limit their development. Many advocates of the *bhikkhuni* ordination consider that there is a direct relationship between the low status of women in many Buddhist traditions and the inferior status of women within Buddhist societies. Thus, the introduction of the *bhikkhuni* ordination is not only considered to be significant for religious reasons, which would benefit women who choose to embark upon this religious life, but also for its potential to empower women more broadly, including creating the conditions for girls to be able to ordain as temporary monks and thus receive increased education and social support. In our paper, and no doubt in a number of papers at this conference, the challenges that have faced supporters of the *bhikkhuni* ordination within the Theravada tradition will be explored in more detail. However, despite strong reactions, there are a growing number of Thai *bhikkhunis* committed to social and religious reform who have education at the heart of their agenda. Through support for the *bhikkhuni* ordination, they aim to enhance women’s ability to practice the Dhamma; to educate the public about women’s equality to men; and to provide lay education in temples, schools, and other social settings. However, the widespread acceptance and growth of a *bhikkhuni* movement in Thailand is still a long way off, if indeed it ever does flourish and achieve its aims. Thus, the institutionalization of education for girls as well as boys within temples via groups of supportive *bhikkhunis* is not currently realizable.

Instead, others have focused their attention upon the reform of the *mae chi* (8-10 precept nuns) institution as a vehicle for both greater access for females to education and as a means of transforming

negative stereotypes supported by the tradition. Yet, there still exists a fair amount of negative opinion about the validity of the *mae chi* institution and the ability of individual *mae chi* to be effective and respected teachers in a society where they are often portrayed as fallen and destitute women who have had no alternative but to become renunciants. However, some recent scholarship has highlighted several high-profile *mae chi* who have achieved national (and international) respect and veneration for their spiritual abilities, including from the upper echelons of the Thai Sangha.⁵ Despite this increasingly nuanced picture of *mae chi* emerging in western scholarship, there are still fewer successful *mae chi* than male monastics and the tensions regarding their social and religious status, and the subsequent impact on increasing educational opportunities for women, remains.

Thai Buddhism is not only relevant to a gender analysis of education within a monastic setting, but also more broadly, because monks play important spiritual and educational roles within many Thai lay communities. This undoubtedly has an impact on the quality of lay female religious education and typically reflects traditional patriarchal interpretations of the tradition.

Religious Education for Lay Buddhist Women

Since the educational reforms of the 1999 National Education Act, at least nine years of “secular” (non-monastic) education is mandatory for boys and girls in Thailand, although, as we have identified, there continues to be some disparity, particularly between the rich and the poor. For laywomen, particularly those from lower income families who do not wish to live as renunciants, opportunities for religious and spiritual education are likely to also be limited. The monk is the practical conduit for spiritual advancement and knowledge, both within the temple setting and through his community pastoral and educational role. Although part of his role is to liberate all sentient beings from *samsara*, it is argued that in practice, many monastics in Thailand maintain the social reproduction of patriarchal Buddhism.⁶ Because women are seen as a threat to celibacy, male monastics are prohibited from coming into direct contact with women. This ultimately minimizes their ability to provide in-depth spiritual guidance for their female lay followers. Historically, learning and translating Buddhist texts from Pali was the domain of ordained males or academics. Therefore, the choice of what to teach to the laity is likely to be subject to the interpretation of the male monks. Although Pali canonical texts are available in Thai, it is debatable how much they are read and utilized. Therefore, monks remain the main conduit for spiritual education and development and can choose to relay messages about women’s “lesser *kamma*” and status as opposed, for example, to some of the seemingly more positive messages contained within texts such as the *Therigatha*. Lucinda Joy Peach raises this issue about recent work within “religious feminism” to look for positive teachings within existing Buddhist texts and how these might be translated into practice and asks, “Who is doing the reinterpreting, and for what audience?”⁷

Although Buddhist Sunday schools do provide spiritual guidance for girls and boys, girls do not currently have universal access to the intensive Dhamma education and religious knowledge that is potentially available to boys through monasteries and (temporary) ordination. Due to the limits of the existing *mae chi* institution, this leaves laywomen in a difficult position; they do not have a clear alternative to the male monastic to provide the education, support, or merit that men are able to garner from their association with *bhikkhus*. Although McDaniel has argued that the quality and significance of educational opportunities available for boys within monasteries can be exaggerated, the everyday and practical inequality of opportunity between girls and boys remains.⁸ While *bhikkhus* are typically consulted by lay Buddhists for advice and support, cultural constraints make it difficult for women to seek spiritual and practical advice from male religious persons, particularly regarding issues of a sexual or intimate nature. Our informants in Thailand have argued strongly for the potential role that

bhikkhunis and *mae chis* could play in this regard, with suitable institutional support. In fact, many are already engaging in informal religious education and social service work with women and children who may otherwise find it difficult to consult religious figures for advice or guidance on both spiritual and practical matters.

Having looked at the role of the *bhikkhuni* and *mae chi* in monastic and lay Buddhism in Thailand, we can also see that each is tied to movements for reform that could contribute considerably to agendas for social change. Despite the unresolved issues regarding the *bhikkhuni* ordination in Theravada Buddhism, there remains a potential for Buddhist teachings and religious roles for women to be educational and transformative. In the final section of this paper, we look at the role of Buddhist women in social development, focusing on Cambodia.

Buddhist Education and Social Transformation for Women

In Cambodia, a country ravaged by war and political violence, eight- or ten-precept female monastics (*donchee*), akin to the Thai *mae chi*, are playing a role in education linked to social development. Cambodia faces significant challenges in its attempts to increase school enrollments beyond the primary level and the UNDP has identified a gender disparity in educational attainment.⁹ Cambodian women are under-represented in the public sphere, face high rates of maternal mortality and HIV infection, and experience high levels of domestic violence.¹⁰ Like neighboring Thailand, a majority of Cambodians are Theravada Buddhist. Khemacaro argues that, “Buddhism is the sole institution which cuts across the deep political divisions separating Cambodians today.”¹¹ Following the reestablishment of monastic institutions post-Khmer Rouge, a number of scholars have identified a social and educational role for Buddhism in Cambodia, particularly with and for women, arguing that it is the (female) religious practitioners that are likely to have the most trust and success.¹² One example is the Nuns and Wat Grannies breast-feeding education program. The Reproductive and Child Health Alliance (RACHA, funded by an international development organization, USAID) has worked with the Association of Nuns and Laywomen (established by the Heinrich Böll Foundation in the 1990s) to train over 2000 *donchee* and *upasikas* (Buddhist laywomen) to disseminate information to women on breastfeeding practice initially in Pursat, Siem Riep and Kampot provinces. Religious women such as the *donchee* or *upasika* are supported by development practitioners to educate women, using outreach in both public spaces (such as markets) and within homes. The effect of this grassroots health education has been an increase in the number of women likely to take up early breastfeeding practice and subsequently improve infant health.¹³ RACHA has also worked with the *donchee* and *upasika* to educate both women and men on contraception and HIV/AIDS prevention; in 2002 both programmes began expanding geographically through Cambodia.¹⁴ According to RACHA, the benefit of working with religious women is that amidst “distrust for government,” *donchee* and *upasika* are more influential as a result of their commitment to Buddhism.¹⁵

Yet, while the Association of Nuns and Laywomen, like the Institute of Thai Mae chi in Thailand, provides educational support to women in both secular and religious spheres, the level of education of the *donchee* themselves is still limited.¹⁶ As in Thailand, this has a direct impact both on their status in Cambodian society compared to the male Sangha. A *donchee* states: “Most of us are poorly educated. We have to study first, in order to be recognized as equal to monks in Cambodian society.”¹⁷ In addition, for female Buddhist practitioners, there is a tension between engagement with social work and secular educational development, and spiritual practice within a religious lineage which does not traditionally value engagement with “worldly” matters.¹⁸ However, if a balance can be achieved by improving opportunities for *donchee*, support for social and educational development may simultaneously

raise their profile and gather additional support from the wider society.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have identified some of the complexities in relation to gender, Buddhism, and education as experienced by women in Thailand and Cambodia. Buddhism provides both grounds for patriarchal values to affect women's education and life chances, but also can act as a resource to empower women in contexts where they are oppressed and disadvantaged in relation to men. This process of female "empowerment,"¹⁹ which we discuss in more depth in our forthcoming book chapter, has both religious and secular components. The three interrelated types of education (monastic, lay, and social development) that we have discussed here all have a significant impact on the life experiences of individual women and cannot be considered in isolation. Ultimately, each is tied to movements for reform that could contribute considerably to agendas for social change.

NOTES

¹ For more information on how the United Nations Development Programme rate Thailand in relation to human development and the Millennium Development Goals, see Thailand Human Development Report 2007:
http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/nationalreports/asiathepacific/thailand/THAILAND_2007_en.pdf
f. Last accessed: December 15, 2010.

² The Millennium Development Goals for education in Thailand are to (1) ensure that by 2015, boys and girls alike will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling, and (2) to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education by 2015. Thailand is seen by the UNDP to be "highly likely" to achieve the former and has "already achieved" the latter. See
http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/nationalreports/asiathepacific/thailand/THAILAND_2007_en.pdf
f. Last Accessed: December 15, 2010.

³ See Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, *Thai Women in Buddhism*. Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1991; Emma Tomalin, "The Thai *Bhikkhuni* Movement and Women's Empowerment," *Gender and Development* 14:3(2006): 385-97.

⁴ <http://www.american-buddha.com/thai.buddh.patriarchy.htm>. Last accessed: December 12, 2010.

⁵ M. Seeger, "The Changing Roles of Thai Buddhist Women: Obscuring Identities and Increasing Charisma," *Religion Compass*, 3/5(2009): 810.

⁶ Lucinda Joy Peach, "Human Rights, Religion, and (Sexual) Slavery." *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 20, 2000, pp. 65-87.

⁷ Ibid., p. 80.

⁸ J. McDaniel, "Buddhism in Thailand: Negotiating the Modern Age." in *Buddhism and World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives*, edited by S. Berkowitz. (ABC-Clio, 2006), p. 122.

⁹ UNDP (2008) 'How Does Cambodia Measure Up Now?'

Online: <http://www.un.org.kh/undp/CMDGs/How-Does-Cambodia-Measure-up-now.html>.

Last Accessed: November 24, 2009, 08.47am.

¹⁰ R. Surtees, "Negotiating Violence and Non-Violence in Cambodian Marriages," in *Gender and Development* 11:2 (2003) 38.

¹¹ Y. H. Khemacaro, "Steering the Middle Path: Buddhism, Non-violence, and Political Change in Cambodia," Conciliation Resources. 1998. Online: www.c-r.org/our-work/accord/cambodia/middle-path.php. Last Accessed: February 12, 2008.

¹² S. Suksamran, "Buddhism, Political Authority and Legitimacy in Thailand and Cambodia," in *Buddhist Trends in Southeast Asia*, edited by T. Ling (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993), p. 102.

¹³ B. T. Crookston, K. A. Dearden, K. Chan, D. D. Stoker, "Buddhist Nuns on the Move: An Innovative Approach to Improving Breastfeeding Practices in Cambodia," *Maternal and Child Nutrition* 3:1(2007) 10-24.

¹⁴ K. Kong, T. Savery, and M. Stewart Titus, "Member Voices: EngenderHealth Makes Creative Strategies in Low-Resource Settings," HealthLink, 2002, p. 114. Online: <http://www.globalhealth.org/publications/article.php?id=714>. Last Accessed: November 24, 2009, 08.44am.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Heike Loschmann. "The Revival of the Don Chee Movement in Cambodia," in *Innovative Buddhist Women: Swimming Against the Stream*, edited by Karma Lekshe Tsomo (Surrey, U.K.: Curzon Press, 2000).

¹⁷ Quoted by Loschmann 2000.

¹⁸ E. Guthrie, "Khmer Buddhism, Female Asceticism and Salvation," in *History, Buddhism and New Religious Movements in Cambodia*, edited by J. Marston and E. Guthrie (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004).

¹⁹ Whilst we acknowledge the complexities surrounding the term "empowerment," in this paper, we use the definition provided by Rowlands (1998): "...women increasing their ability to act, to perceive themselves as capable, to hold opinions, to use time effectively, to control resources, to interact with others, to initiate activities, to respond to events." J. Rowlands, "A Word of the Times, But What Does it Mean? Empowerment in the Discourse and Practice of Development," in *Women and Empowerment: Illustrations of the Third World*, edited by H. Afshar (Basingstoke, U.K.: Macmillan, 1998), p. 23.

Buddhist Nuns and Educational Reform in Thailand

Monica Lindberg Falk

This paper focuses on gender and Buddhism in Thailand. In 1990, a Buddhist “nunnery” and branch of the Thai Buddhist Institute opened an unaccredited school and provided education for Thai girls and *mae chiis*. Since then, Thai girls and *mae chiis* (Buddhist nuns) have had the opportunity to study secondary education through a Buddhist ordained community.

In 1999, the Thai government decided on a new educational policy. The reformed Thai education system, enacted in 2003, with nine years compulsory education for both boys and girls, has decreased the gender gap in education that previously favored boys over girls. In spite of the fact that the Thai government now provides education for Thai girls, the “nunnery” school has not become redundant. This paper explores why the school has increased its number of pupils from approximately 50 in 1998 to more than 300 in 2009 after the educational reform was implemented. The school has developed into an accredited school that offers preschool, primary, and secondary school for girls. The transition into an accredited school has brought many changes for the *mae chiis*’ temple. The much larger school has brought increased responsibilities and new challenges for the ordained community, which is addressed in this paper.

The ethnography for the paper is based on material collected between 1997 and 2009. The methods used for gathering information have been participant observation and interviews. I conducted fieldwork at the *samnak chii* in 1997 and 1998 and at that time there were approximately 59 *mae chiis* and 47 *dhammajarinees*. The *dhammajarinees* studied secondary education and Buddhism at the Dhammajarinee School. The schoolgirls came from different parts of Thailand and they stayed for either two or four years at the school. Also, older *mae chiis* had a chance to study secondary education at the school.¹

Buddhist School for Girls

The Dhammajarinee School was established in 1990 at an autonomous Buddhist *samnak chii* (Buddhist “nunnery”) and was the first school for girls in Thailand established by *mae chiis*. The Dhammajarinee School was an unaccredited school for fourteen years and during that period the *mae chiis* taught most of the subjects. In 2004 it became an accredited school and the majority of the *mae chiis* did not have the required teachers’ training certificates and were, therefore, only qualified to teach Buddhist subjects. Nevertheless, the *mae chiis* are now carrying out administration work and the lay teachers work under their supervision. The *mae chiis* at the *samnak chii* keep their monastic lifestyle and follow the same regulations and daily routines as they have always done. However, the school has gone through major changes. In the unaccredited school the girls studied only secondary education at the *samnak chii*. In 2004 the Dhammajarinee School opened a pre-school and primary school. Accredited and unaccredited schools do not share an identical curriculum with accredited schools covering more subjects. Therefore, the girls do not have as much time as they had before to work on vegetable gardening or with handicrafts.

Khun Mae Prathin, the director of the school, considers it the school’s mission to provide education for deprived girls since society still does not support low-income girls in the way that the government supports poor boys through their educational opportunities at the temples. For the first five years the Dhammajarinee School survived from donations made by lay people, individual

monks and *mae chiis*. The school is still dependent on private donations, but the government contributes more to the school's finances than it did when it was an unaccredited school. The support from the government covers about 25 percent of the expenses and the remaining seventy-five percent of the expenditure comes from private donations.² It is costly to run a boarding school, but the school has become well known over the years and more people are making donations. Khun Mae highlights the importance of the *mae chiis*' work and engagement in the Dhammajarinee School. She says that the *mae chiis* represent continuity and sustainability and that they are imperative to the Dhammajarinee School's existence. According to her, the Dhammajarinee School would not survive without the *mae chiis*' work.

The Education Reform

With the Thai government's changes of the education system, girls and boys now have the same right to free education. The legal obstacles to a fair education have finally been removed for girls in Thailand. Basic education in Thailand is divided into six years of primary schooling (*pathom* 1–6) followed by three years at lower secondary (*mattayom* 1–3) and three years at upper secondary (*mattayom* 4–6). In 1999 the government initiated an educational reform and it has been a lengthy process to implement it throughout the country. The education system is based around nine years of compulsory education (enacted in 2003) with twelve years of free basic education guaranteed by the constitution. The pre-primary school is for children between three and five years old, primary school (grade 1–6) is for children between six and eleven years, lower secondary school (grade 7–9) is for children between twelve and fourteen years, upper secondary school (grade 10–12) and vocational and technical education are for children between fifteen and seventeen years.³

Although the government's policy is to provide education for all Thai girls, the Dhammajarinee School run by the *mae chiis* is still a necessity. The number of girls who are studying at the school has actually increased dramatically during the last decade. Khun Mae states that the reasons why girls are seeking education at Dhammajarinee School have changed in nature. Poverty is still a main reason since it is not enough that the girls have access to free teaching because there are also costs for school uniforms, books, school utensils and travel, which are too expensive for many poor families. Moreover, letting a child continue studying means that the child does not contribute to the family's economy and the family has to pay for all the expenses and financially support the child, which is beyond what many families can afford.

As already mentioned, the number of girls who study at the Dhammajarinee School has increased dramatically. Today the *samnak chii* runs a nursery, a pre-primary school and they also provide education at primary and lower secondary levels. The school is planning to offer upper secondary education in the near future. The girls who are studying at upper secondary school are doing so at schools in the vicinity of *samnak chii* by means of the *samnak chii*'s expenses.

The transition from unaccredited to accredited has resulted in a number of important organizational changes for the Dhammajarinee School. In the unaccredited Dhammajarinee School the *mae chiis* carried out most of the teaching but in the accredited Dhammajarinee School most of the teachers are lay persons. The reason for that change is that an accredited school requires teachers who are formally qualified and most of the *mae chiis* are not officially qualified to teach secular subjects. Therefore, the *mae chiis* now teach the Buddhist subjects, having handed over the secular teaching to lay teachers. The school strives to have one teacher per ten pupils and in August 2009 twenty-five lay teachers were teaching at the school.

Dhammajarinee School – Still a Refuge for Girls

The Dhammajarinee School is still a refuge for girls. In the end of the 1990s the majority of the students came from poor villages in the northeastern and central provinces and they stayed at the nunnery for either two or four years. In 1998, secondary education was still out of reach for girls without financial means and the Dhammajarinee School became the only chance for them to continue their education. Girls who had finished primary education and were eleven or twelve years old were then welcome at the school.

Information about the Dhammajarinee School has spread through the *mae chiis*' networks throughout the country and through media. The school's reputation is that of a safe place for girls to study. Khun Mae and other *mae chiis* from the *sammak chii* are invited to schools and local Buddhist temples in far away villages to introduce the Dhammajarinee School. A few years ago a Buddhist monk accompanied a group of thirteen Karen girls who were going to commence their studies at the Dhammajarinee School.⁴ When the girls returned home they told their parents and the other villagers about their positive experiences from studying at the Dhammajarinee School and as a result more girls applied to study at the school. In 2009 there were approximately forty Karen girls studying at the Dhammajarinee School.

In alignment with the situation in the 1990s when the school was established, many of the girls come from the northeast of Thailand and today the monks at the local village temples are also important for introducing the Dhammajarinee School to the girls and their families. However, one striking difference is that currently many of the girls who study at the Dhammajarinee School belong to ethnic minority groups and the majority belong to the Thai-Karen and the Thai-Mon groups. Most of the Karen girls come from the north of Thailand and the Mon girls are from the same province where the *sammak chii* is located.

The education that the government provides is out of reach for many Thai children and one *mae chii* explains that accessing the education that the government offers is an obstacle for children who live in outlying regions. Many minority girls who live in remote areas cannot reach the school bus in the mornings because it would take hours to walk to the road where the bus stops and it is impossible to walk at night time.

Security for young girls is a theme that is frequently brought up in my conversations with both lay teachers and *mae chiis*. The *mae chiis* and the lay teachers are concerned about the vulnerable circumstances that many girls are placed in. Khun Mae says that the more well-known the Dhammajarinee School has become the more children in vulnerable situations are brought there. Khun Mae considers the school's mission to take care of these children and to find ways to finance the school and the living costs for the children. For her that is important not only for the children and their families but also for the very future of Thai society.⁵

The Dhammajarinee School follows the general curriculum in the Thai education system. The *mae chiis* say that the curriculum at the school has improved and they consider that to be a result of the external evaluation of the curriculum.⁶ The regulation is that those who teach at the Dhammajarinee School must have graduated in one major subject and they must have a teaching certificate most *mae chiis* do not have that.

The lay teachers that are now employed at the Dhammajarinee School have made it possible for the school to admit young children. One significant reason for the demand to accepting young children at the *sammak chii* is Thai girls' responsibility for their siblings. This became explicit by the many younger sisters that accompany older sisters to the Dhammajarinee School. Some parents require that the older daughter must take care of their younger sister/s studying at the same school.

For some girls it is a prerequisite for being able to study that they take care of their younger siblings. Khun Mae says that they do not want these girls to lose their opportunity to study, recognising that if the Dhammajarinnee School rejects them because of the girls' responsibility for their younger sisters and brothers, they would probably return home and find it difficult to finish school. Therefore, they opened a nursery to take care of children from three years old so the older sisters would have the opportunities to study.

Concluding Remarks

The Dhammajarinnee School was established at an autonomous Buddhist *sammak chii* in 1990 with the aim of helping impoverished girls attain a better future. Women's exclusion from the *sangha* made it a male privilege to attend monastery schools. Girls could receive education through the ordained (*mae chii*) community at the Dhammajarinnee School. Education has been singled out as a key factor for generating better circumstances for poor women and children the *mae chiis* had long wanted to provide schooling for girls who had no chance to further their education.

The school reform that has recently been implemented in Thailand aims to give both girls and boys access to free education. However, many girls, especially in remote areas, still have difficulties gaining admission to the government schools and that is one reason for them to leave home and study at the Dhammajarinnee School. The leading *mae chiis* at the Dhammajarinnee School state that the main reasons why most of the girls apply to the Dhammajarinnee School are a combination of social problems, poverty and difficulties in the family.

Education is expected to solve social and individual problems and is seen as the vehicle for attaining a desirable future. The curriculum at the Dhammajarinnee School follows what the educational reform prescribes. In addition to that, the school holds onto traditional schooling that values moral knowledge and discipline and the school emphasises the importance of the Buddhist teaching. To achieve basic education, instil good Buddhist manners and become a good person are perceived as an individual's safeguard, completely in line with traditional Thai social values of what is considered necessary for creating a peaceful and trouble-free society.

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¹ See Monica Lindberg Falk, *Making Fields of Merit: Buddhist Female Ascetics and Gendered Orders in Thailand* (Copenhagen/Washington: NIAS Press/University of Washington Press, 2007).

² Interview August 2009.

³ Information about the education system in Thailand please see: www.oec.go.th

⁴ About a quarter million Karen live in Thailand and is the largest "tribal" minority in Thailand. Karen has their own traditional culture. However many are today Christians due to intense Christian missionary activities. Others have become Buddhists and in Thailand they practice together with Thai people. The province where Dhammajarinnee School is located and the neighbouring province Kanchanaburi have a large Karen population.

⁵ Interview May and August 2009.

⁶ Interview April 2009.

Rujing Mao

In the early fourth century, the *bhikkhuni* lineage was transmitted to China. In the Mahayana tradition, the *bhikkhuni* monastic traditions of doctrine and discipline have been handed down from generation to generation. In this tradition, *bhikkhuni* are considered equal to monks. In particular, *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis* are on an equal footing regarding educational opportunities. *Bhikkhuni* education in China has developed greatly over the past 20 years and continues to develop. Many Buddhist universities and institutes have been constructed, such as Sichuan Bhikkhuni Buddhist College, Fujian Buddhist Nuns' College, Minnan Buddhist Nuns' College, and Wutaishan Bhikkhuni Vinaya College. This paper focuses on Minnan Buddhist Nuns' College, which has provided Buddhist education for more than 25 years and has become well-known Buddhist institutions both in China and abroad. It is a training base for local Buddhist institutions and a center for nuns training to spread the Buddha's teachings. Students at the college are well regarded by local leaders and senior nuns.

Minnan Buddhist Nuns' College was established by Bhikkhu Zhuanpeng in 1985 and is located in the vicinity of Zizulin Temple in Xiamen, Fujian Province. At a time when the status of Buddhist nuns in China was low, Bhikkhu Zhuanpeng realized that education was essential for improving the status of Buddhist nuns in society. He therefore decided to foster the construction of a college for nuns. In this paper, I examine the history and development of Minnan Buddhist Nuns' College based on documents, interviews, and first-hand observations in order to gain an understanding of its *bhikkhuni* education programs, daily practice, and social service activities.

Education for *Bhikkhunis*

Students come from many different cities and provinces to study at Minnan Buddhist Nuns' College. All the students are nuns with a high-school education, a degree of knowledge about Buddhism, strong devotion, and have been ordained for at least one year when they enter the college. Applicants are selected based on the results of an entrance exam.

Minnan Buddhist Nuns' College is mainly teaching- and learning-oriented. It offers preparatory, undergraduate, postgraduate, and exchange-student programs. Course offerings include 40 courses on Buddhism and 16 courses on liberal arts. The preparatory program is two years, the undergraduate program is four years, and postgraduate program is three years. To meet graduation requirements and receive the corresponding diplomas, students in the preparatory program must complete at least 2,000 hours of study, those in the undergraduate program must complete at least 4,400 hours, and postgraduate students must complete a further 30 credits. In addition to the academic course requirements, students must also participate regularly in Buddhist practice programs in order to graduate.

Minnan Buddhist Nuns' College offers courses in Buddhist studies, social sciences, and humanities. The main focus is Mahayana Buddhism. Courses are taught on the basic theories of the major Buddhist schools and important Buddhist scriptures: history of Buddhism in India, history of Buddhism in China, Madhyamika philosophy, Yogacara philosophy, *Lotus Sutra*, *Avatamsaka Sutra*, Zen, Pure Land Buddhism, and Vinaya. The social science and humanities courses include modern Chinese, ancient Chinese, Chinese history, Chinese philosophy, Western philosophy, politics, law, foreign languages, calligraphy, computer science, and so on. In addition to academics, the college requires

students to put the theories they have learned into practice and to maintain strict monastic discipline.¹ The nuns not only study Buddhist philosophy and culture, but also learn temple management, including how to conduct various ritual ceremonies, how to maintain financial accounts, and so on. At a minimum, students should be prepared to assume management positions at a temple after graduation. The teaching goal at the college is to prepare potential Buddhist leaders with the skills they need to promote Buddhism and to benefit humankind. The aim is to train nuns to be ethical, intelligent, well-trained, and qualified to serve the needs of Buddhism in China. Equal weight is placed on teaching and research, and the traditions of both Buddhist and secular education are upheld. To produce Buddhist students with international awareness, the college also offers courses in English, Japanese, Chinese and world history, and philosophy. To enrich the students' knowledge, each year Minnan Buddhist Nuns' College invites scholars in Buddhist circles to deliver lectures. Both at home and abroad, the college has become well-known for its educational programs.

Education is essential for nuns to improve their status in society. After more than 20 years of development in education for Chinese *bhikkhunis*, students of the college have now taken up posts both at home and abroad. These graduates receive support from society, but there is still room for improvement. The college still faces challenges, including a lack of sufficient capital investment, a lack of international programs, and few courses for laywomen. Minnan Buddhist Nuns' College has plans for an international program and exchange-student programs with other countries. At present, programs are limited to students who are *bhikkhunis* between the ages of 18 and 30. Although one course for laywomen was instituted in 1996, there are no courses for *bhikkhunis* over 30 years old, many of whom have insufficient educational background for college coursework. Solutions to these problems and future directions for further development in *bhikkhuni* education pose many difficulties. In order to improve education for *bhikkhunis*, Minnan Buddhist Nuns' College is exploring development in the following directions:

1. Developing new channels for Buddhist education and internationalizing the Buddhist studies curriculum;
2. Combining theory with practice, emphasizing the integration of teachings on history and doctrine;
3. Utilizing various teaching methods conjointly and strengthening lay Buddhist education; and
4. Promoting mutual cooperation between higher education and other educational systems.²

***Bhikkhunis'* Daily Practice**

In Minnan Buddhist Nuns' College, students come from various provinces and cities, all of them pursuing the renunciant life. They abandon all belongings to lead a life without home, family, or private property. Novices need to train in the ten precepts at least for one year before they are eligible to become postulants (*sikkhamana*) and begin intensive training in the precepts. For two years, postulants follow a preceptor-nun who prepares them to become fully ordained nuns. After obtaining the highest ordination, postulants become full members of the *bhikkhuni* order. In contrast to the Theravada tradition, at this college, students are not allowed to study the Vinaya-pitaka unless they have received the *upasampada*. Following the *Dharmagupta* school, Chinese *bhikkhunis* observe 348 precepts. Students who are *bhikkhunis* recite the monastic precepts (*patimokkha*) in the recitation hall twice a month, on the full moon and new moon days. A competent nun recites the *patimokkha* while the others listen. This is an opportunity for the *bhikkhunis* to reflect on all the rules in their code of discipline and to examine whether they have committed any offences that need to be confessed. The recitation also

ensures that the nuns do not forget the precepts or the categories to which they belong. Each nun is required to understand and memorize the precepts. One Vinaya precept (*payantika* 151) specifies that ignorance of a given rules is no excuse for a person who breaks it.³

The college asserts that “the college is like a monastery and the monastery is like a college.” Every class of nuns at the college is required to participate in a meditation course at Zizhulin Temple. They learn that Buddhism is not only about having right views, but also about having right faith and regularly practicing the Buddha’s teachings. Students pursue the study of theory and must also participate in meditation and other practices. Everyday, the student nuns are required to participate in the early morning and late afternoon chanting, and the evening recitation of *sutras*; every month, they gather to recite the name of Amitabha Buddha. During work periods, the students are divided into rotating teams for cleaning the temple, watering the flowers, and helping in the kitchen.

At the temple, all the nuns eat in the dining hall, which they call it the Five Contemplations Hall. Monastics of the Mahayana Sangha do not go for alms, because all the monks and nuns are vegetarian. Buddhist laypeople donate food and funds to support the temple. The Sangha and laypeople are taught to be mindful in developing gratitude when eating in the dining hall. When meals are served, they mindfully practice the Five Contemplations: (1) contemplation on the diligence of my practice and the enormous effort that is needed to produce and prepare the meal in front of me; (2) contemplation on the fact that I eat this meal, even though I lack thoroughly moral behavior; (3) contemplation that to avoid mental anxiety and mistakes, I must safeguard my mind from greed, hatred, and ignorance; (4) contemplating that I eat this meal as good medicine to guard myself from becoming physically weak; (5) contemplating that I receive this meal to accomplish the spread of the Buddhadharma. After these contemplations, they begin the meal.

Social Service

The Buddha taught his followers to avoid all nonvirtuous actions and to always engage in virtuous deeds. The Mahayana Buddhist traditions are based on the Buddha’s teaching to benefit others. In the Mahayana view, the ideal of benefiting others needs to be carried out in real life; otherwise, it is just an empty message. Charitable activities must be carried out conscientiously with honesty and pure motivation. These altruistic efforts must be more than mere slogans; corrupt practices must be replaced with worthy efforts for the benefit of society. Dharma masters should take the lead in these charitable activities.

On Sundays, students from Minnan Buddhist Nuns’ College engage in releasing living beings, a Buddhist ritual to express mercy and compassion for all living things. In this way, students can cultivate compassion and mercy. Many lay followers also participate in this activity, which requires large sums of money that must be raised by Dharma masters, students, and lay followers. In the early morning, the practitioners go to the market to buy many kinds of animals and take them to the sea, where they set are free. Releasing living beings is a popular ritual for Chinese Buddhists, who are strictly vegetarian, based on the Buddhist principle of no killing.

The students of Minnan Buddhist Nuns’ College also enjoy doing charitable activities on Sundays, such as helping the elderly and helping children in orphanages. The college has a charitable organization that was created by the students themselves. The students are ideally suited to providing services to the elderly, such as givin Dharma talks, home care, meal service, friendship visits, housekeeping services, information services, and so on. The *bhikkhunis* perform these services very compassionately. Because they teach Dharma and speak sympathetically with the elderly, they are easily accepted.

The students not only visit homes for the elderly to teach them Dharma, but they also collect food and money for them. They also collect money to pay the tuition fees for students in difficulty and to provide help during natural disasters, such as the tsunami in 2004 and the severe earthquake in Sichuan Province in 2008. Students usually make donations several times per month and some donate everything they have. This reflects the spirit of Mahayana *bodhisattva* practice in the world. People know about these activities and appreciate both the Bhikkhuni Sangha's outstanding religious practice and their active engagement in society.

The education programs and daily practices of the *bhikkhunis* at Minnan Buddhist Nuns' College have become well known throughout the region. In the Chinese tradition, where *bhikkhunis* are considered equal to their *bhikkhu* counterparts, *bhikkhunis* have established temples, receive both Buddhist and secular higher education, and are developing as Dharma teachers for future generations. *Bhikkhunis* who have graduated from the college go on to serve in different capacities, both in China and abroad. Whether they manage temples, lead Buddhist institutes, promote Buddhist education, pursue Buddhist studies, or are dedicated to charitable activities, all are likely to be esteemed by the wider society in which they live and work.

NOTES

¹ Minnan Buddhist Nuns' College Syllabus, Religious Culture Press, 2008, pp. 5-18.

² Based on interviews with Fayuan Shi, Wuyuan Shi, and Chaobo Shi, senior *bhikkhunis* of Minnan Buddhist Nuns' College, who are rich in educational experience.

³ Chinese *Tripitaka*, *Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo*, No. 1433.

Monastic Education for Nuns at Dong Hak Temple in Korea

Dong Geon Sunim

In the history of the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, the tradition of monastic colleges for *bhiksunis* and *sramanerikas* began in 1954 at Dong Hak Temple, located on Geryong Mountain.¹ Bhiksuni Dae Hyun Sunim, the abbess of Dong Hak Temple, established a monastic college for *bhiksunis* and *sramanerikas* with Bhiksu Kyung Bong Sunim(1885-1969) as the dean.

Dong Hak Temple has a history of 1300 years in Korea and was restored in 1864 by Bhiksu Man Hwa Bo Sun Sunim. It appears that Dong Hak Sa Temple opened a monastic college at that time, but it was for monks, not for *bhiksunis* and *sramanerikas*. Nevertheless, it laid the foundation for the founding of a monastic college for *bhiksunis* and *sramanerikas* for the first time in Korea in 1954. Dong Hak Sangha College was founded with the idea of cultivating *bhiksunis* of talent and *bhiksunis* themselves developing their own capacities. This was also the demand of a new era.

The Buddhist Purification Movement during the 1950s was an opportunity to encourage Korean *bhiksunis* to establish a monastic college for *bhiksunis* and *sramanerikas*. Because Korean *bhiksunis* were actively involved in the Buddhist Purification Movement, they realized that the *bhiksunis* of Korea were members of the Jogye Order, just like the *bhiksus*. After the Buddhist Purification Movement, Dong Hak Temple became a temple for *bhiksunis*. The early generation developed their awareness and a sense of responsibility as they gradually helped transform Dong Hak Temple into a monastic college for *bhiksunis* and *sramanerikas*.

By 1963, Bhiksu Gyeong Bong Sunim, the first dean of the college, was able to produce many graduates. Among his devoted disciples were Myo Eom Sunim, the dean of Bong Nyeong Sangha College, and Hye Seong Sunim. Myung Seong Sunim, who became the dean of Un Mun Sangha College, was trained at Dong Hak Temple when Bhiksu Seong Hyeon Sunim was the dean. In 1956, Bhiksu Myo Eom Sunim passed on his scholarship to Bhiksu Gyeong Bong Sunim. This was the first time in the history of Korean Buddhism that a *bhiksu* passed on his learning to a *bhiksuni*.

Academic Traditions of Dong Hak Sa Sangha College

Despite the dedicated efforts of the *bhiksuni* elders to cultivate young *bhiksunis* of talent, more than 20 institutes of higher education for *bhiksunis* have gradually disappeared in recent decades. This demonstrates that it is not easy for a conventional temple to maintain the tradition of Sangha education. Despite such difficulties, Dong Hak Sa Sangha College has produced 869 graduates in the 50 years since the founding of its traditional monastic college for *bhiksunis* and *sramanerikas*. This was largely achieved due to the efforts of the eleventh dean, Gyeong Bong Sunim, and the thirteenth dean, Ho Gyeong Sunim. Gyeong Bong Sunim contributed greatly to create a broad base of support to sustain Dong Hak Sa Sangha College, the first monastic college for *bhiksunis* and *sramanerikas*. From the late 1960s to the mid-1980s, Ho Gyeong Sunim spared no effort to develop Dong Hak Sa Temple as an exemplary monastic college for *bhiksunis* and *sramanerikas*.

The study programs at Dong Hak Sangha College have continued to develop up to the present day. Ho Gyeong Sunim translated *A Commentary on Yogacara* and *A Commentary on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana* in cooperation with her devoted disciples Beop Seong, Myeong Seon, Bo Ryeon, GyeongJin, Haeng O, Do Il, and Beop Song Sunim. Il Cho Sunim wrote *The Great Teaching on One Mind*, considered to be the ideological framework of required courses at traditional monastic colleges. These

scholars established the academic traditions that served as the foundation for the education system at traditional monastic colleges until the present.

Daily Life in the Monastic College

At Dong Hak Sa Sangha College, one hundred trainees observe strict discipline together in one place. After studying the traditional curriculum for four years, they become revitalized as *bhiksunis* and *sramanerikas*. Dong Hak Sangha College is very different from secular colleges in Korea in that academic affairs are based on the concept of successive classes rather than the academic year, for example, the Chi Mun class, Sah Jip class, Sah Gyo class, and Dae Gyo class. The course of study follows the guidelines set forth by the Bureau of Monastic Training in the Jogye Order. These guidelines prescribe the traditional training for the Korean Sangha and are compatible with modern education.

This educational model has certain limitations, however. In addition to extensive studies, the trainees also perform most of the tasks that are necessary for the daily life of the temple. The curriculum includes chanting and discussing the *sutras* in the traditional learning style.² The students read something that they learned during their first year in the Chi Mun class and second year in the Sah Jip class. In every class, they interpret the text and memorize it. Each year in each class, the students read and interpret individual *sutras*, then gather before class to discuss points that they have not understood. The classes continue in this way, with the students requesting the rector to explain points that they have not understood from yesterday's readings and listening to the rector's responses.

The traditional curriculum uses an exegetical method of learning, focused on subjects within the Zen school. The problem is that the traditional curriculum of at the college is not compatible with the methods of modern education. The traditional curriculum is also not suitable for laypeople, who wish to pursue their religious goals in other ways. In the college, the traditional curriculum is supplemented by some courses found in secular colleges, such as calligraphy, traditional painting (plum blossoms, orchids, chrysanthemums, and bamboo), yoga, foreign languages, and so forth. Visiting experts are invited to Dong Hak Sa Sangha College to teach these subjects.

Extracurricular Activities at Dong Hak Sa Sangha College.

Three times a year, hiking excursions are scheduled and are open to all. These activities help create harmony and unity among all the residents at Dong Hak Temple. Harmony among all the residents, including students and faculty, is emphasized as a vital aspect of traditional education for monastic colleges for *bhiksunis* and *sramanerikas*.

Festivals also have a place in the traditional curriculum. For example, the Dong Hyang Festival is an exhibition organized to display the students' accomplishment in poetry, flower arrangement, calligraphy, and traditional Asian painting of plum blossoms, orchids, chrysanthemums, and bamboo. Some works are composed by individuals and others by groups. The festival expresses the importance of harmony and balance in traditional culture.

Buddhist services are also held at prisons and army bases. Students organize Buddhist services for the guards at Daejeon Prison and at the army training center in Nonsahn City, near Dong Hak Temple. Some students in the Day Gyo class participate in these services every week. They are regarded as educational opportunities for students to broaden their understanding not only in the temple, but also in society.

Specialized Courses

Some *sramanerikas* who have completed their training at a traditional Sangha college or secular educational institution expressed interest in special courses for continually deepening their understanding of Buddhism. For this purpose, a postgraduate course was established at Dong Hak Sa Sangha College that attempts to further *bhiksunis*' educational horizons by combining the traditional Buddhist curriculum with modern studies. The eighteenth dean, Hae Joo Sunim, who is also a professor of Buddhist Studies at Dongguk University, oversaw the founding of these programs. The objective is to offer postgraduate studies in Buddhism for talented students who already have a basic Buddhist education. These programs were developed in response to the demands of *bhiksunis* who wish to educate themselves further in order to develop their abilities as Buddhists.

In all these ways, Dong Hak Sa Sangha College, the first traditional monastic college for *bhiksunis* and *sramanerikas*, keeps alive the traditional methods of *bhiksuni* education in Korean Buddhism. The college thus occupies an important place in Korean Buddhist history. At the same time, it is the birthplace of modern education for *bhiksunis* in Korea today.

NOTES

1. Korean National Bhiksuni Association ed., *The History and Culture of Monastic College for Bhiksuni*, Seoul:YemoonSeowon, 2009.
2. Korean National Bhiksuni Association ed., *The Life and Practicing Asceticism of Bhiksuni in Korea*, Seoul:YemoonSeowon, 2007.

Perceptions, Aspirations and Opportunities: Bhutanese Women and Buddhist Scholarship

Tenzin Dadon (Sonam Wangmo)

Bhutan, a small Vajrayana Buddhist kingdom nestled in the Himalayas, is a country in transition. Isolated from the rest of the world until the 1960s, the country is slowly shaking its medieval identity to embrace modernization. The country is well known for its policy of balancing economic progress with human values, grounded in Buddhist ideals, with Gross National Happiness (GNH) as a core indicator of sustainable development. To the government of Bhutan, Buddhism is now more relevant to the nation than ever, because there is growing concern that Bhutanese youth, caught between subsistence and market-based economy are degenerating into delinquency. The government, via its monastic institutions, are now reaching out to schools and tertiary educational institutions to bring Buddhism to the forefront of national education. The need for scholars in Buddhism in Bhutan is increasing, as formal studies in Buddhism are now expanding beyond the confines of monastic institutions.

This paper focuses on the role of Bhutanese women in fulfilling the aspirations of their nation and their individual aspirations for Buddhist scholarship. The key focus is on how Bhutanese women perceive Buddhism and the intellectual pursuit of Buddhist scholarship. Bhutanese society is traditionally egalitarian in almost all spheres, except in the domain of politics and religion, as far as gender is concerned. Bhutanese women have traditionally been sidelined in religious scholarship, where more opportunities were accorded to men with high intellectual credentials. This paper explores the opportunities available to Bhutanese women to pursue formal studies in Buddhism and whether or not an adequate support structure is available to Bhutanese women who seek Buddhist scholarship. Finally, the paper analyzes possible avenues for Bhutanese women scholars to contribute their expertise and knowledge in Bhutan upon completion of their formal studies in Buddhism.

This paper outlines the role of Bhutanese women in fulfilling the aspirations of their nation and their individual aspirations for Buddhist scholarship. Key areas of inquiry are the challenges faced by and opportunities available to Bhutanese nuns to pursue formal studies in Buddhism. The aim is to help improve the well-being of nuns and promote gender equality in the sphere of nuns' education in Bhutan. This paper discusses how educating nuns will help address gender inequalities and close the gaps between male and female, rural and urban, rich and poor, and literate and illiterate. In addition, it discusses how nuns contribute to national development and the preservation of cultural and spiritual values in the wider society. The education of nuns in Bhutan is an important development objective that strongly supports the goals of Gross National Happiness, a development philosophy and strategy promulgated by the former King of Bhutan, soon after his coronation in 1972. This paper discusses how supporting nuns and nunneries is an important means to ensuring that all girls and women in Bhutan are valued and have access to quality education and a fulfilling life, regardless of income, status, or geographic location.

Background

Bhutan or Druk Yul (Land of the Thunder Dragon), well known for its beautiful landscape and for its drive to achieve GNH for its citizens, is a small country nestled in the Eastern Himalayas. It is the only country in the world that recognizes Vajrayana Buddhism as its official religion. Bhutan borders the Tibet Autonomous Region to the north and India to the east, south and west. The

indigenous people of Bhutan are called Drukpas, while people of Nepali origin, who are concentrated in the southern districts of Bhutan, are called Lhotsampas, or “southerners.” The people of western Bhutan, the Ngalongpa, speak Dzongkha, which is the official language of Bhutan. Dzongkha is a modified version of the Tibetan language and uses the same writing system (*chos ke*). The people of eastern Bhutan and their language are referred to as Sharchokpa. Bhutan’s population is about 700,000.

Known as the Forbidden Land, mainly due to its geography, Bhutan was isolated for centuries. In the early 1960s, the Indian Army assisted the country to build its first north-south paved roads connecting the plains of Indian Bengal and the higher valleys of Bhutan with Paro and the capital, Thimphu. The period between 1952, when the third King, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck ascended the Dragon Throne, until his demise in 1972, marked the beginning of a new era for Bhutan. The third king instituted a modernization of Bhutan with the introduction of modern secular education, a National Assembly to decentralise political control from the capital to the rest of the 24 districts, a secular legislation and high courts, a currency (*ngultrum*), and banking and postal systems. The modernization of Bhutan that began in the early 1960s dramatically changed the lives of the Bhutanese people from medieval regionalism to modern nationhood. However, Bhutan is still a country in transition; much of rural Bhutan today still maintains a traditional subsistence-based economy, with 69 percent of the population dependent on agriculture for their livelihood.

The Bhutanese are predominantly Buddhist; the only other religion that is accepted in Bhutan is Hinduism, the religion of the people of Nepali origin. The Bhutanese display a very strong adherence to Vajrayana Buddhism, which is evident in almost every aspect of Bhutanese life. There are more than 2000 monasteries (*gompa*) and temples (*lha khang*) in Bhutan. Each village has a temple around which community life revolves. Each district (*dzong khag*) in the country has a *dzong*, a large fortress that combines a religious and secular administrative functions and serves as the seat of government for the local jurisdiction.

The great Indian saint and teacher Guru Padmasambhava (popularly known as Guru Rinpoche), who is credited with establishing Buddhism in Tibet, founded Buddhism in Bhutan in 747 CE. Guru Rinpoche, the founder of the Nyingma school of Vajrayana Buddhism in Tibet, is revered in Bhutan as a second Buddha. He is the focal point of Buddhism in Bhutan and is worshipped in almost every temple and monastery in the country. Vajrayana Buddhism became Bhutan’s state religion in the 17th century, with the founding of the Drukpa Kagyu school of Vajrayana (Tibetan) Buddhism.

The religious environment in Bhutan is a protected one, as a by-product of the theocratic state formed and dominated by the Drukpa Kagyu School. This school controls the religious affairs of the state and vehemently opposes the proliferation of other religious traditions in Bhutan, including different schools of Buddhism. The only other Vajrayana school of Buddhism in Bhutan is the Nyingma School, which is followed by the royal family of Bhutan. As a consequence, monastic institutions in Bhutan are still highly conservative and largely refuse to change to suit the needs of the people, despite the sweeping modernization that is affecting almost every sphere of the people’s lives. The ultra-conservative monastic institutions also perpetuate gender inequalities in the rigid religious environment in Bhutan, with little will to change the male-dominated status quo that has been maintained since the inception of Buddhism in Bhutan.

In 1999, a World Bank Report estimated that over 150 million children aged six to eleven years did not attend school, primarily in the developing world. Over 60 percent of children who are not in school are girls. In South Asia, there are large gender gaps and other inequities related to access to education. This occurs even though research has shown that investing in girls’ education yields higher economic and social returns than investing in boys’ education. Developing countries such as Bhutan are beginning to accept that girls’ education and women’s literacy must be factored into every

development strategy, if these strategies are to succeed and enhance the quality of life. However, there are considerable gender and geographic equity gaps in the delivery of education; the enrollment for girls is estimated at 47 percent compared to 55 percent for boys. Most parents in rural Bhutan cannot afford to send their children to school, though the cost to them is only the uniform, stationery, and basic enrollment fee.

Access to education for all is the main goal of Bhutan's education sector and the country has made substantial progress toward achieving the goal of universal access to primary education to ensure that boys and girls alike will be able to complete primary school. In response to these disparities, Bhutan's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) was developed with a focus on the education sector. The PRSP sought to improve access to primary education through the expansion of schools, particularly the network of community schools. The percentage of students who complete primary education (from pre-primary to grade 6) increased from 60.5 percent in 1996 to 69.3 percent in 2000.

Bhutan's PRSP goals are consistent with the country's Ninth Five-Year plan development objectives and the 2015 Millennium Development Goals. These are also perfectly consistent with Gross National Happiness (GNH) strategies. The Ninth Five-Year plan of June 2008 emphasized the important role education in the achievement of GNH. The policy objectives cover all levels and sectors of education. Objectives include providing support for early childhood care, enhancing the enrollment of children aged six to twelve, increasing access, and enhancing the literacy rate from 54 percent to 80 percent by 2007 as part of the broader goal of ensuring lifelong education for all citizens. The only flaw in the Ninth Plan lies in its failure to recognize the important role of nuns and nunneries in promoting girls' education, women's literacy, and GNH.

The Role and Status of Bhutanese Nuns

The Eight Heavy Rules for nuns (*gurudharmas*) in the Buddhist monastic discipline (Vinaya) is largely viewed by Buddhist scholars as the root cause for the subordination of nuns in Buddhist monastic institutions. According to Kim Gutschow: "The first and foremost of these eight rules dictates that a nun who has been ordained a hundred years must bow down to a monk ordained for only a day." This rule effectively seals the fate of Buddhist nuns, as it is viewed as an official endorsement of the lower status of nuns in comparison to monks and a justification for the subordination of nuns by monks. As a consequence, many forms of discrimination can be observed in the monastic realm in the Himalayas; for example, the monastic seating order is governed by the clear precedence of males over females and, secondarily, by seniority or office. The subordinate position of Buddhist nuns in the Himalayas in relation to monks is thus institutionalized. Examples of discrimination include lack of access to Buddhist education, the right to perform rituals, and forced labor. In extreme cases, nuns are even subjected to physical and sexual abuse.

Himalayan Buddhist women view the female body as a punishment for previous misdeeds and women's specific forms of suffering must be endured without complaint. A common Bhutanese saying, "We women, the enemy is our body," speaks volumes about Bhutanese women's view of their female existence. Women are considered impure by virtue of biological processes such as menstruation and childbirth. In Tibetan Buddhist ideology, women, corpses, outcastes, adultery, children, death, menstruation, urine, faeces, sweat, blood, pus, phlegm, spit, hair, skin, fingernails, and placentas are all regarded as potent impurities.

The Bhutanese view of women as beings of lesser birth – impure, miserable, and innately sinful – has its roots in Bhutanese myths of origin and the biographies of religious leaders. Vajrayana Buddhism repeatedly uses symbolic violence to subdue the dangerous and primordial female energy of

the landscape, which is evident in many origin stories from various parts of Bhutan. Many of these stories, for example, from Menchari, Haa, and Dungsam, revolve around a strong male character, usually a highly realised Buddhist master, monk, or local hero who subdues a demoness, as in the story of Masang of Eastern Bhutan.¹

Bhutanese oral narratives, proverbs, poetry, drama, songs, and dances are often filled with sexual innuendos, mocking the vulnerability of the female body and highlighting the sexual prowess of Bhutanese men as a means to control women. Biographies of famous Buddhist masters often portray women, including nuns, as wicked and morally loose characters, in contrast with men who uphold religious values, thereby saving the people from moral decadence. Nuns are hardly mentioned in religious biographies or oral stories, but when they are mentioned, they are portrayed as killers or intellectual inferior characters who need male figures to liberate them from the cyclic existence of *samsara*. These biographies suggest that women are unable to attain enlightenment on their own. For example, there is the belief that in order to attain enlightenment, a woman needs to be reborn as a man first. These types of beliefs perpetuate nuns' subordinate position in the monastic sphere.

Challenges Faced by Bhutanese Nuns

Girls and women in Bhutan seek monastic life as a peaceful, selfless, and spiritual alternative to worldly pursuits. They are inspired by the belief that, as nuns, they can contribute to the well being and happiness of all sentient beings through direct action or, at the very least, through their prayers. There are also those in the nunneries who have come purely for refuge from extreme poverty, overwhelming social challenges, loss of family, and deprivation. Many have also joined the nunneries in search of educational alternatives, and many more will continue to do so. While a few of them come from the middle class, the majority are from poor homes and receive no support of any kind from their families. Life for most of Bhutan's nuns is very harsh. Most nunneries are located in very remote areas where there is no access to proper roads. The nunneries often lack clean water, electricity, bathrooms for sanitation, and adequate nutrition. If a nun becomes ill, she often must walk for three hours or more to reach the nearest health center. Basic living conditions are usually very poor. Nuns often lack basic essentials, such as a dry rooms for sleeping, studying, and daily meditation practice. The structures of many nunneries are seriously dilapidated and some are unsafe.

Nuns lack the ordination status and the training to perform certain religious rites and rituals in Vajrayana Buddhism. From the Vinaya (code of monastic discipline) perspective, nuns in the Tibetan (Vajrayana) tradition are not fully ordained nuns (Tib. *gelongma*; Skt. *bhikshunis*), but are novice nuns (Tib: *getsulma*; Skt: *sramanerika*). They are ordained by monks with full monastic ordination (Tib: *gelong*; Skt. *bhikshu*), rather tht by *bhikshunis* as prescribed in the Vinaya, or monastic code of discipline. Therefore, the nuns belong neither to a Bhikshuni Sangha nor the Bhikshu Sangha; hence, their monastic status is lower than that of monks. This situation creates space for the subordination of nuns and a loss of opportunities to perform religious rites and rituals. For example, Himalayan nuns study the most esoteric tantric doctrines, but are not authorized to transmit them to their students. In fact, there are neither teachings nor lineages that are passed down by women and no famous female adepts in the monastic realm. Laypeople scramble to seek initiations and blessings from incarnate lamas (*trulku*) and other "high *lamas*," because they believe that the efficacy is greater. Therefore, "Nuns and laywomen remain marginalized and associated with lesser Tantric potency. Although Tantric ideology rejects discrimination, its practices have sustained a real gender duality."²

Opportunities and Support Structure for Bhutanese Women Seeking Buddhist Scholarship

Before the introduction of modern secular education in Bhutan, the monastic education system, which provided Buddhist education, “was accessible only to monks and a few privileged families. Women were excluded, with the exception of a few nuns.” Nuns in Bhutan did not receive the same educational opportunities as the monks. There were no study programs whereby nuns could learn Buddhism and realize the highest teachings. At best, nuns were only able to conduct prayers and recite *mantras*, without being able to understand what they meant. Nuns and laywomen who wanted to learn Buddhism had to travel to India or Nepal, where study programs are available to them. The gender disparities in Bhutan in terms of Buddhist education are evident even from the time of Dorje Lingpa in 1370 CE. Dorje Lingpa, considered one of the five great “treasure revealers” (*tertön*) in the Nyingma tradition and an important Dzogchen master by the Bonpo tradition, noted that nuns’ Buddhist knowledge was extremely poor. When a group of nuns in Punakha requested him to give religious instruction (*dampa*), it is said that he felt pity for them, due to their lack of privilege, and agreed to teach them. The situation has improved slightly since then, with the introduction of study program for the nuns initiated by Ashi Tsering Yangdon Wangchuk, the Queen Mother of Bhutan, under the Bhutan Nuns’ Foundation which was founded in 2009. However, most of the nuns in Bhutan still do not have access to Buddhist education.

Access to education must commensurate with other aspects of nuns’ religious life. Many Bhutanese nuns are confined to doing chores, which effectively limits their potential and spiritual growth. They serve monks by performing the menial chores and other services, without compensation. Deprived of access to Buddhist scholarship, nuns willingly cook and tend to abbots and teachers in return for religious instruction. In the Himalayan region, parents generally benefit from the labor of daughters they send to the nunnery. Nuns are in constant demand as workers by members of their natal families, their nunneries, and monasteries, which prevents many nuns from fulfilling their ritual duties, let alone securing a Buddhist education. To ignore their family’s demands means losing their means of subsistence. Neglecting their responsibilities to the community of nuns may incur disciplinary action or even expulsion. Nuns serve monks as a means to earn merit and status, which is naturally higher than serving lay villagers or even their fellow nuns. The Buddha intended the relationship between the two orders to be that of elder brothers and younger sisters, all sharing the same essential status as children of the Buddha. However, nuns in all Buddhist traditions and societies continue to serve monks, often without regard for their own welfare.

Unlike the monasteries for men and boys, who are the beneficiaries of state or private support, nuns and nunneries in Bhutan receive no government funding. Private and community support is also extremely limited, leaving many nunneries vulnerable and neglected. It is sad that so little of nuns’ potential to serve society and contribute to its collective happiness is ever realized. That such a paradoxical situation should prevail in a country that prides itself on an absence of gender bias is inexplicable. Overall, almost none of Bhutan’s nunneries provide a proper learning environment. The nuns have great potential and a passion to receive a good education at their nunneries, but the nunneries have no standardized curriculum or system of evaluation. Above all, they have no qualified teachers who are committed or qualified to give them a proper education, either for spiritual enrichment or for a productive lay life, should they leave the nunnery.

Bhutanese Nuns and National Aspirations

Since the 1990 World Conference on Education for All, it has become widely accepted that

education for girls has a profound effect on lowering maternal and infant mortality rates and reducing rates of fertility. Scholars have established an equally strong correlation between schooling for women and children's learning opportunities. They contend that the intergenerational benefits of schooling for women are considerably higher than those for men. Improving girls' education and women's literacy provides enormous benefits to individuals and families. As a result, literacy for women and girls has become a major focus for governments in many developing countries. Bhutan's literacy policy was conceived and developed to complement its overarching GNH philosophy for development. While the GNH goals support education and equity, Bhutan, like many other developing countries, still has much work to do to attain gender equity in educational access and learning outcomes.

Improving nuns' living conditions and education will greatly contribute to Bhutan's drive to achieve "Education for All" within the framework of GNH. A significant number of young women in Bhutan have been nuns at some stage of their life. Consequently, it is critically important that this group receive proper attention. Nuns also play a crucial role in preserving Bhutan's tradition and culture, and are thus crucial to achieving GNH. In essence, this philosophy is all about balancing material wants with spiritual needs. A woman who has spent some part of her life pursuing the spiritual path is likely to live a life of moderation and contribute to the happiness of others, even in a world where consumeristic values prevail. Throughout the country, nuns serve as role models for women at the grassroots. This is especially significant now, as outside influences severely affect traditional values in Bhutan. Helping nuns will benefit all women and girls in Bhutan, especially in rural areas.

Despite the cultural preservation component of GNH, the younger generation – Bhutan's future leaders – are overwhelmingly getting caught up in modernization and Westernization. As a result, it has become more important than ever to support spiritual practitioners who work hard to maintain traditional values and spiritual harmony. Bhutan's culture and traditions are a priceless treasure to be passed on to the younger generation to help them succeed in, and not be overwhelmed by, a rapidly changing world. If the ability of nuns and others to support cultural preservation is not recognized, then the philosophy of GNH may remain merely a dream.

Bhutanese Women's Aspirations for Scholarship and Avenues for National Development

In Bhutan, there are several thousand nuns, living either inside or outside nunneries. Recent estimates indicate that many women between the ages of 12 and 50 have attended a nunnery as a form of traditional learning. Many younger women join the nunneries as an alternative means of achieving an education. A significant number of girls become nuns because their parents could not afford to send them to secular schools. Some girls who drop out of the formal school system later join nunneries in hopes of pursuing a traditional education. Others join because they wish to follow the spiritual path and live a life of meditation, devotion, Buddhist studies, peace, and harmony. Finally, some women join a nuns' community later in life, seeking learning and devotion after fulfilling their household responsibilities. Overall, women, both young and old, join nunneries because they are passionate about studying Buddhism and wish to live a peaceful and meaningful life that brings balance and wisdom in a rapidly changing, increasingly unsustainable world.

In contrast to formal education, nunneries provide women from all walks of life with opportunities that are not limited by age or learning capacity. If nunneries provided quality education, many girls and young women would become empowered to contribute more, as teachers in their nunneries and as social workers in their villages. Because nuns are often close to their communities, both psychologically and physically, supporting nuns' education will maximize the social capital, enhance the role of women in development, and help to achieve GNH. The promotion of nuns'

education and recognition of their role in Bhutanese society is critical to strengthening the sustainable development of Bhutan. These factors, combined with the need to empower women in general, demand that the education of nuns be given urgent attention. The benefits of nuns' education will greatly outweigh the costs. Education for nuns is therefore vital to the success of GNH and Bhutan's development goals.

NOTES

¹ *Masang* in Sharchokpa means a man with extraordinary physical strength.

² Kim Gutschow, *Being a Buddhist Nun: The Struggle for Enlightenment in the Himalayas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 233.

Ong Yee Choo

In this presentation, I will share the story of an extraordinary nun who was very dear to me, my grandmaster Bhiksuni Zhaode. Bhiksuni Zhaode began her nunhood as a humble *zhaigu* (“vegetarian woman”), then went on to become a revered *bhikkhuni*. At a time when Sakyadhita is promoting *bhikkhuni* ordination in traditions where it is absent, my grandmaster’s story of transformation from a Buddhist nun with an ambiguous monastic status to a full-fledged *bhikkhuni* is fascinating and an important piece of Buddhist women’s history. It is, however, a very difficult story to tell, for my grandmaster has suffered from dementia for many years and I could only rely on the retelling of her life story by elders in our nunnery to complete this paper. Precisely because of this difficulty, I feel that it is urgent to tell her story before it is too late. I will first give a short introduction on her life and then discuss her life story in the Malaysian context.

The Life of Bhiksuni Zhaode

I was adopted into Bhiksuni Zhaode’s nunnery as a child; this is why I call her my grandmaster. Born in rural Guangdong Province, China, on the June 26, 1926, my grandmaster was named as Zhong Fenhua. In 1927, while still an infant, her parents took her and her younger sister and immigrated to Malaysia. They first went to Perak and then to He Fong, before eventually settling in Ipoh. It is said that there the Zhong sisters encountered “spiritual friends.” At the young age of twenty, Zhong Fenhua and her younger sister vowed to keep a vegetarian diet. Their mother soon joined them. The Zhong sisters and two like-minded women then established a humble *zhajijiao* worshiping place.

The term *zhajijiao* is used for popular Chinese religious sects that may or may not follow a celibate lifestyle, but keep the five basic Buddhist precepts and a vegetarian diet. It is believed that *zhajijiao* (“vegetarian teachings”) can be traced back to Patriarch Luo (*luo zu*) who lived and taught in the second half of the 15th century in China. From his teachings, numerous religious sects emerged that were later labeled *zhajijiao*.¹ In her famous study, “Marriage Resistance in Rural Kwantung,”² Marjorie Topley mentions that women who resisted marriage in Guangdong Province of China might join places of worship associated with *zhajijiao* that were known as vegetarian halls (*zhaitang*). Vegetarian halls of Xiantian sect (Xian Dadao) had particular appeal for women because its “highest deity is a “mother goddess” Moreover, the religion stressed sexual equality....”³ Women who joined *zhajijiao* were generally referred to as *zhaigu* (vegetarian women). By becoming a *zhaigu* of the Xiantian sect, my grandmaster was following an old Chinese tradition that allowed women to live in ascetic lifestyle rather than becoming a wife.

The *zhajijiao* place of worship that my grandmaster and her *zhaigu* sisters set up was called Guanyin Hall. Guanyin is the Chinese female form of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara.⁴ Topley argues that the popular Chinese version of Guanyin’s story contributes to women’s resistance to marriage; Guanyin “is popularly believed to have been a princess who became a nun over her parents’ objections,” thus lending credence to beliefs “that refusing to marry is not morally wrong and even that religion can help those brave enough to resist.”⁵ It is an interesting suggestion, but no one in our nunnery would connect the name Guanyin Hall to a resistance to marriage. We believe that the name was derived from an older vegetarian hall in Singapore through which my grandmaster and her three *zhaigu* sisters received initiation into *zhajijiao*.

Perhaps reflecting the popularity of Guanyin worship among the Chinese, the chapter on Guanyin in the *Lotus Sutra* (*Pumen Pin*, the Universal Door of Guanyin Bodhisattva⁶) was one of the main texts chanted and studied at the Guanyin Hall. In addition to this Buddhist text, another main text that was chanted and studied at the Guanyin Hall was a Daoist text called *Beidou Jing*. This reflects the long scholarly debate over whether *zhajijiao* can be seen as a form of Buddhism, for the practice and doctrines of *zhajijiao* integrate elements from both Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions. The practices at the Guanyin Hall during the early days certainly reflected this ambiguity.

Some have suggested that women become nuns not out of religious motives, but for economic reasons. However, economics could not have been the motivation for my grandmaster and her *zhaigu* sisters becoming nuns, because there was no economic benefit for them to gain by becoming *zhaigu*. During the early days at Guanyin Hall, conditions were extremely difficult. The so-called “hall” was just a tall simple shack, with nothing but a small Guanyin shrine inside. Severely impoverished, Bhiksuni Zhaode awoke before sunrise and headed for the local bazaar to beg for leftovers from vegetable sellers and then brought these leftovers back to the hall to cook. The nuns also had to work for long hours in their vegetable garden, since the produce from the garden was an important source of food for them. They were too poor to afford cooking fuel, so they had to walk for miles to collect firewood. To meet their daily expenses and raise the children that they had adopted, they earned a very small income by performing religious services and sewing funeral clothes. Because the Guanyin Hall was situated on ground that was lower than the nearby river, flooding was a common occurrence. To solve the problem permanently, Bhiksuni Zhaode led the temple residents and devotees to the river and carried back river sand to raise the elevation of the temple grounds. Life like this continued for many years. Some of the *zhaigu*, for various reasons, left the community, but Bhiksuni Zhaode persisted.

As for life inside the Guanyin Hall, it is said that Bhiksuni Zhaode was quite strict. She did not hesitate to punish disciples who had committed wrongdoings. Kneeling for long hours or transcribing religious texts were the usual forms of punishment. At the same time, she was also loving and attentive to other people’s needs. She established the tradition of saving ten percent of the offerings from every religious service performed at the temple from the beginning of the Chinese New Year until the twentieth day of the seventh month of the Chinese Lunar calendar. After a big religious service on that day, she would distribute those savings to the needy. This practice is still observed at the temple today.

Meanwhile, the Sino-Japanese war and the civil war in China continued to produce incessant upheavals in China. Many monks fled China at that time. In Taiwan, these monks helped bring about reforms in Buddhism⁷ and the same was true for Buddhism in Malaysia. My grandmaster was attracted to the sermons given by monks who had recently fled China, such as Bhiksu Quanhui (1926-)⁸ and Bhiksu Jingkong (1927-).⁹ Elder nuns in our temple recall how my grandmaster developed a strong interest in Buddhism through those sermons. She would often be the first person to approach the speaker to ask questions or discuss the Dharma and she studied Buddhist *sutras* whenever she could. Eventually, she decided to take refuge in the Triple Gem and traveled to China to receive the five Buddhist precepts from the monk Bhiksu Xuyun (1839-1959), who was then 117 years old.¹⁰ After her *zhajijiao* master passed away, my grandmaster decided it was the right time to finally become a member of the Buddhist Sangha.

On October 18, 1985, at the age of 60, my grandmaster, her younger sister, and a *zhaigu* sister received *sramaneri* ordination from Bhiksu Jihuang (1920-)¹¹ of Furong Miaoying Temple. She became known as Zhaode from that time on. On December 14 of the same year, the three of them travelled to Taiwan to receive *bhikkhuni* ordination from the revered monk Bhiksu Guangqin (1892-1986)¹² of Miaotong Temple in Kaohsiung.

This was a turning point for Guanyin Hall. Almost all the *zhaigu* who lived at the hall

subsequently followed Bhiksuni Zhaode's example and went forth to receive *bhikkhuni* ordination. Bhiksuni Zhaode was adamant that Guanyin Hall should be a *bhikkhuni* temple where Buddhist women could learn and practice Dharma. She herself had studied the Vinaya under Bhiksu Guanqin and the well-known Vinaya teacher Bhiksu Baisheng (1904-1989).¹³ She often taught us the importance of observing the Vinaya and emphasize that we should try to live in harmony and overcome greed, anger, and ignorance. As the economy in Malaysia began to prosper, we were able to collect funds to rebuild the temple. Today, Guanyin Hall has become a religious landmark in Ipoh.

We feel fortunate that the hardships of the early days are over. We no longer need to bury ourselves in menial labor just to meet our daily expenses. The nuns at the Guanyin Hall can now concentrate on spiritual practice and Dharma dissemination. Bhiksuni Zhaode always stressed the importance of Dharma education. Toward this end, Guanyin Hall regularly invites Dharma masters to give Dharm teachings and lectures to both the nuns and public. To educate the next generation, a youth camp, held at Guanyin Hall every December, has become a regular event. Guanyin Hall has not forgotten the older generation either. It hosts weekly *sutra*-chanting events that enable senior citizens to gather together to learn Dharma and socialize. We remember the example of Bhiksuni Zhaode who, despite inconceivable hardships, never despaired nor allowed her faith in the Buddhadharma to waiver. Under her tutelage, nuns at Guanyin Hall became independent and self-sufficient, and have brought great benefit to society.

The Malaysian Context

Evidence suggests that Buddhism first appeared in Malaysia around the beginning of the eleventh century, but lost prominence with the spread of Islam during the 15th century.¹⁴ The second phase of Buddhist presence in Malaysia occurred primarily due to the influx of Chinese immigrants who fled destitute condition at home and came to settle in Malaysia. Usually, temples set up by these Chinese immigrants became the religious and social center of the Chinese community. There is a strong correlation between the rise of Buddhism and the increase in Chinese population in Malaysia, even though those Chinese who claim to be Buddhist might, in fact, practice "Chinese religion" in a form that combines Buddhist and non-Buddhist elements.¹⁵ In any case, neither Buddhism nor Chinese religion has achieved majority status in any state in Malaysia.¹⁶ As such, the transformation from *zhaigu* to *bhikkhuni* that the nuns of Guanyin Hall underwent cannot be viewed in the same way as the contemporary *bhikkhuni* movement that is being promoted by Buddhist feminists.

The transformation that occurred is by and large a religious reformation rather than a feminist empowerment. Since monastic Buddhism was quite weakly established in Malaysia during the earlier years (and perhaps still is), the concern was not whether a woman could seek higher ordination, but, rather, how to found the Buddhist *sangha* in Malaysia. The establishment of the *bhikkhuni sangha* was viewed as a success of monastic Buddhism, rather than as a challenge to the Buddhist status quo, as is the case for nuns in many Buddhist traditions today. Furthermore, there is no central Buddhist authority in Malaysia to regulate or, more accurately (as is the case in Myanmar and Thailand), to forbid higher ordination for women. As far as I know, there has never been any objection to higher ordination for women among the Chinese Buddhist establishment in Malaysia. What we find, instead, is Chinese Buddhist rhetoric that calls early Chinese immigrants "ignorant of religion" and "lacking knowledge of *real* Buddhism." This shows that earlier Chinese Buddhist practice in Malaysia was a cause for concern among later generations of Chinese Buddhists; discourse on early Chinese Buddhist practice today tends to stress its heretical nature more than anything else. It should be recalled that those who inspired my grandmaster to study the Buddhadharma were mainly monks from mainland China. The practice

of *zhaizhao* or popular Buddhism among the Chinese in Malaysia at the time would have appeared heretical in their eyes, since it was mixed with Taoist and other religious elements. For them, higher ordination for Buddhist nuns would have been seen as a way of “purifying” local *zhaizhao* practices by purging erroneous elements. Hence, for my grandmother and her former *zhaizhao* sisters, receiving higher ordination represented a move toward practicing correct, orthodox Chinese Buddhism, rather than seeking women’s empowerment.

Nevertheless, women are empowered by higher ordination. This is clear from the case of Guanyin Hall. As full-fledged *bhikkhunis*, the nuns became independent and self-sufficient. Rather than depending on hand-outs from monks, over the years the nuns at Guanyin Hall have contributed enormously to Buddhism and to society.

Conclusion

I am grateful for the opportunity to share the life story of this incredible woman, Bhiksuni Zhaode. From humble beginnings as a *zhaizhao* living in an impoverished situation, she became inspired by the Buddhadharma and received higher ordination as a *bhikkhuni*. As a *bhikkhuni*, she taught her nuns to be independent and self-sufficient. Most importantly, she taught her nuns to benefit society and propagate the Dharma.

NOTES

¹ Hubert Seiwert, *Popular Religious Movements and Heterodox Sects in Chinese History* (Boston: Brill, 2003), pp. 214-67.

² Marjorie Topley, “Marriage Resistance in Rural Kwangtung” in *Studies in Chinese Society*, ed. Arthur P. Wolf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978).

³ Ibid., p. 254.

⁴ For more on Guanyin, see Yü, Chün-Fang, *Kuan-Yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokitesvara* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

⁵ Topley, “Marriage Resistance,” p. 255.

⁶ For an English translation of the chapter, see:
[<http://www.buddhistdoor.com/oldweb/resources/sutras/lotus/sources/lotus25.htm>] Accessed January 9, 2011.

⁷ See Charles B. Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State, 1660-1990* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i, 1999), pp. 97- 177.

⁸ Information on Bhiksu Quanhui cited from <http://linyim.org/tc/master.htm>. Accessed January 10, 2011.

⁹ Information on Bhiksu Jingkong cited from
http://www.amtb.org.tw/jklfs/jklfs.asp?web_choice=1. Accessed January 10, 2011.

¹⁰ Information on Bhiksu Xuyun cited from <http://www.bfnn.org/book/books2/1184.htm#a78>. Accessed January 10, 2011.

¹¹ Information on Bhiksu Jihuang cited from <http://www.malaysianbuddhistassociation.org/index.php/2009-04-25-04-45-17/-1995-2004/248-2009-05-15-08-58-08.html>. Accessed on January 10, 2011.

¹² Information on Bhiksu Guangqin cited from <http://ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/formosa/people/1-guang-qin.html>. Accessed January 10, 2011.

¹³ For more on Bhiksu Baisheng, see Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan*, pp. 138-77.

¹⁴ Robert E. Buswell, Jr., ed., *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, Vol. 1. New York: Macmillan, 2004), pp. 370-71.

¹⁵ For more on Chinese religion, see Julia Ching, *Chinese Religions* (London: Macmillan, 1993).

¹⁶ Swee-Hock Saw, "Population Trends and Patterns in Multiracial Malaysia," in *Malaysia: Recent Trends and Challenges*, ed. K. Kesayvapany (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2006), p. 22-24.

Ruting Xiao

The Chinese feminine form of the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara, known as Guanyin in Chinese, is a spiritual inspiration for many Buddhist women worldwide, and Taiwan is no exception. The worship of Guanyin is one of the most popular religious practices in contemporary Taiwan. This paper will examine Guanyin worship in contemporary Taiwan by using three popular Guanyin temples as case studies.

Guanyin Worship in Taiwan

To verify the popularity of Guanyin worship in Taiwan, one need only visit the home of an ordinary Taiwanese and take a look at the family shrine. More often than not, a picture of the white-robed, feminine Guanyin can be found behind the ancestor tablet, painted as the background of the family shrine. The picture is known as “Buddha painting” (*fózu qī*) or “Mother Guanyin picture” (*guanyinma lian*). As the background image on the family shrine, Guanyin is worshiped daily, along with the family ancestors and other guardian deities. In fact, Guanyin is so popular in Taiwan that she is catalogued as one of “Five Family Deities” (*jīatang wushen*).¹

To verify Guanyin’s popularity, one may observe how she is worshiped in different religious traditions in Chinese culture. Chinese Buddhists generally believe that Guanyin is the embodiment of compassion. The name Guanyin in Chinese means “hearing all sounds,” listening to everyone. Chinese Buddhist *sutras* describe Guanyin as the *bodhisattva* of compassion who comes to the aid of anyone who calls out to her. In today’s Taiwan, we find Daoists referring to her as the Buddhist *bodhisattva* Lord Guanyin’ (*guanyin dashi*), Priest Compassionate Navigator (*cibang zhenren*), or Lord Compassionate Navigator (*cibang dashi*). Followers of Yinquandao, a religion that combines Confucian, Taoist, Buddhist, and other elements, call the *bodhisattva* “the Old Buddha of South Sea” (*nanhai gufo*). Popular Chinese religions understand Guanyin as a savior of women and children who often helps out women who are in labor, so Guanyin is also known as Delivering Guanyin (*songzi guanyin*). It is thus safe to say that the worship of Guanyin has penetrated many layers of Chinese religious culture.

The Sinicization of the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara has a long history. The *bodhisattva* probably arrived in China during the second century, along with the translation of the *Sutra on the Mental Fixation of Integral Illumination* (*Cheng-chü kuang-ming ting-i ching*).² By the sixth or seventh century, the *bodhisattva* had come to be associated with the legend of Princess Miaoshan.³ A story written by the well-known woman poet and painter Guan Daosheng (1262-1319 CE), *A Brief Biography of Guanyin Bodhisattva* (*Guanshiyin pusa chuanlue*), affirmed the transformation of the *bodhisattva* from a masculine Indian form to a feminine Chinese form by the 14th century, at the latest.⁴

The *bodhisattva*’s transformation to a feminine Chinese form has been used to explain the popularity of Guanyin worship among the Chinese. Glen Dudbridge attributes the popularity of Guanyin worship in China to the creation of the legend of Princess Miaoshan by the Chinese *sangha* and literati, since Chinese women could easily identify with the suffering that Princess Miaoshan had to endure.⁵ Xing Li believes that the constant warfare during the South and North Dynasties period (420-589 CE) created a spiritual vacuum in the minds of the people that could not be easily filled by Confucian and Daoist teachings; therefore, the *bodhisattva* who comes to the aid of whoever calls her name was immensely welcome. In addition, the Chinese Buddhist *sutras* state that Guanyin Bodhisattva grants sons to whomever prays for them. In early times, this quality was greatly appreciated by Chinese

women, whose status both at home and in society was assessed by her ability to produce sons.⁶ So far, the most thorough study on Guanyin Bodhisattva is Yü Chü-Fang's *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara*, published in 2001. Yü traces the process of Guanyin's feminization and Sinicization from the time of the Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's arrival in China and asserts that this transformation not only contributed to the popularity of Guanyin worship among the Chinese, but also helped Buddhism to take root in China.

Although Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is Indian, Buddhist, and male, Guanyin as a Chinese deity need not be identified as such. The legend of Princess Miaoshan carries strong Chinese overtones. It tells of her willingness to sacrifice herself for the well-being of her father, exemplifying the filial piety so highly valued in Chinese culture. In a way, the legend of Princess Miaoshan is a bridge between Buddhism and Confucianism, since it combines values praised in both teachings.⁷ The Daoist text *Guanyin Jing* states that Guanyin is an immortal who, under the edict of the Jade Emperor, descends from heaven to help the needy.⁸ Here, the role of the Daoist Jade Emperor and the Daoist concept of immortals overshadow the Buddhist teachings. Another Chinese religious text, *The Encyclopedia on Deities of the Three Religions*, even states that the full title of Guanyin (the infinitely compassionate and merciful savior *bodhisattva* Guanshiyin) was conferred upon her by none other than the Jade Emperor. The Jade Emperor is clearly placed above Guanyin in this tale. Since the Jade Emperor is the highest deity in the pantheon of Chinese popular religions, this shows how Guanyin worship has been blended into the Chinese popular imagination.⁹

Descriptions of Guanyin in Chinese popular religions differ from the Buddhist concept of a *bodhisattva*; they are closer to Chinese culture and thus easier for the Chinese populace to accept. In these syncretic tales, one can spot Buddhist teachings on compassion and *karma*, Confucian teachings on filial piety and patriarchal values, as well as Daoist magic and immortals. In other words, the feminization of Guanyin in Chinese culture is the result of the syncretization of Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist elements.¹⁰ This syncretization manifests in three Guanyin cults in Hsinchu, a town located in northern Taiwan. Han Chinese migration to the Hsinchu area can be traced to the 17th century¹¹ and thus was one of the earliest Chinese settlements on the island. The temples in Hsinchu reflect the cultures evident during different phases of Chinese migration. Information for these three case studies was obtained through fieldwork at three temples visited in November 2011, publications, and signs posted at the three temples.

Zhulian Temple

Zhulian Temple is located outside of the old city of Hsinchu city and is still frequented by devotees today. Among the three case studies in this paper, it is the earliest temple built. Zhulian Temple was originally named Guanyin Pavilion (*guanyin ting*). Legend has it that in the year 1783, Minnan immigrants brought a Guanyin statue from China and placed it in a small hut for worship. Later, a certain Mr. Wang Shijie donated land and funds to build Zhulian Temple at its current location.

It is claimed that the original Guanyin statue at Zhulian Temple has a close association with a sacred site of Guanyin in China; it is said to have come from the legendary Unmovable Guanyin Temple at Putuo Mountain in the South China Sea (*bukenu guanyin yuan, nanhai putuoshan*). The Chinese believe that Putuo Mountain is where Guanyin Bodhisattva once gave sermons. Before the Communist takeover, devotees of Zhulian Temple made pilgrimages to Putuo Mountain once every twelve years.

The shrines at Zhulian Temple are colorful and reflect a great degree of influence from Chinese popular religion. While it contains shrines dedicated to Guanyin Bodhisattva, Manjusri Bodhisattva, Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, and other Buddhist saints, the temple also contains shrines for non-

Buddhist deities such as Lady Midwife (*zhusheng niangniang*), Lady Guardian for Children (*qiniang furen*), Twelve Midwives (*shier pozhe*), Temple Guardian (*jing zhu*), Land Guardian (*fude*), and so on. From its pantheon, it is clear that Zhulian Temple was not built with spiritual practice in mind. Most if not all of its deities are closely associated with ordinary people's household concerns (for example, safe childbirth, protection of children, and so on). It is obvious that Zhulian Temple was built to comfort people facing the difficulties of life and thus it is no surprise that Zhulian Temple has always been run by the laity rather than the Buddhist *sangha*.

Furthermore, as is customary in Chinese popular religions, Zhulian Temple provides not one, but three Guanyin statues. Each statue is a near duplicate of the others. They are fondly called First Mother (*da ma*), Second Mother (*er ma*) and Third Mother (*san ma*). When a devotee is in distress, he/she can "invite" one of the Guanyin mothers home to worship. It is believed that, by so doing, Guanyin will give her special blessing to the household. Although Zhulian Temple is registered as a Buddhist temple with the Ministry of Interior, it is clear that the temple may better be described as a temple of Chinese popular religion rather than a Buddhist one.

Falian Temple

In comparison to Zhulian Temple, which is a temple in its own right, located on a busy street and obvious to passers by, Falian Temple is quietly obscure. Located right next to the temple of the very popular, highest ranking city god (*cheng huang*) in Taiwan, it is easy to mistake Falian Temple as being part of the City God Temple.

Falian Temple was built in the year of 1803, with Guanyin Bodhisattva as its main deity. It is said that Guanyin was once worshiped inside the City God Temple. Next to the City God Temple was a parcel of vacant land with an old well on it. Rumor had it the old well was the entrance for the City God's troops to come in and out, so even though devotees wished to build a temple for Guanyin on that parcel of vacant land, they hesitated to do so. Eventually, devotees conducted divinations and obtained the City God's permission for the temple construction. Apparently, from the very beginning, Guanyin was considered subordinate to the City God by the devotees who built the temple. This may be so, but a temple sign tells the tale of how Guanyin worship might have helped to preserve the City God's temple. During the time of the Kominka Movement (late 1930s-1945),¹² when the Japanese colonialists strengthened their grip on cultural and religious expression in Taiwan. Daoist and non-Buddhist religious expressions¹³ were forbidden and temples destroyed. However, because of its close proximity to the site of Guanyin worship, the City God Temple was mistakenly assumed to be part of the Guanyin temple and successfully escaped demolition. The claim made in this tale is dubious, however. By the time of the Kominka Movement, the Japanese had colonized Taiwan for more than three decades. How could the Japanese administer fail to notice the large-scale temple fair conducted in honor of the city god, especially one that, prior to Japanese Occupation, was necessarily hosted by Qing government officials?¹⁴ Nevertheless, this claim indicates a trait that is usually attributed to Guanyin: motherly care. To protect the City God Temple from malevolent destruction is similar to a mother who protects her child from harm. Whoever fashioned this claim must have had an image of Guanyin as a benevolent mother in mind.

Today, both the City God Temple and Falian Temple are surrounded by food vendors. The location has become a tourist site in Hsinchu and never lacks a crowd. However, being close to food vendors also means that Falian Temple is now covered with greasy soot stains which, compounded by the badly maintained lighting inside the temple, makes Falian Temple appear dark, neglected, and a bit delapidated. When tourists flock to worship Hsinchu's City God, they tend to visit Falian Temple

almost like an afterthought. On Hsinchu City's tourist website,¹⁵ where the City God Temple is recommended as a tourist attraction, one finds no mention of Falian Temple. Yet, this neglect suits Falian Temple's Guanyin fine, since the temple was not built to become Hsinchu's central sacred site. Instead, Falian Temple's Guanyin is described as an ideal Confucian mother,¹⁶ one who protects her child at time of crisis (i.e., the Kominka Movement), yet never robs her child of the spotlight.

Zhiguan Temple

Unlike the other two temples that are run by householders, Zhiguan Temple is run by a *bhikkhuni sangha*. According to the inscription on a stele located on the temple grounds, the temple land was donated in 1957 by the mother of the abbess, Bhiksuni Dagan. The temple began as a small hut and, although construction began in the 1960s, it was not completed until 1980. The inscription on the stele states that Zhiguan Temple belongs to the Buddhist Pure Land tradition.

Bhiksuni Dagan is a native of Hsinchu. Like many Taiwanese nuns of the older generation, she is reluctant to speak about herself and I had difficulty obtaining any information about her in an interview. She is now at least in her sixties and those around her told me that she indeed built Zhiguan Temple for the purpose of spiritual practice. This explains Zhiguan Temple's location and surroundings. Unlike Zhulian Temple and Falian Temple, Zhiguan Temple is located on the outskirts of Hsinchu and one sees no hustling vendors within the temple grounds. Zhiguan Temple is quiet and serene. Perhaps more significantly, Zhiguan Temple is in close proximity to Yitong Nunnery and Fuyan Buddhist College, two institutions where the reform-minded monk Bhiksu Yinshun (1906-2005) once taught.¹⁷ Reflecting Bhiksu Yinshun's Buddhist reforms, one finds no elements of Chinese popular religion, such as burning paper money for the dead, in Zhiguan Temple.

Guanyin seems to occupy an important place in the minds of the nuns living as a Chinese *bhikkhuni sangha* in Zhiguan Temple. One can hardly fail to notice the 7.3-meter-tall Guanyin statue at the temple gate. Holding a water vase, Guanyin looks down at worldly beings compassionately. According to a blog entry, Bhiksuni Daguang has been engaged in romanizing Buddhist sutras into the Taiwanese vernacular since 1994 and one of her earliest projects was the chapter on Guanyin in the *Lotus Sutra*¹⁸ Apparently, Guanyin is an important source of spiritual inspiration to the nuns at Zhiguan Temple.

Conclusion

Although the three temples discussed above are all dedicated to the worship of Guanyin, they exhibit widely different expressions of religious culture. Zhulian Temple claims to be a Buddhist temple and Falian Temple claims to be a Daoist temple, but fieldwork reveals that both temples actually contain strong Chinese popular religious elements. This is in strong contrast to Zhiguan Temple, where the icon serves as an inspiration to a *bhikkhuni sangha* in a Chinese Buddhist monastic setting.

Guanyin worship at the three temples also plays widely different roles. Zhulian Temple was built by early settlers from mainland China, so Guanyin worship there is a reflection of the daily household concerns of the common people. Falian Temple sits in the shadow of the highly popular Hsin Chu City God and might be easily overlooked; yet according to legend, at a time of crisis, Guanyin rose to defend her neighbor temple like a brave mother protects her child. Here, Guanyin worship is embedded in the Confucian narrative of ideal motherhood. By contrast, at Zhiguan Temple, Guanyin is worshiped as a source of spiritual inspiration and a compassionate role model by the nuns who live as a *bhikkhuni sangha*. Therefore, it seems that even the feminized Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva may not

always be a feminist symbol: the Guanyin worship at Falian Temple functions to further the Confucian value of motherhood. Only by (re)claiming the positive attributes of the feminine icon Guanyin, as is the case at Zhiguan Temple, might she be able to empower women.

NOTES

¹ The Five Family Deities or *Jiatang Wushen* refer to Guanyin, Tianshang Shengmu (heavenly mother), Guansheng Dijun (lord justice), Zaojun (kitchen god), and Tudi Gong (land guardian).

² See Chü-Fang Yü, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese transformation of Avalokiteśvara* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 33.

³ For more on the legend of Princess Miaoshan, see Glen Dudbridge, *The Legend of Miaoshan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

⁴ Shi Houzhong, *Guanyin Yu Mazu* (Taipei: Dowtien, 2005), p. 89.

⁵ Glen Dudbridge, *The Legend of Miaoshan* (Oxford: Ithaca Press, 1978).

⁶ Xing Li, *Guanyin Xinyang* (Taipei: Hanyang Publication, 1994).

⁷ Shi Houzhong, p. 103.

⁸ Zhu Jianming, "Shanghai Doushi Bai Guanyin Xisu," *Minsu Quyi* 114(1998) 54.

⁹ Xing Li, p. 96-98.

¹⁰ Shi Houzhong, p. 104.

¹¹ *Encyclopedia of Taiwan* (online).

¹² Ibid. [<http://taiwanpedia.culture.tw/web/content?ID=3714>] Accessed January 22, 2011.

¹³ Because Buddhism was a traditional religion in Japan, it was not considered a threat under Japanese colonial rule.

¹⁴ [http://www.idn.com.tw/temple/intro_t_history.php?t_id=20] Accessed January 22, 2011.

¹⁵ [<http://dep-tourism-en.hccg.gov.tw/web/SG?pageID=24245&FP=4140>] Accessed Jan. 22, 2011.

¹⁶ For a discussion of Confucian ideals of motherhood, see Wang Chun-Fei, "Nushen yu Nucong: zhonguo wenxue zhong de nuxing lunli liangxinghua," *Nankai Xuebao* 6 (2006), pp. 23-29.

¹⁷ For more on Bhiksu Yinshun, see Charles B. Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State, 1660-1990* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), pp. 124-210.

¹⁸ [<http://tw.myblog.yahoo.com/yehsc12/article?mid=1811&sc=1>] Accessed January 22, 2011.

Why Walk? Walking Meditation and Spiritual Pilgrimage: Asian and Western Perspectives on Embodied Spirituality

Suellen S. Semeko ski

“Why walk?” No doubt walking is good for us. It is good for our mental and physical health. Walking can clear our minds of the clutter of our thoughts and calm our bodies. It can help us to maintain our health and to get fit. In the spring of this year the New York Times reported research on the benefits of walking and its positive effects on the brain. It was proven that a control group of older adults who walked, showed a significant increase in the size of the hippocampus. The hippocampus being the part of the brain that is able to process new memory. We can grow parts of our brain by simply walking! My classroom for spiritual growth as a seeker has involved a lot of walking from both a Western Christian perspective of walking as spiritual pilgrimage and from an Eastern Buddhist perspective of walking meditation as spiritual practice. In the Christian tradition, I have felt “heaven on earth” and in the Buddhist tradition I have touched the “pure land” while walking. Simply slowing down and walking offers embodied healing for our earth and us.

As a woman from the West living in fast paced city, I am aware of the power of intentional walking and walking meditation as a simple and profound spiritual practice. Every step we take can be an expression of our relationship to our mother earth. Our first small step was a developmental milestone but also a miracle. We stood up, looked around and as we moved through space there was one sensory delight after another. It was both alluring and confusing, but we met the world *with wonder*. As witness to our first steps, our mothers, made sure we were safe, and by doing so *preserved our capacity for delight and wonder in the world*. Our mother’s aspirations for our stability began with our first step and will end with our last. It is profound aspiration shared by all mothers all over the globe. It doesn’t matter whether our mother is alive or with us in spirit. Her desire for our stability is everlasting. The experiences of being lost, finding your way, being able to get up after a fall, finding balance and recognizing our missteps would become metaphors for growth, our well being and spiritual journey. Our mother’s aspiration for our stability is profound because she knew if we had the capacity to be stable, chances are everything and everyone within a few feet of us would also be stable.

If we could walk with attention and intention, we could have a better chance of knowing how to get from here to there and becoming the person we aspired to be. If we were stable we could continue to be in touch with the wonder and delight in our world and honor our mother earth. When we began walking we never stopped to think about the miracle of support under our feet, we just ran, skipped, tumbled, fell and yet our mother earth was there to meet us, to support us in our every step. When we walk one foot receives support from the earth and with the other we give back to her. There is a flow in the exchange of energy, receiving and giving, giving and receiving. Gravity, a gift of strong attraction from the universe reminds us of her support and that we are a miracle walking on a miracle. In 2002, I would walk the Camino de Santiago or the Way of St. James a 500-mile (800 kilometers) ancient pilgrimage route across northern Spain. In the early days of Christianity in Europe it was one of three pilgrimage routes, one to Jerusalem, one to Rome and the third to Santiago on the west coast of Spain. Today it is a beautiful walking route in nature, rich with history and spiritual mystery. It attracts spiritual seekers from all over Europe and the world. I began walking in southwest France on the border of Spain and ended the walk 46 days later in Santiago. The physicality of the Camino or “the way” forces you to pay attention to the body.

When we acknowledge our physical vulnerabilities a compassionate space opens up inside our hearts for the possibility of embodied healing. Embodied healing begins with acceptance of the suffering in the body, mind and spirit. Embodied healing also means taking in a sensory diet of the beauty of nature, fresh air, silence, companionship and the spiritual discipline of the daily practice of walking. Another important part of embodied healing is the understanding of being a part of a compassionate community of millions of pilgrims who have walked “the way” in the past and will walk it in the future. When walking with an open heart we are able to spiritually open ourselves to the landscape. The physical geography becomes a spiritual geography. A deep resonance is felt with the landscape, best described as becoming one with nature. We look for signage from the Divine and resonate with the metaphors of the landscape; the muddy places where we get stuck in life, the mountainous challenges in life that appears too big, the moist lushness of green trees and plants breathing spiritual life back into us, or the dry, parched, desert - like places where we look for signs and there is nothing, we feel lost separate from the Divine.

Walking becomes prayer in communion with nature. The refuge of the church of San Nickolas was the only place on “the way” where you could receive the ancient ritual of the washing and blessing of the pilgrims’ feet by hosteliers (or hosts). Refuges were schools, homes, and monasteries, places of simple accommodation reserved only for pilgrims. Hosteliers were volunteers who attended to the needs of the pilgrims and were required to have completed “the way” and speak more than one language. Many had experienced transformation on their journey and out of gratitude wanted to give back. We walk into the St. Nickolas hungry from walking nine hours and the smell of pasta cooking in boiling water fills the room. There are large bowls of freshly picked salad greens from the farmer’s fields nearby. White ceramic plates line up on a red and white checked tablecloth on massive tables running the length of the rehabbed 8th century church, turned refuge. In the raised altar area, there are chairs on which we pilgrims will sit and have our feet washed and blessed. After dinner the hosteliers prepare the water and prayers to bless our feet, one hostelier will read the pilgrim’s blessing to each of us in our language, while the other gently pours water over our feet. As the blessing and symbolic washing is finished, the reader of the blessing bends down and places a gentle kiss to the top of one of our feet. Each of us bears witness to each other’s blessing in silence and everyone is deeply touched by symbolism of such tender, compassionate care and love. I feel I am taken back to biblical times when the washing of feet was both a necessary and sacred ritual to relax and honor the part of the body that touches the earth. One the hosteliers starts to pour water on the feet of a female pilgrim and the other begins the blessing of her feet. From across the room from I can see the sores on her feet “No, no, please don’t! Please! she whispers, “No, no, I don’t want my feet to get infected.” She is now waving her hands back and forth above her feet as to protect them from the water. The hostelier puts down the pitcher of water and pantomimes holding invisible pitcher and pouring water on her foot. With deep reverence the other finishes reading the blessing and blows a gentle kiss toward her feet. She misses the entire gesture because she is bent down, her head close to her feet, focused on protecting her feet. Even after the dry ritual and blessing is over, she continues to wave her hands saying, “No, no please”. It is sad to witness her refusal of the spiritual support. She is a mirror, a valuable teacher to all of us of about the excesses of all kinds. The next morning we wake up at dawn and the ritual begins of greasing one’s feet, blister check and the layering of socks to allow for friction while walking. I sit next to the pilgrim who refused last night’s blessing. She starts a conversation about how she is known as a hiker in her country, owns a health food store and is she has been doing between 38 – 48 kilometers every day (about 21 -30 miles). She takes her socks off to reveal heel pads, toe protectors, Kleenex, gauze and medical surgical tape on each foot. She

carefully takes off the custom made preparation for each foot in order to put it on again after she has treated her feet. I gaze at her feet and my stomach feels ill. Her feet are a raw constellation of blisters, wounds and swelling. “How far do you plan to walk today?” I ask. “Maybe I will do just 38k” she answers. I do not know her brokenness nor she mine. I see how her body becomes controlled, made to fit an idea instead of lived in, loved and cared for.

I am grateful that I have just met one of my many, many teachers on the “the way”. Not far from where I began the Camino, I would visit Plum Village Monastery in southwest France the following year. I would be introduced to the teachings of Zen Buddhist Master Thich Nhat Hahn or Thay, become a student of the dharma and receive my dharma name. My journey would change, my path would shift direction, however, *I would keep walking.*

In 2005, I was one of 45 people from 15 nations who would accompany Thay in the first portion of his return trip to Viet Nam after thirty-nine years of exile. As Westerners we had limited opportunities to understand and process the dizzying amount of new information each day. The schedule for the tour was challenging and much of our time was spent in noble silence, which helped us to retain our energy and focus. Everyday we would do walking meditation. We focus on walking gracefully and smiling as a way to embodying our practice, while following Thay and the monastics in public procession. In the evening we would walk in small groups in our hotel rooms. The outpouring of love by the Vietnamese people, many bearing visible and invisible scars of the American War was an unexpected gift especially to us Americans. As the tour went on while waiting at temples, small groups of us lay community would informally start to walk with small groups of Vietnamese people. We would engage in these small spontaneous, silent conversations about peace through our mindful walking meditation, our healing was embodied. In the airport in Hanoi we are waiting with the monastics to board the planes south. I bow to one of my favorite nuns who is doing walking meditation inside the airport. She bows and stops walking, to signal she can begin talking. “Good morning Sister I offer, “I notice that you seem very happy.” Her face is radiant and I can’t help but smile at her. “Yes” she whispers quietly, “you know there are many floors and much asphalt between us and the earth here at the airport. In my meditation I am walking in the hope that the earth feels my gentleness. You know the earth has been through a lot here. I want her to feel my appreciation for everything she has been through and that she is still here for us.” She bows to signal she wants to return to walking. Every so gently she place each foot down mindfully like a caress to the earth far below. She is happy, and so am I, and for a moment mother earth is happy too.

In March of this year I presented at an International conference on “Trauma and Spirituality: An International dialogue” in Belfast, Northern Ireland, sponsored by a group of activists, Catholic and Protestant clergy and clinicians, a group called Journey Toward Healing and funded by Northern Ireland Mental Health Association with the purpose of bringing together international activists, clergy and trained clinicians to exchange ideas about psychospiritual approaches to trauma after 40 years of sectarian violence in Belfast. In my workshop on “walking and embodied healing East and West” I read the stories I shared with you today, then we cleared away tables and chairs from the middle of the room and did walking meditation together in the grand ballroom of the hotel. Crazy, yes? No, not really. The Europa hotel had been bombed 30 times in forty years. Although a peace accord was signed 40 years of symptoms of intergenerational trauma remained, alcoholism, depression, anxiety, domestic violence, the populace was traumatized. Afterward a wise, young psychiatrist from Belfast who participated our workshop, talked with me about his growing up as a boy in the midst of the violence of North Ireland. As a psychiatrist he was now treating trauma patients many whom were former paramilitary. Some were former

enemies from the opposition and had perpetrated violence in the very neighborhood he grew in. “So... he smiled “It is just as simple as putting one foot in front of the other, right?” I understood the enormity of his question and smiled back at him it, “Yes I think, *it is that simple*, and it is also about each of us *taking our first step with stability, breathing...* and remembering that *it is a beautiful world.*”

Buddhist Representations of Spiritual Attainment: What Tibetan Nuns Can Teach Westerners about Virtue

Carol L. Winke lmann

Some [Americans] view monastics as a welcome alternative to the consumerism and violence of contemporary society, while others view us as a threat to their values and their chosen lifestyle.¹

I dedicate my life to the way of the Dharma.²

Virtue as Aesthetic

In Indian Buddhism, the public assessed the virtue of monastics by outward signs, namely their physical appearance and the performance of certain actions, including the care of their robes and their comportment. Moral status was judged by physical comeliness and other signs coded onto the body or enacted by it.³ The Buddha professed more profound criteria and he himself was portrayed as the embodiment of physical perfection.

The eighth-century Indian scholar, Shantideva, in his renowned work, the *Bodhicaryavatara*, enumerates ten virtuous actions for the aspiring *bodhisattva*; that is: to protect life; to be generous; to maintain chaste behavior; to speak truthfully; to create harmony; to speak gently; to speak meaningfully; to be content materially; to wish for others' happiness; and to believe Buddha's words.⁴

As Buddhism becomes unfastened from its Asian moorings and travels through time and space, it's worth wondering how representations of virtue fare today. In the United States, only seven percent of the population is Buddhist.⁵ Buddhists there practice in a cultural context informed (if not always deeply influenced) by Christian values. In 20th-century Christian virtue ethics, the traditional Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love⁶ have been translated into a "complex mindset"⁷ in which the person effortlessly displays the emotions, attitudes, interests, sensibilities, desires, and choices appropriate to the particular situation in which a virtue is called forth.⁸ The ideal practitioner of Christian virtue ethics, who is perhaps as rare as the realized *bodhisattva*, is nevertheless reminiscent of Shantideva's enumerations.

Given these two complementary discourses, among other articulations of the ethical life, American Buddhism would seem to have a large canvas for healthy representations of virtue. However, its media circles around more superficial notions. Many non-Asian American Buddhists (who account for a third of American Buddhists) access teachings by way of printed sources – sometimes glossy magazines filled with attractive photos of teachers, students, sacred space, and religious implements. Briefly, I would like to critique this media.⁹

Virtue as Consumption

My simple assertion today is that, while contemporary Buddhists may abjure a direct connection between physical perfection and spiritual attainment, unwary practitioners can become easily ensnared in processes of commodification that strengthen the association. Indeed, American Buddhist media makes a virtue of comeliness and privilege by subtly framing these traits as most desirable. Such media

encourage spiritual materialism by solidifying ego instead of diminishing it. For example, in their depictions of practitioners, such magazines tend to prefer depictions of: the attractive over the ordinary; the slim over the more robust; the young over the mature; the white complexion over one of color; the more wealthy over the less, and so forth. Words and pictures of renowned teachers, often photographically haloed, are interspersed with images of beautifully clad, well-appointed, attractive students who are situated in visually inviting spaces. Such depictions play into the insecurities of those western women who (even into their middle and senior years) struggle with body image issues.

In a word, American Buddhist magazines, like many western magazines, favor a narrowly ranged, culturally-defined, aesthetically beautiful depiction of the desirable life, the “virtuous” life, with its attendant artifacts and activities. As such, this discourse is homologous to that of many fashion or lifestyle magazines, and increasingly blogs and vlogs, that prey on the insecurities of girls and women to present themselves as flawless, perfect, and, ultimately, passive.

The reason is simple: Even for Buddhists, beauty sells. Non-Asian American Buddhist publications promote opportunities for attending advanced teachings in pleasant, if not resplendent, meditation and yoga centers, sitting on comfortable cushions, wearing expensive ethnic jewelry, fingering costly meditation beads – all the while in the company of comely co-religionists. And, as media studies scholars have recognized, relentless depictions of the inordinately beautiful can lead to feelings of insecurity and lack that promote consumption. This sort of depiction is most evident in magazine advertisements; yet, there is some overflow to all sections, even the most elevated of the magazines’ discussions.

It may be inferred that the viewer, an ensuing sense of lack can be filled by consumer items and access to sacred space, commodified, packaged, and ready to be consumed. A visual rhetoric of virtue can easily dissipate into a rhetoric of consumerism. This dynamic is contrary, of course, to our most profound spiritual aspirations.

Curiously, in a study of how Americans feel about various religions in America, Buddhists scored at the very bottom, above only Muslims.¹⁰ Americans of other faith denominations feel somewhat “cold” towards Buddhists. In a most gentle glossing, the authors of the study suggest that Americans simply are not familiar with Buddhism. As Buddhism becomes more known, as it becomes more institutionalized through textual apparatus, I suggest we might consider the effect of images circulating in popular culture. Religion can either contribute to dominant discourses or subvert them. In one evangelical articulation of the Christian gospel in the United States – one that contributes increasingly to dominant consumer discourse, prosperity theology – material rewards are the blessings of belief.¹¹

American Buddhists ought to contemplate more contrary discourses to consumerism, should we not? In this regard, Tibetan nuns I have come to know and learn about in north India, struggling for education and spiritual realization, may be my greatest teachers. Their words cut across discourses of acquisition with striking clarity. “I have seen what life has to offer and what it lacks,” one monastic says, “so my commitment to my vows is very strong” (2009: 78). “Witnessing the burning and destruction of the nunneries and monasteries and the abuse of monks and nuns as a girl affected me deeply,” relates one nun. “It made me think about the meaning of this life, and of all those to come” (2009:80).

Indeed, in my experience, Asian nuns dismiss denigrating popular notions of why women become nuns; instead, they focus directly on the benefits of education, enlightenment, and effort for all sentient beings. Coming from impoverished backgrounds, the material situation of many nuns in north India may improve. But their wisdom often has grown out of and leads to further risk-filled commitments to social change. They demonstrate, march, or go to jail in public protest for human

rights. They undergo torture and risk death, and they leave family, friends, and country behind for the opportunity to study and practice.

Lest I be guilty of romanticizing, idealizing, or exoticizing a “culturally other,” let me be clear that it is the most subtle articulations of the *bodhisattva* ideal that move me the most. A soft-spoken diminutive nun told me, “I decided to become a nun because I felt it was useless for me to stay in *samsara*. As a nun, I felt all sentient beings would benefit” (2009: 75). Another monastic says of life in the nunneries, “Here I can become accomplished, and help [others] even more” (2008: 50).

In comparison, the journey of some western Buddhists to attain states of inner harmony or personal psychological development with the support of a media that tends to neglect the difficult circumstances of Buddhist women in other cultures, and instead promote (if obliquely) spiritual materialism is a curious trajectory. In commenting on western marketing strategies and what she calls “artifact spiritualism,” Susan G. Josephson writes:

In advertising, we go from our higher feelings about social good, or love of family down to the material plane. ... An example of this is the advertisement that has us move from church to family to slacks. ... we project our thoughts down to man-made material objects and see no transcendent meanings or symbols anywhere.¹²

Virtue as Skillful Action

All this being said, it should be recognized that the images of female teachers and both male and female students in American Buddhist magazines do represent a welcome change. I suggest that American Buddhists work for representation of wider ranges, interpretations, of the aesthetically beautiful. The notion of virtue as simply an aesthetic of the sensually beautiful has been surpassed in philosophy, ethics, and art. Moral beauty is more than a physical trait and virtue is more than the sensuously gratifying.¹³ Manifestations of the buddhanature within women everywhere are beautiful. Shouldn’t the range of our depictions of virtue as beauty match the height of our moral aspirations?

The producers of Buddhist magazines may point to the fact that their efforts are dependent on revenue-generating advertisements. But readers can be critical in their approach and rhetoric can be appropriated to cut against the ideological stream. In sustaining the critique, the against-the-grain cultural engagement of Buddhist nuns may prove inspiring for western women. Tibetan nuns increasingly understand public performance and social action – from social work to political resistance, from leadership development to theological debate – as skillful action conducive to moral attainment. Given our various traditions and life situations, dialogue between Asian and American Buddhists can be enormously edifying. Our 2011 Sakyadhita Conference, for example, uplifts and instructs us all.

NOTES

¹ Karma Lekshe Tsomo, “North American Buddhist Women in the International Context,” in *Women Practicing Buddhism: American Experiences*, ed. Susanne Mrozik and Peter Gregory (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2007), pp. 15-31

² A Tibetan Buddhist nun in northern India.

³ John Powers, “Why Practicing Virtue is Better Than Working Out: Bodies and Ethics in Indian Buddhism.” *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal* 22 (2009): 1-2. See also Susanne Mrozik, *Virtuous Bodies: The Physical Dimensions of Morality in Buddhist Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴ From Shantideva’s *A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*. Cited in Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Taye, *Buddhist Ethics*, trans. and ed. by The International Translation Committee, p. 423: n. 80.

⁵ The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey. Church Statistics and Religious Affiliations: U.S. Religions.” [<http://religions.pewforum.org/affiliations>] May 2011. The breakdown is <0.3 Theravada, <0.3 Mahayana, <0.3% Vajrayana.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 13:13.

⁷ Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁸ *New World Encyclopedia*. [<http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Virtue>] July 7, 2010.

⁹ The magazines I consider are *Shambala Sun*, *Tricycle*, and *Buddhadharma*. These are important publications with many merits such as their wide distribution, making available teachings by both Asian and western teachers. Yoga magazines, such share some of the same readership and they even more flagrantly display the associations I discuss here. The obvious reason is that physical yoga postures are being illustrated. All of these magazines offer exceptions to different degrees.

¹⁰ Robert D. Putnam, Campbell, David E. and Shaylyn Romney Garrett. *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).

¹¹ Traditional notions of *karma* are similar.

¹² *From Idolatry to Advertising: Visual Art and Contemporary Culture* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), p. 203.

¹³ Berys Gaut, *Art, Emotion and Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 27.

Buddhist Travel and Cultural Exchange in Thailand

Brooke Schedneck

In *A Meditator's Diary*, a 1976 memoir of learning meditation in Thailand, Jane Hamilton-Merritt shows how difficult it was at this time to find a teacher and temple willing to instruct a foreign woman. She writes:

I soon found, however, that I would encounter tremendous difficulties in finding a Buddhist monastery that would accept me – the foreign woman – as a resident. I tried for over a year with no success. My inquiries and requests to live within a wat compound were met with kind but negative responses. Usually I was told by the head monk that I could come to visit the wat any time, but as to the question of living in, the response was commonly that there were no facilities for women.” (20).

Eventually, Hamilton-Merritt learns of Wat Bowonniwet in Bangkok and attends the daily Dhamma talks and meditation sessions there, before becoming a student of Ajahn Tong at Wat Muang Mang in Chiangmai. Hamilton-Merritt's experience is certainly quite different from the experience of English-speaking meditators today, who have many opportunities to learn about Buddhism and meditation in temples across Thailand. Though the search for a meditation teacher and temple in Thailand is no longer so difficult, the history of this phenomenon is important. How did meditation become so popular among Buddhist travelers?

History of Buddhist Travel in Thailand: The Guides

The first people who encouraged the trend of helping foreigners find meditation temples in Thailand were the writers of a series of editions of meditation guides published by the World Federation of Buddhists (WFB). The first edition of this guide was available in 1978, two years after Jane Hamilton-Merritt's memoir was published, through the research of then monk, Sunno Bhikkhu, now better known as Jack Kornfield. His book, *A Brief Guide to Meditation Temples of Thailand*, was an important document for foreigners who traveled to Thailand to learn and practice meditation. This guide formed the basis for two additional editions. Later, a committee of the National Identity Board (Prime Minister's Office) authored a second edition of the book which came out in 1988 under the title, *A Brief Guide to Buddhist Meditation Centres in Thailand*. Since this edition, opportunities for foreigners have changed, as new monasteries and meditation centers become popular and others are no longer able to host foreigners. For this reason, a third edition by Bill Weir appeared in print in 1991 and online in 1994. The online edition is still used by foreign meditators looking for suitable places to learn about meditation in Thailand.

Besides the WFB guides, long-time Thailand resident Joe Cummings published *The Meditation Temples of Thailand: A Guide* in 1991. In his introduction, he describes why he decided to write this book:

With the rising general interest in Theravada Buddhism and in insight or mindfulness meditation in particular, the time seems right to make the study of Buddhism in Thailand even more accessible to westerners, if possible. This book was written to serve that purpose. In the past, many foreigners have arrived in Thailand with the name of one *wat* [temple] or none at

all; it is hoped that this guide will alleviate some of the problems experienced by first-time visitors, as well as open up a wider range of possibilities for the serious student.¹

Cummings also describes why Thailand is appealing to meditators. He asserts that it is the most open to foreigners among the Theravada Buddhist countries, that there is strong social and cultural support, that instruction is freely given, and that the teachings are offered with no motive to convert practitioners. Cummings states that the rise in popularity in lay meditation in Thailand is due to the efforts of famous teachers to promote meditation among the laity, increased interaction with foreigners, and the rapid growth of modernization.

The fourth edition of the WFB guide, *A Guide to Buddhist Monasteries and Meditation Centres in Thailand*, by Pataraporn Sirikanchana, was released in 2004. The foreward, written by WFB president Phan Wanamethee, states that while there are many guidebooks to Thailand that give information on famous temples, this book “is meant to meet the needs of those seeking knowledge about reliable places in Thailand where meditation is taught according to Buddhist traditions.” Phan Wanamethee also asserts that the popularity of this guide shows the growing interest in meditation centers and ways to achieve peace in the modern world. In the preface, the author writes that he intends this revision to assist foreigners to find a meditation center of their choice.

The most recent guide, which appeared online in 2007, is “Meditation Retreats in Southeast Asia,” compiled by Dieter Baltruschat and translated by Katharina Titkemeyer. The information on retreats was collected through the members of the Munich Buddhist Society and intentionally follows the format of the WFB guide publications. In the introduction, Baltruschat lists the benefits of meditating in Thailand:

[Thailand] has some outstanding meditation teachers. Some monasteries have excellent conditions for practice. Thailand also offers a broad spectrum of retreats. Whether you are a beginner wishing to combine a beach holiday with a meditation course, a meditator who wishes to ordain in a forest monastery, or simply want to practise intensely, you will find a suitable place. English, however, is not commonly spoken and therefore communication can be difficult, especially in the lesser known monasteries.²

These guides have been important sources for Buddhist travelers and the history of foreign meditation in Thailand. English speakers who have never traveled to Thailand before and are interested in participating in a retreat use this information to select a place and plan their trips. Many Buddhist travelers visit many of these spots over a long period, making a meditation tour of Thailand. The guides have opened up more possibilities for travelers by giving them the information necessary to find the sites and become familiar with what to expect. Along with this, the meditation guidebooks list the benefits of practicing in Thailand. The difficulties and experiences of earlier foreign meditators were the impetus for the creation of these guides. The success of long-established centers and the increased number of foreign meditators has encouraged the creation of additional international meditation centers.

History of Buddhist Travel in Thailand: “On the Ground”

An increasing interest in Buddhism and the appeal of meditation led Buddhist travelers to explore opportunities to learn more in Asian Buddhist countries. With the rise of lay meditation already being offered to Thais, many temples and meditation centers have sought to accommodate an

international audience through teaching in English. This phenomenon is evident in different regions of Thailand.

One of the first programs for international visitors interested in meditation took place in Bangkok, at Wat Mahathat and the Buddhist university housed by the *wat*, MahaChulalongkorn (MCU). Ajahn Helen Jandamit was instrumental in the creation of this program, which began soon after she arrived in Thailand in the mid-1970s. Wat Buddhapadipa, a Buddhist temple in London, recommended that she receive further guidance at Section 5 of Wat Mahathat in Bangkok. Once there, she was asked to teach the English-speakers who came to the temple and who wanted to learn about meditation. She worked for more than 20 years with the monks at MCU to provide *vipassana* meditation instruction and information about Buddhism in English. In 1974, she co-founded the International Buddhist Meditation Centre (IBMC) that is now part of MCU. It ran talks, lectures, discussions, and weekend retreats in English. In 1994, she converted her residence into the private meditation center called The House of Dhamma.

Apart from Wat Mahathat, Bangkok in general was a popular place for Western monks to ordain. This was available at the famous temples of Bangkok, such as Wat Bowonniwet. The Western monks at this temple used to conduct meditation classes in English until the early 1980s, when backpackers began to behave inappropriately, even sleeping on the temple grounds. At this time, the temple made a rule that foreigners would be expected to make a long-term commitment to the monastic life and would prove this by living as a novice for at least a year. Thai men who want to ordain face a different situation. Because ordination is a socio-cultural duty for them; they can ordain without commitment and for a short period of time. In 1954, Wat Paknam, which is also in Bangkok, held the famous ordination of the first foreign monk, Kapilavaddho, followed by the ordination of three more British monks two years later. These temples were at the forefront of foreign ordination, due to their history and their proximity to the capital where most Buddhist travelers arrive.

Many of the Western monks who followed Ajahn Chah began their journey at one of the large temples in Bangkok, ordaining there in the early 1970s. Many of them subsequently moved to the northeast when they heard of this great teacher, beginning with American monk Ajahn Sumedho in 1967. More Western men interested in Buddhism heard about the community surrounding Ajahn Chah and joined at Wat Nong Pah Pong or moved to one of his branch temples, which included the International Forest Monastery, Wat Pah Nanachat, which was formed in 1975. Another smaller community grew up around the famous teacher Luangda Mahabua, beginning in 1963, when Ajahn Pannavaddho went to live at Wat Pa Baan That and other Western monks followed in his path. These communities of Western monks led to a transient community of lay foreign Buddhist travelers hoping to learn from these Western monks, or at least be able to understand about living in a Thai temple with help in English.

In the south of Thailand, group retreats became popular. The first international retreat site was Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's Wat Suan Mokkh, which began in 1985. Starting in 1990, through the enthusiasm and encouragement of the present abbot, Ajahn Po, the International Dhamma Hermitage was built as a group retreat facility for foreigners and Thais in separate retreats. Ajahn Po had heard about ten-day group retreats and, based on the interest he saw among foreign travelers on his home island of Ko Samui, he helped to create a retreat program with the famous Buddhadasa Bhikkhu.

The large numbers of travelers who attended led to a second group retreat in the south at Wat Kow Tahm International Meditation Center on Ko Phangan. Mae Chii Ahmon of Wat Kow Tahm received many foreign travelers interested in meditation. When long-time meditation practitioners Rosemary and Steve Weissman arrived on the island in 1987, Mae Chii Ahmon soon asked them to teach meditation to the foreign travelers and they continue to teach today.

In the northern Thailand, at Wat Muang Mang, the famous meditation teacher Ajahn Tong introduced his method of meditation based on the method of Burmese master Mahasi Sayadaw in 1954. The popularity of his method led to the creation of many meditation centers throughout northern Thailand, the second being Wat Rampoeng in 1973. Mahasi Sayadaw created the phenomena of lay meditation centers in Burma and Ajahn Tong carried this to Thailand, first setting up these centers for Thais. Now there are three popular international centers in the area: Wat Doi Suthep, Wat Chom Tong, and Wat Rampoeng. All of them practice the Ajahn Tong method and welcome foreigners with instruction in English. Wat Chom Tong and Wat Rampoeng opened their doors to foreigners in the early 1990s and Wat Doi Suthep in 2006.

Because of the popularity of meditation and interest in the Buddhist tradition among foreign visitors to Thailand, new programs have recently been created. These are not based primarily on meditation but on teaching the basics of Buddhism and monasticism. An introduction to Thai Buddhism and culture in addition to meditation was established at the MCU campus of Wat Suan Dok in 2005. Phra Saneh Dhammavaro created this program because he saw a need to teach interested foreigners about the tradition. More recently, the Monk for a Month program is also based on teaching about Buddhism and the basics of meditation, with the added option of becoming a novice monk. This program was created as a cultural exchange, so that travelers could understand more about the Buddhist tradition and be able to experience it first-hand.

Thus, the history of Buddhist travelers in Thailand began in Bangkok with the meditation center at MCU and the ordinations at famous Bangkok temples. This occurred because of increasing numbers of travelers and foreign men interested in becoming monks, as well as Bangkok's central location for travelers. Teachers who attracted foreigners, such as Ajahn Chah and Luangda Mahabua, contributed to the movement of foreigners to more remote destinations such as the Northeast. Another tourist destination was the south with its islands and beaches. The tourist boom on Ko Samui and Ko Phangan, as well as the presence of the famous monk Buddhadasa Bhikkhu nearby, led to the establishment of two long-standing group retreats. In the North, Ajahn Tong's adaptation of the Mahasi Sayadaw method led to the creation of a number of lay meditation centers for Thais. This, in turn, led to the establishment of international centers that welcomed foreigners. These individual retreats attracted serious practitioners as well as travelers to the North seeking new experiences. All of these opportunities and their success among foreigners helped create new programs that focus not just on meditation, but also on teachings about Buddhism and monasticism as well.

NOTES

¹ Joe Cummings, *The Meditation Temples of Thailand: A Guide* (Woodacre, CA: Spirit Rock Center, 1991), pp. vii-viii.

² Dieter Baltruschat (trans. Katharina Titkemeyer), "Meditation in Southeast Asia" (Munich: Munich Buddhist Center, 2007), p. 6. [http://www.retreat-infos.de/Download/Retreats_in_Asia_Oct07.pdf]

The Establishment of Vedic *Sannyas* for Women

Sister Saradeśhaprana

For women in the Hindu community, one of the greatest contributions of the 19th-century Hindu renaissance was the revival of Vedic *sannyas* (traditional full monastic ordination) for women and the creation of institutions where women could live recognized and respected forms of monastic life. I will focus particularly on the Ramakrishna-Vedanta tradition, partly because their contribution was one of the earliest and most influential, and partly because it is the lineage to which I belong.

Sri Ramakrishna, the founder of this lineage, had great compassion for women. He taught that each woman has intrinsic value and potential power, because she is a manifestation of the all-pervading Divine Presence, which he thought of as the Divine Mother of the Universe. He, and his leading disciple Swami Vivekananda, believed that if each woman could experience and manifest this Presence, not only would she overcome her own suffering, but she would be able to help to alleviate the sufferings of society.

The foundational religious texts of Hinduism, the Vedas were revealed to many sages, both women and men. These texts seem to suggest that in the Vedic era women studied the scriptures, either with their fathers or at the schools of women sages. After completing their education, they had the choice of either getting married or retiring to a forest *ashrama* to live a celibate life devoted to meditation and religious study. They composed sacred hymns; tended the sacrificial fires; performed Vedic rites, and were renowned religious scholars who debated openly with men in the courts of the kings.

But about 500 BCE, this begins to change. Early marriage began to replace Vedic study. In time, Vedic learning for women almost completely disappeared. Without Vedic knowledge, the religious status of women sank to the level of *sudras*, the lowest caste in Hindu society. Eventually women were no longer allowed to chant Vedic *mantras* and the only Vedic rite sanctioned for women was marriage.

The *viraja homa* fire, the formal ordination rite of *sannyas*, and *shradha*, the personal funeral service that precedes it, are Vedic rites. The special *mantras* that mark the formal giving of *sannyas* are Vedic *mantras*. The primary texts for *sannyasins* are the Upanishads, which are Vedic texts. As these rites and texts were orally transmitted from guru to disciple, it was easy to deny them to women. So, we have the paradox of women who have created Vedic *mantras* being no longer able to chant them. Consequently, Vedic *sannyas* became completely closed to women.

There is a tradition of woman sages of high spiritual realization to whom the truths of the Vedas were revealed, who studied and taught the Vedas, and who chose to live unmarried lives. However scant the textual evidence for this tradition may have been, it was an extremely important model for the 19th-century establishment of Vedic *sannyas* for women. It provided role models and textural support from the most authoritative Hindu scriptures.

At the time Vedic learning disappeared for women, the ascetic traditions begin to influence Vedic culture. For the celibate ascetic, women are regarded as temptresses. To reinforce the ideal of renunciation, women are depicted as physically repulsive, and slightly morally unstable.

By the time that Shankara organized the *sannyasins* into ten orders, probably about the beginning of the ninth century, the pattern of monastic life was well established. Either at the completion of his early studentship, or after reaching old age, and setting his family affairs in order, a man would seek a *sannyas* guru. After a period of training in meditation and scriptural study, either in a monastery or on the road with another *sannyasin*, he would take *sannyas*. He was taught the practical aspects of *sannyas*

life – the routes that the *sannyasins* used for traveling, the places where he could beg for food; and the special questions that would enable him to recognize other properly ordained monks. He would then embark on a life of solitary spiritual practice, wandering from place to place. It was a life characterized by celibacy, detachment, and intense spiritual practice.

This system was still in place at the end of the 19th century. However, Hinduism is not an institutionalized religion. During this period, there were women who put on the *gerrua* cloth and assumed the life of wandering mendicants. Although unquestionably some did so from religious conviction, others did so because they had transgressed the rules of society and had no other options in life. With the exception of the occasional great saint, wandering women mendicants were looked down upon by society. Their morality, and especially their celibacy, was questioned. This was reinforced in the case of women, due to the fact that most of these women were either tantric practitioners or roamed in Vaishnava groups with men. It was assumed that virtuous women practiced spiritual disciplines within the home.

This assumption was a major obstacle when it came to reestablishing monasticism as an institution for women in India. The women had to convince society, and particularly the families of young women who wanted to join, that monastic life was a virtuous life. To protect the reputation of both the men and women's monastic orders, Swami Vivekananda decreed from the beginning that male and female renunciants should be absolutely separate. This created problems in Europe and America, where the only spiritual teachers in the Ramakrishna tradition were monks.

In India, marriage and motherhood became the glorified path for women. There was a great emphasis on *stridharma*, regarding one's husband as one's personal form of god, and serving him as such. One of the exceptions to this was the high caste Hindu widow, particularly if she was childless. At the death of her husband, she had the opportunity to live a life of intense spiritual practice. Such a woman would shave her head, dress in a simple white sari, eat one meal a day and sleep on the floor. She would ideally spend her day in *japa* (repetition of the name of God), meditation, devotional songs, and ritual. Older *sadhus* (renunciants) have told me that for women, this was a form of *sannyasin* life, lived within the home. However, although the lifestyle may have been similar, it was unlike *sannyas* for men, it was not been freely chosen but was imposed on widows by society. Also, unlike *sannyasins*, who had very high status in Hindu society, widows were regarded as highly inauspicious members of society who had earned their circumstances through bad karma.

Although segregated within the home, women developed a rich tradition of spiritual practice, rooted in the duties of their everyday lives. This tradition was transmitted by women to women through ritual, iconography, art, and mythology, based on the teachings and models of spirituality found in the epics and Puranas, and the autobiographical songs of the medieval women poet-saints. The methods of daily spiritual practice in Hinduism include *japa* meditation, ritual worship, and scriptural study. Periodic practices, such as visiting holy people and going on pilgrimage, are the same for both laypeople and monastics. Monastics, who are free from the distractions and responsibilities of family life, have the opportunity to do these practices with greater focus and intensity. There is also a belief that some yogic and meditative practices require celibacy for achieving the highest states of spiritual realization.

Another model of renunciation for women was recorded in the autobiographical songs of the medieval women poet-saints, which are still sung and treasured to this day. These saints regarded God as their husbands, rather than their husbands as God. They felt that only through celibacy could the heart be undividedly given to spiritual practice and realization, and either refused to marry and ran away, or left their husbands. Their attitude could perhaps be summed up by the following poem of Akka Mahadevi, a 12th-century South Indian saint:

I have fallen in love, O Mother, with the Beautiful One
who knows no death, knows no decay and has no form.
I have fallen in love, O Mother, with the Beautiful One
who has no middle, no end, no parts, and no features.
I have fallen in love, O Mother, with the Beautiful One
who knows no birth and knows no fear.
I have fallen in love, O Mother, with the Beautiful One
who is without any family, any country, and any peer.
Lord Shiva the beautiful is my husband.
Fling into the funeral pyre the husbands who are subject to death and decay.

The first *ashrama* for women *sannyasins* was founded in 1895 by one of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples, Gauri Ma (1858-1938). She based her life and the practices of her monastics at Saradeshawari Ashrama on this model. Gaurima was born into an orthodox Brahmin family in Bengal. She received some secular education at a primary school that was run by missionaries for high-caste Hindu girls. She received her religious education from her mother and grandmother. As was typical in devout Brahmin families, she learned *puja*, and memorized devotional hymns and scriptural passages from the epics and Puranas. She also learned Sanskrit grammar. Later, she became quite learned in the scriptures and wrote devotional hymns. As a young child she met an unidentified *brahmin* who blessed her and initiated her into a Krishna *mantra*.

At the age of 13, her marriage was arranged by her relatives. She flatly refused to get married to a man. Like the saint singers, the only husband she was interested in was her deity Krishna. After a couple of unsuccessful attempts, she finally managed to run away while on pilgrimage with her family. She put on the *gerrua* cloth and traveled all over northern India for many years practicing severe austerities and learning from the wandering monks. She sometimes joined groups of pilgrims and sometimes disguised herself as a man. In 1882, she met Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar and recognized him as the *brahmin* who had initiated her as a child.

Sri Ramakrishna participated in her Vedic *sannyas* by putting a *vilwa* leaf into the *viraja homa* fire. He asked her to sacrifice her solitary wandering to work for women. Gaurima eventually founded a school and a monastic organization.. The nuns take *sannyas*, but they regard themselves as married to the deity and wear the bracelets of married women. Although they have recently initiated some American women into *sannyas*, it remains an extremely orthodox *brahmin* organization.

From the beginning, Swami Vivekananda wanted to start a monastic order for women. This required the cultivation of women's leadership and he believed that the process had to start with education. He envisaged a modern revival of the *ashramas* of the Vedic women sages, in which women would have both a thorough religious education and a practical modern education. When they completed their education, they would either marry or take *sannyas* and serve society.

Unfortunately, this model had disappeared 2,500 years earlier and there were many obstacles to reestablishing it. Upper-caste Indian women, who ideally would have led this movement, were in *purdah*, confined to the home and veiled even before their male relatives. They were usually married by about eight years old. In addition, there was a strong prejudice against girls learning to read, since they might read novels, which would diminish the purity of the home. There was a superstition that an educated girl was inauspicious and more likely to become a widow.

To overcome these problems Swami Vivekananda brought Sister Nivedita, one of his English disciples who was an experienced educator, to start the school. He gave her the precepts of *brahmacharya* (celibacy) and prepared her to do this work. He insisted that she learn to live the restricted life of an Indian *brahmin* widow. An American disciple of Swami Vivekananda's, Sister Christine, also came to

help.

In time, the school took in residential students and a group of women who wanted to live Swami Vivekananda's ideal of renunciation and service came to live there. In 1954, the centenary year of Sri Sarada Devi's birth, senior monks of the Ramakrishna Order gave these women *brahmacharya* (vows of celibacy) and helped them to establish Sarada Math, a parallel women's monastic organization. An early student of the school, Pravrajika Bharatiprana, managed to escape marriage by being hidden in various houses by one of the teachers. She had been closely associated with Sri Sarada Devi, a woman who had been doing intense spiritual practices in Varanasi for many years and who was summoned to become president of the new order. The monks guided the organization until 1959, when the women were given *sannyas* and complete independence.

The organization accepts and works among women of all castes. They are very proud of the fact that they are one of the very few monastic women's organizations that is not under the authority of men. The women are highly educated; they run schools, a maternity hospital, clinics for women, and do relief work. Like the Ramakrishna Order, they also run economic self-sufficiency programs for village women. Social service work is done as a form of worship, each woman being regarded as an embodiment of the Divine Mother.

In the United States, the early teachers were monks sent by the Ramakrishna Order in India. Unlike India, the West has a centuries-old unbroken tradition of woman monastics. It was natural that sincere women who wanted to emulate their teachers and live a life of intense spiritual practice would want to become nuns.

Swami Paramananda, one of the early monks of the Ramakrishna Order, came to the U.S. in 1907 and started a convent for women. His most senior disciple, Sister Devamata, had a vision of Sri Ramakrishna and her guru before she had any contact with the Ramakrishna Order. She was trained in the U.S. and India by disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and by Sri Sarada Devi and the women who surrounded her. In 1926, Swami Paramananda brought Gayatri Devi, his young, widowed niece, to be a member of this convent. The nuns formed a residential community, wore Catholic style habits, and took *brahmacharya* precepts, but not *sannyas*. They lectured and helped run all aspects of the three *ashramas* that the swami had started. When Swami Paramananda died in 1940, it was uncertain who would be in charge of the *ashramas*, a monk sent from India or Swami Paramananda's designated successor, Gayatri Devi. Gayatri Devi wrote to the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Order at Belur Math asking that "you give us sanction to carry on Swami Paramananda's entire work as a Sisterhood. Your recognition of us as ordained sisters... would solve our problem." The trustees of Belur Math were not ready to set this kind of precedent. The *ashramas* separated from the Ramakrishna Order. Two of the *ashramas* continue to thrive under Gayatri Devi's successor, Reverend Mother Shudha Puri, who has taken *sannyas* in the *dasanami* lineage.

The *ashrama* that I belong to was founded in the 1920s. Eventually, women who wanted to dedicate their lives to full-time spiritual practice came to live there. In 1947, the first women took their *brahmacharya* vows; in 1959, the first nuns in the U.S. were given *sannyas*. Although in the *dasanami* tradition it only takes one ordained *sannyasin* (or *sannyasini*) to ordain another, Swami Prabhavananda wanted to have the full permission and blessings of Belur Math before he did this. At that time, it was assumed that the American nuns would create a separate organization under the newly formed Sarada Math. But the Vedanta societies in America had small congregations and Americans were not used to strict gender separation of Indian culture. Partly because they wanted to continue to have the option to study with their teachers who were monks, and partly because they felt that an independent women's religious organization would not survive financially, the nuns decided to stay under the direction of the monks of the Ramakrishna Order.

After one year of preprobation, all the nuns' expenses for food, clothing, and medical care are

provided by the ashram. The ordination of nuns follows the same procedure as for monks of the Ramakrishna Order. After six years, nuns take *brahmacharya* precepts, which involve character formation, celibacy, spiritual practice, and service. At this time, we received the *gayatri mantra*, the *mantra* of the *brahmins*. After five more years, we take formal vows of *sannyas*. Two days before the vows, we perform a funeral service for ourselves and those relatives who are still alive. Because we are about to renounce home and family, we must complete all family rites. After a night of fasting, we take our *sannyas* vows in the *viraja homa* fire. We are given the *gerrua* cloth, a staff, and a new name by our *sannyas guru*, who is the most senior monk in the country. For three days, we live the traditional *sannyas* life, begging for food and eating only outside. We break our staff into two and cast it into the ocean, to symbolize that the ideal of our life is both renunciation and service.

The nuns perform the daily temple rituals; run book departments and our Spanish ministry and publicationS department; give retreats and lectures both in the U.S. and overseas; represent Hinduism in the community; and participate in feeding and housing the homeless. The current minister in charge of our center, Swami Swahananda, has been very supportive of the cultivation of women's leadership and has sent nuns to run three of his new Vedanta centers.

We would like to express our gratitude to Sakyadhita. Inspired by you, we have begun to have conferences twice a year with the nuns in our lineage. In time, we hope to include other Hindu nuns as well.

Birthing Liberation: The Blood and Ink of Leaving Oppression

Bonna Devora Haberman

The biblical Exodus of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt is the font of a shared tradition of liberation in Western culture, a manifesto for freedom struggles. Inspired by the story, many have sought to release the yoke of oppression. The liberating quality of the Exodus text operates within and far beyond the purview of religion. In recent history, the Exodus narrative has stirred activists who work for abolition, suffrage, labor, civil rights and justice, women's, anti-apartheid, and national liberation movements. People render the Exodus relevant to our struggles, hopes, trials, songs, and liturgies.

Early in the book of Exodus, a King-Pharaoh arises in Egypt who perceives the inchoate Israelite people as a threat, and seizes them as slaves. Pharaoh institutes cruel treatment to control them and their burgeoning growth – calling for Egyptians to murder newborn Israelite babies. The text depicts human actors practicing exploitation based on racism, suspicion, and fear. As the oppression bears down on the Israelites, the divine actor enters the scene to respond to human cries of desperation. God chooses Moses as an assistant, and with the help of Aaron and Miriam,¹ leads the reluctant children of Israel out of Egypt amidst signs, plagues, and miracles. Cornered between the advancing Egyptian army and the Reed Sea, the fleeing slaves express fear and helplessness to their leader. Some would rather return to Egypt and continue with slavery than travel the risky road to freedom. Here I propose a reading of Exodus in terms of *liberation-as birth*, as the cornerstone of a Jewish liberation theology.

Liberation theology, a Christian movement that began in Brazil, seeks for religion to alter the unjust material conditions of human society, particularly the distribution of knowledge, power, and resources. Liberating people from domination and building a more inclusive political and economic order are religious obligations no less binding than faith or ritual. Jewish tradition holds the biblical Exodus to be *the* model for redemption, a core meta-narrative of Jewish spiritual and national consciousness. The rabbinic sages canonize the Exodus story in ritual and liturgy as a central tenet, its significance paralleling the Genesis account of the creation of the universe. Creation and Exodus share more than a coincidental association.

Conception

Most consider that the Israelite Exodus from slavery in Egypt begins in the divine revelation to Moses at the "burning bush".² In this scene God responds decisively to the Israelite cries with the promise to intervene to save them from their oppression.³ The *liberation* story, however, begins earlier, with the human resolve to engage in the activities of birthing. From the outset, the Book of Exodus portrays the fertility of the Israelite families as a mass movement. It is Pharaoh who first perceives the children of Israel developing into a great nation; their potency to birth healthy children is the source of his fear, "Look, the Israelite nation is greater and stronger than we."⁴ The Israelites create their identity through their collective activities of lively sexuality, conception, pregnancy, birth, and nurture. A midrash claims, "By the merit of the righteous women who lived in that generation, the Israelites were redeemed from Egypt," elaborating about scenes in the fields after the slaves finish their daily work.

Rabbi Shimon bar Halafta said: What did the daughters of Israel do? They went down to draw

water from the Nile and God would bring little fish into their buckets. They cooked some fish and sold the rest, buying wine with the proceeds. Then they went out to the fields and fed their spouses. After eating and drinking, the women would take bronze mirrors and look at them with their spouses. The woman would say “I’m prettier than you,” and the man would reply, “I’m more beautiful than you.” Thus they would arouse themselves to desire and they would then “be fruitful and multiply,” and God took note of them (*pakad*) immediately. Some of our sages said, They bore two children at a time, others said, six and others said twelve, and still others said six hundred thousand...and all these numbers from those mirrors.... In the merit of those mirrors which they showed their spouses to accustom them to desire; from the midst of the harsh labor, they raised up all the hosts, as it is said, “All the *hosts* of God went out of the land of Egypt” (Ex. 12:41), and it is said, “God brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt in their *hosts*” (Ex.12:51).⁵

Exhausted and downtrodden by cruel physical labor, the slaves take refuge in each other’s arms, in the pleasures of intimacy and shared delight. The imagery of fish and water, sumptuous dining, seduction, and lovemaking on the earth, among the crops make vivid a daily erotic existence. From misery, they arouse each other to desire for love and life. In the early verses of the biblical Exodus, human characters conceive Israelite growth, planting the seed for the subsequent escape from bondage in Egypt. Seven words describe the fruitfulness of the children of Israel.

The Children of Israel were **fruitful** and **proliferated** and **increased** and **strengthened very greatly** and the land **was filled** with them.⁶

Well before a new evil king arises to oppress them, the Hebrews are conceiving a people. According to traditional commentaries, the verse designates many different forms of fruitfulness to explain the astonishing ways that the Israelite women were giving birth: birthing multiple offspring at closer intervals than normal pregnancies to more vigorous infants and in exceptional locations such as fields. The Israelite response to the king's oppression is much more proliferation.

The more oppressive the treatment of the Israelites, the more they increased and multiplied⁷

Both at their own initiative and in defiance of the oppression, the Israelites singularly preoccupy themselves with conception, pregnancy, and birthing. Under increasingly difficult conditions, they persist with fortitude and physical stamina to gestate, birth and nurture babies. Obstinate in the face of Pharaoh, both unnamed and named women instigate the process of overcoming their oppressor. The Israelite birthers, Shifra and Pu’ah and the other midwives, Miriam and Yocheved, and the daughter of Pharaoh all conspire to birth and protect children against the law.⁸

The midwives, fearing God, did not do as the king of Egypt had told them; they let the boys live.⁹

Israelite society in Egypt, therefore, abounds with pregnant, birthing, and nursing women and their infants. Such prolific birthing focuses Israelite attention on caring and nurturing. Not cordoned off in hospital wards, birthing people, their attendants and families are ubiquitous. An unruly act that obeys no schedules of day or night, birthing mobilizes the energy, concerns, and prayers of all of those who are connected with the life-giving process. Nothing intervenes or takes precedence over attending to

birth.

During the sojourn in Egypt, Israelite population growth is mythic: from seventy souls who descended to Egypt with Jacob to the estimated million who left slavery.¹⁰ Theories that take account of the resources, the space and populations in the region, as well as parallel texts from other traditions doubt the historicity of the numbers. Scholars suggest either that the Torah quotes numeric formulas from other epics, or that the word *elep*-thousand, has some other meaning, such as family units—in which case the total of Israelites leaving Egypt would number in the thousands.¹¹ These views indicate that the text of Israelite fecundity expresses a quality and not a quantity. Birthing counteracts the suffering of servitude and imbues Israelite society with the prospect of new life. This human initiative stimulates God to participate in the labor of a nascent people. Aroused by their vigor, and their desire to end their confinement, God joins the birthers and their midwives in their movement against the authority of the mortal king.¹² In this phase, the Israelites conceive themselves and their yearning for liberation.

Gestation and Labor

Egypt – in Hebrew, "narrow places" – is the womb of creation within the infinite divine being where the Israelite people gestates and prepares for birth from God's body. The inchoate nation grows and develops self-consciousness, becoming larger, more articulated, and organized.

Signaling the end of gestation, Moses' encounters with Pharaoh are the first stage of the liberation birth, "*Send forth* my people that they might celebrate me in the desert."¹³ The Israelites experience the onset of birth – the Egyptians intensify the labor.¹⁴ The divine plagues and the hardening of Pharaoh's heart signify the contractions of the divine birthing body. The muscles tighten – heart and womb, organs of life and sustenance – pump new life forth. The rhythm of contractions is achieved in the text by interspersed intervals of relief between plagues, one following another, "But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart and did not pay attention to them, as God had said."¹⁵ The divine cervix that holds the Jewish people within during the incubation gradually softens and dilates as the Egyptians and their ruler experience the quickening of God's muscles.

Toward the end of the labor, the Israelites take an active approach to the liberation-birth – they smear their doorposts with blood. Their homes in Egypt represent the uterine enclosure from which they are to emerge.¹⁶ The blood offering ritualizes the petition for life and salvation from death. This blood signifies the Israelite intention for safe deliverance through the precarious passageway from slavery to freedom – it fulfills the imagery of the blood of birth at the vaginal opening. The final plague of death that passes over the Israelite homes alludes to the mortal danger of birthing liberation.

In the final delivery, the Israelites partner in the labor. According to rabbinic legend, the people debate amongst themselves when they reach the shore – "lip," in Hebrew – of the Sea of Reeds. With the Egyptians in the rear, the waters impede the passage to freedom. The Sea does not part until the Israelites, albeit momentarily, overcome their fear of leaving the certainty of slavery behind.¹⁷ Freedom brings with it unknowable risk and responsibility. According to a well-known midrash, one individual, Nachshon, child of Aminadav, plunges forward into the Sea representing the crowning of the Israelite head in the birth canal; the body of the people follows through.¹⁸

The Israelites wrest their way from constrained enclosure into the wide world. Pressing out from God's womb, through the parted waters of the Reed Sea – the birth canal, and between God's spread thighs, the Israelite nation is delivered from Egypt onto the dry land of the Sinai Desert. There, God breastfeeds Israel with infant food – the soft, moist manna from heaven.¹⁹ The Egyptian army in pursuit is the placenta, part of the organism which once participated in nurture, now expelled lifeless

during the final postpartum closing. *Liberation-as-birth* does not shrink from the anguishing loss of life in the liberation struggle.

Liberation-as-birth reads the Exodus as a politico-spiritual enactment of physiological birth. Birth is more than a symbol of liberation; birth *is* liberation. This assertion bears clarification. Birth is a transition from enclosure to manifestation – an exodus. Each birth releases one being encompassed within the domain of another – from powerlessness and dependence into a new and unfolding relationship of connection and mutuality. Birth reformulates the relations of oppression and suffering that usually occasion liberation struggles. Throughout pregnancy, the wellbeing and prosperity of all participants depend on one other; they share an integrated life system.

Telling Birth

Here I purposely violate the norms of discretion that relegate birth to the conversations of private voices and shroud them in the screams of labor wards. Birth and liberation bleed into one another. Repeating relentlessly, birth is both a mundane human event and a miracle. Birth embodies human collaboration in bringing forth new life from confined space into open expanse. Birth is a culmination of intense union, of protracted growth and incubation, and finally, of gripping and productive labor. Flowing and congealing with blood, birth quivers at a dangerous threshold with death. Birth evokes altered consciousness and radical new opening; birth resists control. Birth throbs with motion, breathes with rhythm, and exhausts fully. Birth triggers lactation and enables the nourishment of new life.

For countless women, birth is another occasion of vulnerability to domination. Many supposed lovers, spouses, and medical practitioners physically and psychologically manipulate pregnant and birthing women. Childbearing often occasions the long-term confinement of women to an unremunerated domestic caretaker role. Precisely birth – an activity so invested with sexual difference – is at the heart of this Jewish liberation theology. At the same time as liberating female body processes from many oppressions – power, class, theory, science, belief, industrialization, medicalization, and gender – the perspective I present seeks to activate the liberation potential of birth in society. *Liberation-as-birth* seeks to de-construct oppressive birthing practices and re-construct the spiritual and cultural meaning of birth. Self-consciousness about my privilege to birth in the context of a chosen relationship that honors the sanctity of human life and shares the joys and responsibilities of parenting grounds my proposals about birth and liberation. I interpret birth at the seam of material and spirit, life and danger, as evoking valuable insight and alternate divine images and language. Intense embodied human processes, births sensitize awareness to special aspects of the Exodus text. This is not to claim that women or men fulfill themselves by birthing and parenting. Birthing is *one* facet of the biblical text of liberation and of complex human experience. As liberation is not limited to birth, so also human creativity and spirit are not reducible to the material act of birth or to any sexual or bodily act. *Liberation-as-birth* ascribes mortal significance to birth activities, and mobilizes the life force of liberation accessible in the text and the acts of birth.

As a model, birth undermines the presumption of the universality of male experience and opens to us an invitation to (m)other perspectives. Birth *is* universal; most every creature has emerged from a female body. Birth is a meaningful cultural sign not because it is affiliated with women, but because it is no less a component of the universal human predicament than death. If not first-hand as birthers, we are all birthed. We can all experience birth as readily as any human event, as witnesses, accompanists, accomplices, through accounts, and records. The will to life that permeates the birth process offers to transform our everyday aversion to the pain of labor and reticence to change. Like

liberation, birth is at the cusp of life and death, where certainty and control give way to the intense experience of becoming a change agent. Birth works toward liberation as an antidote to fear of transformation, to the fear of death and mortality.

Suggesting commitment to transformative action, birth is potentially dangerous and destabilizing. Knowledge acquired through liberation-birth discharges helplessness and dependence. Ongoing repeated liberation-birth inspires and forms the character of liberators. Telling Exodus as birth emphasizes how every person, every body is imprinted with liberation experience and impelled to actualize liberation in our daily embodied life practice.

NOTES

¹ Micha 6:4.

² Exodus 3:2.

³ Exodus 2:23-25.

⁴ Exodus 1:9.

⁵ Midrash Tanchuma Pikudei 9.

⁶ Exodus 1:7.

⁷ Exodus 1:12. Commentators show how a particular aspect of fertility derives from the Hebrew root of each word. See Rashi, for example on Exodus 1:7 etc.

⁸ Exodus 1:15-16.

⁹ Exodus 1:17.

¹⁰ Exodus 1:5 and 12:37. In addition to women and children, the verse mentions six hundred thousand males.

¹¹ For a synopsis of scholarship, see Gary A. Rendsburg, "An Additional Note to Two Recent Articles on the Number of People in the Exodus from Egypt and the Large Numbers in Numbers 1 and 26," *Vetus Testamentum*, July 2001, 51(3), 392-96.

¹² Exodus 2:23-25.

¹³ Exodus 5:1.

¹⁴ Exodus 5: 6-9.

¹⁵ Exodus 8:11.

¹⁶ Exodus 12:21-23.

¹⁷ *Mekhilta of Rabbi Ismael* (Beshallah 6), and Pseudo-Philo (*Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* 10:3). Saul M. Olyan discusses how this debate, recorded also in Samaritan parallels, reflects opinions among Jews during the Jewish War of the first century CE. Saul M. Olyan, "The Israelites Debate Their Options at the Sea of Reeds: LAB 10:3, Its Parallels, and Pseudo-Philo's Ideology and Background," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 110(1), 1991, 75-91.

¹⁸ Sotah 37a; Numbers Rabbah xiii, 9.

¹⁹ Exodus 16:13-32.

When Silence Hurts

Malia Dominica Wong, O.P.

Long before the earth was formed, and the heavens as we know were named,
there existed in the realms beyond a brilliant jeweled net expanding along reaches unimaginable.
From top to bottom, to left to right to the myriad directions in between,
each individual jewel shone in all its sparkling glory while unconditionally reflecting
the light of all the other crystalline jewels. None stood alone; each helped manifest
the grandness of interconnectedness, and the wonder of single-mindedness,
the returning to the one.¹

All of us are on a journey. We seek, we follow; sometimes we turn around. But, it is our determination to attain the holy grail, or the clarity of being a jewel in the net that we can thus illuminate the way for others, that keeps us striving beyond our physical and mental capacities – ourselves, to the boundless. Along the way, we may have found a soul mate, *sangha*, religious community, or sacred circle of friends with whom we can share our deepest aspirations and be supported as we learn and grow together. We enter into commitments, undertake promises, vows or precepts, oftentimes publicly declared to last “until death.” However, beyond religious idealism lies the real world and its challenges. And sometimes our expectations of what the religious, monastic, or spiritual life should be all about, fails to meet the bar.

Using the jeweled net as an allegory for our own liberation, we may ask, “What would happen if one of the jewels broke, got chipped, or collected so much dust that its light was dampened or ceased to shine?” Or, “What would happen to the net of the *sangha* or religious community if one of the members fell from ethical standards, and collected so much dust that his/her light extinguished?” What causal effect might happen if the broken jewel was actually hidden, out of shame or a denial of the damage, by those teachers, mentors, masters entrusted to uphold the highest good, and the rest of the community told to keep silent? Sometimes members in community find themselves stuck between a rock and a hard place as they internally struggle with not knowing what to do or to whom to turn. Trust has been broken and feelings of betrayal set in; silence begins to hurt. This paper seeks to discuss the unspoken by identifying and creating an understanding of some of the causes and influences that morally damage the brightness of a *sangha* or community. It also offers a five-step tool that one who is suffering in silence can do to attain freedom from the personal suffering. The ideal motivation is expressed in the Four Great Vows:

The many beings are numberless,
I vow to save them all.
Greed, hatred and ignorance rise endlessly,
I vow to abandon them all.
Dharma gates are many,
I vow to wake to them.
Buddha's way is unsurpassed,
I vow to embody it fully.

A Moral Malaise

In the past decade, the world has witnessed a bursting at the seams of conspiracy silence. The threshold of tolerance has been crossed and the news of abuse keeps hitting the headlines: clerical aggravated assault and even cold-blooded murder, with pastors killing their wives (A.Schirmer, 2010; A.Hopkins, 2008), hiring others to do it (T. Burleson, 2010, M. Baker, 2006), or even a priest and a nun being killed by a monk in China (W. Zhang, 2010). There are multiple accounts of religious leaders engaging in tax evasion; sexual misconduct (P. Tiruchirapalli, 2005; E. Shimano, 2010), child molestation (D.York, 2004), pedophilia, involvement in murder or plotting of the murder of others, (M. Hale; E. LeBaron, 1981; J. Lundgren, 2006), battery (F. Phelps; H. Porter, 2008), federal racketeering (Y.B.Yahweh; H. Lyons), conspiracy and fraud (J. Bakker; H. Fukunaga; S.M. Moon, 1980's), illegal immigration, and sham marriages (B.S. Rajneesh). In addition, we hear new of using one's position as a church leader to entice or coerce others into consensual sexual relationships in exchange for money, travel, and goods (E. Long, 2010). No religious tradition has been left unscathed. Anger and outrage, a sense that "enough is enough," has finally brought decades of hidden, criminally pathological leaders to justice in the courts. Unfortunately, the price of these revelations has been high, as many sacrificed their robes, leaving their beloved congregations or *sanghas*, in order to break the cycle of abuse. And, for others who stay and try to keep the moral lamp burning, life can be a living hell realm.

To Speak, Or Not To Speak?

Once upon a time, a great king was told the following story:

In a certain town there were two men, one rich, the other poor. The rich man had flocks and herds in great numbers. But the poor man had nothing at all except one little ewe lamb that he had bought. He nourished her, and she grew up with him and his children. She shared the little food he had and drank from his cup and slept in his bosom. She was like a daughter to him.

Now, the rich man received a visitor, but he did not take an animal from his own flocks and herds to prepare a meal for the wayfarer for him. Instead, he took the poor man's ewe lamb and made a meal of it for his visitor.

Upon hearing the story, the king grew very angry and said that the rich man deserved death! He shall restore the ewe lamb fourfold, because he has done this and has had no pity.

The storyteller then told the king, "You are the man!"²

In similar situations, how many of us have been told: "Don't ask." "Don't say anything." "Who do you think you are?" "Just mind your own business." How many who have taken the courage to speak up for the sake of truth and reconciliation have been pounded down with charges of "disloyalty," "hanging out the laundry for all to see," "disrespecting our leaders," "being unworthy to remain in the monastery or community," being "disobedient," "being devils in disguise," or "trying to destroy the peace." In the above story, even though King David was the beloved ruler of Israel, Nathaniel the prophet was prompted to speak the truth. King David had sinned grievously by having one of his loyal commanders killed, so that he could take his wife. Blinded by his emotions, he could not see that what he had done was wrong. Only when Nathaniel risked his life by speaking out did the King see beyond

his blind spot.

In the monastic Rule of St. Augustine for monks and nuns, it says that, if one observes something that is detrimental to another, one should speak to that person about it. If that person refuses to listen, or denies the problem, then one should bring the situation up before a couple of other witnesses. If the person still refuses to admit the fault and make amends, then the matter should be raised publicly. Why? Because as mendicants, religious, and *sangha*, we do not exist alone. Each of us has voluntarily become a part of the jeweled community. Our lives are no longer simply our own individual lives; our lives should bear witness to the highest good of all.

In the Buddhist tradition, there are steps to be taken. A formal rite of repentance is performed at the twice-monthly gathering of the *sangha*, in which faults are admitted and members in the community recite the rules of the order (*pratimoksa*). The Great Compassion Repentance or other prayers of repentance may also be recited. But what if the *vinaya* texts are reviewed, the precepts and other rules and regulations are recited, and there is still no change of behavior? In the Christian tradition, the Chapter of Faults, Review of Life, Consciousness Examen, and public or private confession are performed. But what if the transgression, oppression, or aggression continues? What else can an individual do when all means seem to have been exhausted and when the transgressor remains obstinately in denial, often with leadership allowing the deviancy to become normal? When noble silence is used as a shield to cover up moral malaise and one begins to feel pain beyond what a broken heart can bear, how can one at least find some liberation within oneself? As the Psalms say, “Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord, Lord hear my prayer!”³ An elderly Carmelite priest offered the following advice: (1) Know your motivation; (2) Speak the truth if it is for the good of all; (3) If others choose to act irresponsibly, because they have left the religious life, carry them; (4) Be a good religious for those who want to be and need your example; and (5) Only one thing is important, your relationship with God.

Know Your Motivation

The first personal step one can take in leading to liberation is to know one’s motivation. What impels you to want to take action? If, for example, if were to see your nice pair of shoes outside the temple and presume that a simple exchange with my more dilapidated shoes would be okay, how would you react? At first, it is natural to get angry. Later, if you surmised that it was I, your worst enemy who took it, then you might spend a lot of time plotting revenge. Maybe you would take a pair of scissors and cut a hole in one of my garments in subtle retaliation. We know that acting out on emotions is not good, yet if we don’t say something, the other person may think that it’s okay and repeat the action again, and again. We may decide to take revenge, even though we know the *vinaya*, because of some unconscious weakness or mental defilement (*klesa*). We need to examine our motivation for correcting someone. Is it to take revenge or to help the person realize their fault and make amends?

It is hard to speak of the faults of others knowing that we have our own weaknesses. But, if it is for the moral good, we need to speak our conscience. Otherwise, we become accomplices by our silence and more people may suffer. Nobody likes to experience conflict or retaliation. Nobody wants to be shamed, cut off from those we love, disrespected, or labeled a whistleblower or troublemaker. We may think, “What difference will it make?” or “Why should I care, if no one else seems to care?” Yet, when clerical and financial improprieties escalate, when ambition leads to exploiting others, or when the Dharma is used for selfish ends, we may need to speak out. As H.H. Dalai Lama says, “I recommend never adopting the attitude toward one’s spiritual teacher of seeing his or her every action as divine or noble. . . . If one has a teacher who is not qualified, who is engaging in unsuitable or wrong

behavior, then it is appropriate for the student to criticize that behavior."⁴

The English philosopher Edmund Burke said: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." Along with the precious human rebirth come the gifts of free will and duty. Using these gifts requires wisdom. As one school principal taught her children, "We can make life-giving choices or we can make life-blocking choices."

Speak the Truth If It is For the Good of All

What is honesty? Why is it that what is viewed as dishonest in one culture may be acceptable in another? On some Polynesian islands, all property is viewed as being held in common; anyone can just help oneself to whatever is there. Taking things may simply be considered "providing for one's family." It's not seen as theft, but as borrowing without the intent to return. But in the United States, when a stranger comes into one's yard and begins to take fruit, vegetables, or coconuts it is considered stealing. What one person calls an exaggeration, another may call a lie. Due to cultural differences, sometimes it may be difficult to discern whether a person is saying "yes" or "no" or whether certain behavior is "right" or "wrong." Yet certain actions are inappropriate in any culture and we need wisdom to discern when this is the case.

In the *Kalama Sutra*, Buddha taught us not to accept or believe things simply on face value. If, after careful consideration, we know something is wrong, we need to name it. Speaking to the Kalama people, he said:

It is proper for you, Kalamas, to doubt, to be uncertain; uncertainty has arisen in you about what is doubtful. Come, Kalamas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, "The monk is our teacher." Kalamas, when you yourselves know: "These things are bad; these things are blamable; these things are censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill," abandon them.⁵

According to this passage, it is appropriate to censure a teacher's misbehavior and inappropriate to simply accept it.

We may assume that it is not our place to censure someone else's behavior. We may ask, "Why didn't the person's superiors do something about this?" Why didn't they see what was happening and correct the problem before it escalated? Psychologist Raymond Lloyd Richmond says that in dealing with the unconscious mind, "If you learn to voice your pain honestly in language, horror can be given containment. But, more often than not, most of us fail to achieve honesty in life; we remain stuck in our psychological defenses, leaving our real emotional pain unexpressed."⁶ Matters become complicated, however, when remaining silent is seen as loyalty and speaking out is seen as disloyalty.

If Others Choose to Act Irresponsibly, Because They Have Left the Religious Life, Carry Them

Religious leaders may act irresponsibly, having fallen away from the religious life, even though they are still wearing robes. In the well-known case of misconduct by Shimano Roshi, after other means of communication failed, the respected American Zen master Aitken Roshi finally went to Japan to consult with his teachers. He wrote: "Their attitude seemed to be that Shimano had been irresponsible,

and that we should encourage him to behave himself.”⁴ As the record shows, simply encouraging good behavior was not enough.

In religious life, a person can be expelled from the order for major scandalous abuses. However, many times it doesn’t happen that way. In the well-publicized case of Fr. Marciel and his congregation, the Legionnaires of Christ, the founder himself was the root of the scandal. It was only after a seminarian left the order and took the case to the authorities in Rome that something was finally done to stop the clerical abuses.

In some religious congregations, the superior is still looked up to as “the voice of God.” As such, the superior can be held responsible for the actions of the whole community, including its faults and failings. A more contemporary understanding is that the superior is the animator of the community and entrusted, either through appointment or election, to draw out the best in each member. In this view, personal responsibility ultimately falls on the members of the community. “Blind obedience” may be a sign of immaturity. In earlier times, however, obedience was regarded positively. Some monks and nuns known for their holiness tested the students as part of their spiritual training. For example, in Europe a neophyte might be commanded to plant a dry stick in the ground and water it. After a few years of “obedience” and grumbling, when the ego collapsed, the stick would bloom. The Tibetan Buddhist saint Milarepa was instructed to build, destroy, and rebuild structures countless times. The task was regarded as a sacred endeavor, a test of his determination, and a means to purify negative karma. In these cases, the students were seeking spiritual insights and were willing to make sacrifices to develop it.

There are different methods of monastic training, however. Teachers have different perspectives and employ different strategies, often depending on the training they themselves received. Some teachers are good at explaining and exemplifying good character and ethical conduct and sometimes they are not. In either case, there may be varying interpretations of the rules. Some who act irresponsibly are deviating from what their conscience tells them and other may simply not know right from wrong. The difference lies in developing a cognitive sense of moral responsibility and simply acting out of fear or hope that one will not get caught. How can we develop training programs that help practitioners develop a mature sense of moral responsibility?

Be a Good Religious for Those who Want to Be and Need your Example

When I received the habit as a novice, I remember being given a bookmark that said, “I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me.” At that time, I was ecstatic, certain that, by pursuing this religious path, Christ was more “one” with me. Years later, when I reflected on the phrase again, I was filled with trepidation and wondered, “What does this really mean?” Christ lived beyond boundaries, beyond personal likes and dislikes, beyond religion, beyond even being a Jew. He was a person for all peoples. The challenge was clearly a question of being willing to give up personal likes and dislikes, culture, and ways of thinking in order to go beyond the concerns of the world and seek a higher truth. On the simplest level, for missionaries, it means to be willing to eat different food, learn another language, be patient in seeking to understand different way of doing things, and be respectful in accepting that people in different cultures naturally do things differently. In Buddhism we say, “to become enlightened.” What does that mean? Is it only to liberate our own minds or to be a light to others, too, “with the wish to free all beings?” How can we be more authentic examples for those who seek to be free from greed, hatred, ignorance, and suffering? In the Hebrew Bible, Abraham interceded and asked God not to destroy the sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, for the sake of “just the ten good people” living there.⁷ Abraham took a risk in order to save even one soul.

Only One Thing is Important, Your Relationship with God

In the song, “The Greatest Love of All,” Whitney Houston gives voice to a feeling that many of us can relate to:

Everybody's searching for a hero
People need someone to look up to...

Hoping for heroes is a natural part of the human condition. Houston continues to share her answer to the search, by giving example on how to lead the way:

I believe that children are our future
Teach them well and let them lead the way
Show them all the beauty they possess inside
Give them a sense of pride to make it easier
Let the children's laughter
Remind us how we used to be...
I decided long ago, never to walk in anyone's shadows
If I fail, if I succeed
At least I live as I believe
No matter what they take from me
They can't take away my dignity
Because the greatest love of all
Is happening to me
I found the greatest love of all
Inside of me.⁸

In her view, the best example we can give others, especially children, is to live courageously from a place of love.

The other key is to recognize the value of this human lifetime for achieving liberation and for helping liberate others. In the first practice of the *37 Practices of All Buddha's Sons*, we are reminded:

This sound human body endowed with full leisure
an excellent vessel is rare to be found.
Since now we have obtained one in no way deficient,
let's work night and day without veering off course
to take a cross the ocean and free from samsara
not only ourselves but all others as well.
First listen, think hard, then do much meditation –
the Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

This passage hearkens back to the old Carmelite priest's advice: to know our motivation. When silence hurts and it seems that there is no end in sight, we need to remember that the waning moon always gives rise to the new moon. There is an end to suffering. We need to just keep polishing the jewel of our mind and make a strong wish that one day, in time, we and all beings will cross the ocean of *samsara* and become free.

NOTES

1. Adapted from the *Avatamsaka Sutra*.
2. 2 Samuel 12:1-6.
3. Psalm 130:1.
4. Rick Fields. "The Changing of the Guard." *Tricycle*, Winter 1991.
[<http://www.tricycle.com/excerpt/the-changing-guard?page=0,3>]
5. Raymond Lloyd Richmond, Ph.D, "A Guide to Psychology and Its Practice: The Unconscious." 1997-2011. [<http://www.guidetopsychology.com/ucs.htm>]
6. Robert Aitken. "The Shimano Story." Unpublished manuscript, circa 1983/1984.
[http://www.thezensite.com/ZenEssays/CriticalZen/Aitken_Shimano_Letters.html]
7. Genesis 18:20.
8. Whitney Houston. "The Greatest Love of All." Lyrics.
[<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/whitneyhouston/greatestloveofall.html>]

Islam Means to Make Peace

Bhikkhuni Lee and Bayatee Dueraman

Different religious can co-exist peacefully, be generous to each other, and complete the full circle of human life together. ~ Dharma Master Hsin Tao

After years of travel and cultural exploration, I agree with Dharma Master Hsin Tao when he says that, “There is no single religion that is the best.” My goal is to cultivate spiritual tolerance and respect for others. This is my intent in writing this paper with my colleague, Ms. Bayatee Dueraman, a devout Muslim.

It is time for Buddhist-Muslim dialogue in southeast Asia, particularly in Thailand. And it this requires a paradigm shift in how we view religion. Hopefully, the *WFB Review* can serve as an academic forum for scholars to engage in interfaith dialogue, so that we may enjoy a peaceful co-existence.

Analyzing Complex Problems and Offering Solutions

Today’s world has been called a global village, in which people of different spiritual traditions interact with each other daily. The creation of a common global ethic can thus help us to peacefully co-exist. This global ethic would: respect women and men equally; halt the sale and trafficking of women and children; protect the most vulnerable in society, such as children, elderly, and the infirm; help cultivate spiritual tolerance; protect and honor life; encourage monogamy; promote honesty; discourage the use of poisons such as intoxicants, cigarettes, unwholesome speech, violence in the media; show respect for others’ work, deeds, and accomplishments; ban weapons of mass destruction; and honor the environment.

Faith communities can dialogue and cooperate together to create this global “paradigm shift.” Interfaith dialogue offers solutions to many problems. When political and economic diplomacy fails, the interfaith community can connect heart-to-heart, person-to-person, community-to-community. Buddhists and Muslims can strive to create a culture of peace separately, but they can also cooperate to do this together.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu wrote that “to study different religions comparatively, with an attitude of goodwill, results in mutual good understanding. This, in turn, brings about a way of thinking and acting in people that causes them not to hurt each other’s feelings. Further, it gives rise to peaceful co-existence and excellence among all societies and nations in the world.”

Basic Interfaith Vocabulary

Both the Buddhist tradition and the Islamic tradition offer resources for creating peace. For example, the root of the words Muslim, Islam, and *salam* means peace. The traditional Muslim greeting, “Asalam mo alay gum,” means “I offer peace to you.” The value of peace is fundamental and paramount in Islam. One approaches God with an attitude of wishing to be at peace with God, oneself, and others. Muslims value a global brotherhood and sisterhood and the goal of building lasting peace. One of the 99 names of God is Peace. In Islam, all members of society and the world are considered as one family. When one is hurt or suffers, so do all the others.

Some basic information can help cultivate peace education between Buddhists and Muslims. First, the word “Muslim” refers to people who adhere to the faith of “Islam.” Second, Muslims pray in a hall known as a mosque. Third, as Imam Faisal Abdul Rauff explains, “In Islam there is no technical religious ordination. Instead, the Islamic faith has universities and schools where scholars with reputation give people their license,” He is an Imam, as you can see by his title. The word “Imam” is a title often used in mosques for the person who leads the prayers, a path to transcendence, and is always used for the one who leads the community. The word “Imam” means the one in the front, the one who leads.

Dharma Master Hsin Tao views the role of the Dharma master as “a bridge between the truth and human beings.” To me, a Dharma master is one who removes stones from the path, so that others may journey freely between the here-and-now and the transcendent. Imam Faisal Abdul Rauff states that the “spiritual master teaches how to become a completed human being, a Buddha, a bodhisattva, a saint, a friend of God.” Further, he says, “Although someone may say there is Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, etc., once a person has penetrated to the essential nature of his/her religion, he/she will regard all religious as being the same.”

Envisioning a Culture of Peace

In 1994, UNESCO issued a Declaration on the Role of Religion in the Promotion of a Culture of Peace. In 1995 UNESCO created an inter-religious dialogue program as an essential part of inter-cultural dialogue. This dialogue at the international, national, state, and local levels needs to include civil society and to honor women and youth. As a woman, I experience myself and life as open and evolving; thus, I do not find it threatening to explore other faiths on the path of understanding that I walk in this world. Ms. Bayatee, the co-author of this paper, also has a very universal and open perspective to life, while having deep commitment to the divine.

One day, my beloved teacher Bhikkhu Thich Nhat Hanh invited me along with others to his residence. On the shrine, I saw a Buddha statue and a small picture of Christ. When I asked him why they were placed together, he picked up the picture of Christ and we nuns and monks looked at it. Then he placed it back on the shrine and simply smiled. On the second floor, he showed us his room, with a small bed and a desk before a window that could receive the morning sunlight. He said to me “Sister Lee, this is where I wrote *The Sun My Heart*” (the *Heart Sutra* with commentary in English). Later in the garden, as I stood beside a tiny stream, he came alongside me and said, “This is where I wrote, *Peace Is Every Step*.” He went on to write *Living Buddha, Living Christ*. He fosters peace and inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue and his community is very loving and supportive. His love and his message have inspired me to write and to envision a culture of peace.

Dhamma is seeing things clearly, “as they are.” We can create inter-cultural and inter-religious peace when we live in the present moment. Through dialogue, we can acknowledge feelings of fear, the unknown, or powerlessness. We can also acknowledge our feelings of joy, discovery, and learning when we make friends with a person of another faith. Christians and Buddhists can learn many good things from Muslim society and faith. Each faith tradition has many precious jewels.

Professor David Chappell, who taught at the University of Hawai'i and Soka University, explained that “in Buddhism, you go to the Buddha, the Sangha, the community, for guidance. However, the community aspect, the Sangha, is very underdeveloped in Buddhism.” He clangs the bell for Buddhists to awaken and to realize that Sangha is more than a monastic community. The broader concept of Sangha includes all Buddhists. Based on gender equality and spiritual tolerance, it helps create a culture of peace.

Responsibility, Knowledge, and the Divine

In Islam a human being is “a responsible agent.” Responsibility for sin is borne by the actual offender alone. Sin is not hereditary, transferable, or communal in nature. Every individual is responsible for his or her own deeds. And while humans are susceptible to corruption, they are also capable of redemption and reform.”

Knowledge is greatly treasured and pursued in Islam. In fact, according to Islam, humans are to “cultivate the land, and enrich life with knowledge, virtue, purpose and meaning.” Professor Dr. Kamal Hasan, the vice chancellor of the International Islamic University of Malaysia, regards knowledge as sacred: “Knowledge is only a means to serve God, and in the process of learning this knowledge, we should in fact deepen our spiritual experience.”

The spiritual and the intellectual are integrated, as revealed when Feisal Adul Rauff asks, “How are we to live as human beings?” and Ustaz Uthman El-Muhammady asks, “What is that spirit entity in us?... What is real love that transcends egocentric forces?” While each faith has its own beliefs about God, the afterlife, and so on, we can build upon our common values. With respect, Muslims and Buddhists can work together on the basis of shared values.

The New Asia

To build a “new Asia,” Dr. Chandra Muzaffar recommends the “1+2+7 Approach:”

.... with one fundamental principle, two very important values, and seven axioms or guidelines. The fundamental principle is the principle of divine, the purpose of life that can hold us together. The two very important values are Justice and Compassion, which are both very important in Islam and Buddhism. The 7 axioms or guidelines include the following. Living in harmony with the environment. Upholding the concept of a happy family. Believing in a cohesive community. Upholding the principle of moral leadership. Ethical economy. A culture oriented to the development of character, which is missing in modern culture. And, harmonious relationships among people from different religious and communities.

We can compare this approach with the Charter of the World Council of Religious Leaders that aims to:

1. Promote religious and spiritual harmony.
2. Prevent and resolve tensions and potential conflicts connected with religion and culture.
3. Promote respect for women and children, and care for the vulnerable in society.
4. Work for the active promotion of mutual respect and the preservation of religious diversity.
5. Take constructive measures to resolve conflict, promote reconciliation and foster healing in areas of conflict.
6. Seek methods to reduce poverty and promote the values of sharing and compassion in an effort to help the U.N. achieve poverty reduction goals.
7. Promote an Environment Ethic to help reverse environmental degradation; mobilize the faith communities around sustainability, conservation and respect for all life.

Divine Revelation and Repentance

In Islam, divine revelation is the inexpressible truth from God. The Qur'an states that nature and the human soul bear the imprints of God. Nature expresses divine revelation and symbols of a higher order of existence. The Buddhaddhamma also speaks of truth, nature, harmony and justice. Professor David Chappell says, "What is divine is all of our interconnections and our relationships."

In terms of human nature and interpersonal relationships one of the greatest strengths of Islam is the Qur'anic concept of repentance (*tawbah*). Repentance reveals psychological inner-locus-of-control, self-determination and free will. The Qur'an specifies the consequences of acting counter to God's will and requires repentance to strengthen one's virtue, so one can compensate for a negative deed by doing positive deeds. Where Buddhism teaches awareness, Christianity teaches confession and Islam teaches repentance.

Psychology and Religion

Islamic psychology is based on self-determination, awareness of one's actions, sublimation, repentance, and transcendence via divine inspiration. By comparison, Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia does not emphasize a living psychology of self-determination, which result in passivity and submissiveness. An emphasis on statues, magic, amulets, ghosts, and superstitious interpretations of *kamma* can disempower people and ignore their true source of inner strength. To neglect self-determination and human volition and instead emphasize the changeability of life as beyond the scope of human intervention, can encourage pessimism, passivity, submissiveness, and the condoning of deviance.

Islam has an ethos of "sublimation, transformation and self-control." The psychologist Abraham Maslow stressed free will, the human potential to choose. By realizing their capabilities, people are responsible for the degree of growth they achieve. Clearly, an understanding of human nature can be advanced through Islamic sources. As Dr. Amir al Islam says, "religious leaders have to understand the importance of making people recognize the relevance and sacredness of others' traditions and faiths, symbols and icons," moving beyond tolerance to embrace other human beings and the sacredness of all life.

The Sacredness of Life

Islamic sources speak about the sacredness of life. Human beings are given a body and soul by God, who also gives them a limited knowledge of soul or spirit, with which they can arrive at the knowledge of God. In the Qur'an, the seat of knowledge is explained as heart (*qalb*), soul (*nafs*), spirit (*ruh*), and intellect (*aql*). Knowledge and spirit, collectively known as *fitrah*, directs one's behavior throughout life. Humans have freedom of choice and intelligence to decide what is right or wrong, good or bad. In Islam, the term for human being is derived from the word *nasiya*, to forget, and it is this forgetfulness of humans that leads to disobedience, injustice, and ignorance in this world. This is similar to Buddhism, where ignorance is like dust covering the eyes – a kind of forgetfulness that leads to suffering.

Interpreters of Qur'an explain *qalb* as the intrinsic element of a human being, consisting of four parts: the spiritual (*ruh*), cognitive (*latifa'alima*), psychic (*nafsi*), and biological (*jismi*). The cognitive element of the self is capable of perception, learning, and imagination. The psychic element induces feelings and emotions, such as desire or anger. The biological element makes it possible for human imagination and desire to actualize in the real world. The spiritual element unites human knowledge and human volition. Bringing volition to the center of our conception of human nature has far-reaching

implications for the fields of education and psychotherapy, for it opens the door for profound personal transformation.

Learning and Knowledge

Islam emphasizes a continual process of growth, change, and learning throughout life, and a competition among people to do good deeds. In the early years of life, Islam considers education to be paramount. Both parents and social institutions in the Islamic community have a significant responsibility in this matter. Human beings constantly need new objectives and stresses to motivate them. In Islam, there is a striving, or competition to do good deeds and to study. In contrast, the emphasis in southeast Asia Theravada Buddhism is on balance, harmony, and equilibrium to protect living being and the community from stress. However, not all stress is negative. In fact, positive stress can be useful for reaching certain goals. Even a lotus opening to the sun experiences a certain amount of positive stress, which cause the petals to open. Buddhists can use this idea to strive for wholesome *dhamma* (*kusala dhamma*) and create wholesome actions (*kusala kamma*) for the benefit of others.

In Islam, learning is more important than heredity. Knowledge and learning supercede filial bonds. However, the strong value place on filial piety in some Buddhist communities leads daughters to enter the sex trade to get money to give to their parents. Boys may also grow up drinking alcohol and frequenting sex workers, as they saw their fathers doing, disregarding Buddhist precepts.

Behavior is a Form of Worship

All behavior is to be considered as a form of worship in Islam, not just praying (*salah*), fasting (*saum*), charity to the poor (*zakat*), and pilgrimage (*hajj*). This is because the purpose of creation of humans and spirit (jinn) is to worship the Creator, and the concept of worship comprehensively covers all forms of behavior. Worship includes intention and action, and all intentions and actions can bring people closer to the Creator. The Qur'an proscribes very precise rules for human behavior and for politics and law. A good leader should always puts the interests of the people first and consult them regularly. Islam values moderation and balance in human behavior. Speech is also considered to be a good deed.

Nowadays, people from different religions have more contact with each other and we can learn more about each other. When people hear the word "Muslim," they often think of Arab countries, but Arab countries constitute only about 10 percent of Muslims in the world. The majority of Muslims live in Asia. Indonesia is the largest Muslim country, followed by Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Malaysia. "In certain parts of Asia, at a local level, Buddhism and Islam have coexisted for centuries. Muslims are a sizeable minority in practically all Buddhist nations while several Muslim majority nations have significant Buddhist communities. A Buddhist-Muslim dialogue is therefore extremely relevant to this part of the world."

Buddhists and Muslims need to create a global alliance for peace built on a shared ethics of peace and compassionate. The Qur'an says that God created man and woman and people of different nations so that they can get to know each other. In our search for truth and human dignity, we can explore the many different aspects of our religions that deeply enrich our lives. We can work to dispel the fears of national security, and instead work toward Dr. M. Habib Chirzin's definition of human security: "human freedom, human survival, and human welfare." Muslims and Buddhists can collaborate to find the causes of poverty and eradicate them. As Sulak Sivaraksa says, spirituality is not just to be kind and peaceful: "A good Buddhist must also sometimes be very strong, up to the point

of challenging the world, compassionately, and non-violently.” Buddhists and Muslims can come together to correct structural violence. Together, we can help break down stereotypes, foster understanding, and help one another. Inter-religious dialogue is a search for truth free of boundaries.

The life of the well-known Roman Catholic Sister of Charity Mother Teresa has been an inspiration and model for millions of women and men from a wide range of religious backgrounds. Her charity work among the poor is heralded as a classic example of love and justice, embodying the best of the Roman Catholic social teachings. While she used Christian language and grounded her work solidly within her own faith tradition, her life of compassionate service reached beyond the confines of religious categories. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979 and beatified in 2003, yet to date her life and her charitable work have received little scholarly attention.

In this paper, I offer a Buddhist analysis of the life and social justice work of this remarkable woman. My objective here is not to critique Mother Teresa. The reader or viewer of those detractions can draw their own conclusions. The central focus of this paper is a comparative analysis of the Christian principles that guided Mother Teresa's selfless service and the principles that guide the *bodhisattva*, the eminently selfless individual in the Buddhist tradition. First, I introduce the life and teachings of the "saint of Calcutta." Second, I describe the *bodhisattva* ideal and explain the prerequisites for entering the bodhisattva path. Third, using these criteria, I assess Mother Teresa's aspirations and achievements in relation to the aspirations and achievements of the *bodhisattva*. In this crosscultural comparison, I investigate the fundamental values and human qualities that emerge in Mother Teresa's narrative from Buddhist and Christian perspectives. A subtext of this paper is the question of commensurability – the extent to which similar concepts in dissimilar contexts can legitimately be equated.

To Save and Sanctify the Poorest of the Poor

Mother Teresa was born Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhui in 1910 to a prosperous Albanian Catholic family in Skopje, now Macedonia. As a child, she was very religious and conscientious in caring for the poor. At the age of 18, inspired by the letters of Yugoslavian priests working in Bengal, she left home and traveled to Zagreb and then to Dublin, where she joined the prestigious missionary order, the Sisters of Our Lady of Loreto. Soon thereafter, in 1928, she traveled to India, where she completed two years of novitiate training in Darjeeling before receiving her first vows. She then taught history and geography and later became the headmistress at St. Mary's High School, a prestigious girls' school run by the Loreto Sisters in Kolkata. In 1937 she took her final vows and took the name Mother Teresa. In 1946, Mother Teresa received a calling from God that directed her to serve the poor.¹

In 1950 she received approval from the diocese of Calcutta and Pope Pius XII to establish an order of nuns called the Missionaries of Charity, with the express purpose of serving the unfortunate while living among them: "Our particular mission is to labor at the salvation and sanctification of the poorest of the poor."² She began her charitable work immediately and, two years later, opened a home for the dying destitute in an empty pilgrims' rest house at Kalighat, a popular Hindu pilgrimage site. For the next 45 years, along with the 4,000 dedicated nuns who followed her example and 10,000 lay volunteers who assisted, she faithfully tended the sick, downtrodden, and abandoned. Despite contracting tuberculosis, she continued to give succor to lepers and AIDS patients until her death in 1997, maintaining a lifestyle akin to that of the impoverished she served, while regarding them as "the Lord himself."

Despite her widely acclaimed mission of peace and charity, Mother Teresa received considerable criticism. Christopher Hitchens, in particular, has excoriated Mother Teresa's work, in both print and film.³ While she was admired as an embodiment of Christian faith and goodness, an "angel of mercy," and a "saint of the gutters" by many, her detractors denounced her as a fanatic and a fraud. Eschewing all modern conveniences, Mother Teresa lived a life of poverty for almost 50 years, yet has been faulted for not allowing her nuns to use fans, washing machines, or elevators that would have lightened their work. Despite these controversies, when Pope John Paul II declared Mother Teresa of Kolkata "a blessed of the Catholic Church," the penultimate step to sainthood, 150,000 people from around the world gathered in Rome to pay her tribute.

Few doubt that Mother Teresa was a very special person and many regard her as a saintly and uniquely selfless example of Christian charity and piety. Her life of kindness and compassion among the poor and abject in India set a new standard for what it means to be devoted to Jesus and become an instrument of God's love:

To me, Jesus is the Life I want to live, the Light I want to reflect, the Way to the Father, the Love I want to express, the Joy I want to share, the Peace I want to sow around me. Jesus is everything to me.⁴

The question that concerns us here, however, is whether or not she can be called a *bodhisattva*, a supremely selfless individual in the Buddhist sense of the word. To answer this question, we need to learn more about the qualities of the bodhisattva.

Entering the *Bodhisattva* Path

An abiding concern for the welfare of sentient beings (that is, living beings with consciousness) is one of the salient features of the Buddha's teachings, as is evident in even the earliest Buddhist texts. The Buddha declared his intention to work for the welfare of all and exhorted others to do likewise. In the *Majjhima Sutta*, a Pali source used in the Theravada tradition, we read:

Laying aside cudgel and sword,
I live a life of innocence and mercy,
Full of kindness and compassion for everything that lives.⁵

In the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, this dedication to living a life of mercy, kindness, and compassion for all that lives becomes heightened and linked with the new goal of achieving Buddhahood. The *bodhisattva* doctrine of universal salvation is a natural corollary. This doctrine is founded on the premise that sentient beings are limitless in number and that, in the incessant cycle of rebirth (*samsara*), all living beings have been, at one time or another, related. Consequently, all sentient beings are recognized as having been one's own loving mother, not only once, but innumerable times.⁶ This recognition, conjoined with the virtue of great compassion, results in what the 14th Dalai Lama calls a sense of "universal responsibility."⁷

The path of the *bodhisattva* is not simply living a life of compassion, however. To become a *bodhisattva*, one must meet three specific criteria. The criteria of renunciation, *bodhicitta*, and direct insight into emptiness were clearly enunciated by the Indian scholar and monk Atiśa in his seminal work, *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment (Bodhipratipa)*.⁸ Although the term "*bodhisattva*" may be used rather loosely in common parlance to denote a kind and compassionate person,⁹ properly speaking, only a person who

meets these three qualifications is a *bodhisattva*.

The Soteriology of Selflessness

The first principle of the *bodhisattva* way of life is renunciation. That Mother Teresa sacrificed selflessly in tending to the poorest and most miserable – the abandoned, the dying, and the lepers – in the streets of Kolkata is a well-documented fact. After almost 20 years of teaching at St. Mary's, she felt compelled to give up even the relative comfort of her life as a school principal to establish a mission that would serve the neediest segments of the Indian population. She not only lived a life of poverty like the poor she served, but also inspired an order of nuns with a similar dedication and left a very visible legacy of serving the most indigent sectors of societies around the world. Another aspect of Mother Teresa's renunciation was her clear decision to leave her natal family, to become a nun, and to sacrifice the physical and emotional intimacy of marriage and children. There is little question that she embodied the ideal of renunciation that is the trademark of ascetics of all religious traditions.

In examining the notion of renunciation, we find close parallels between the Catholic and Buddhist monastic orders. Taking their cue from Jesus of Nazareth's exhortation, "Give up all that ye have and follow me," monks and nuns of the Catholic monastic traditions renounce a life of marriage and family to serve God through a life of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Similarly, the notion of renunciation in the Buddhist context applies generally to the lifestyle of the *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis*, the monks and nuns who renounce the household life and join the Sangha ("assembly"), or monastic community. The term "renunciation" as applied to the *bodhisattva* has a specific denotation, however. It carries not only the import of renouncing the pleasures of the world, but of renouncing cyclic existence – the wheel of birth, death, and rebirth known as *samsara*. This understanding of renunciation is premised on the theory of repeated rebirth in the various realms of *samsara* – in myriad heavens, hells, and the realms of humans, animals, and ghosts – in contrast to the Roman Catholic view of a future life in either heaven, hell, or purgatory.

Despite similar beliefs in heaven and hell in the Buddhist and Christian traditions, they do not share the same soteriology. The Buddhist aspires to achieve liberation from *samsara*, whereas the Christian aspires to achieve salvation through the redemptive power of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, in the Christian view, eternal life with God in heaven is the anticipated reward for faith and/or good works, depending on the denomination: "In my father's house there are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you." (John 14:2) In the Buddhist view, by contrast, although rebirth as a long-lived god in a heaven is very pleasant and may last as long as 80,000 years, it is not an eternal state, but temporary. As soon as a being's good karma is exhausted, the pleasant consequences created through virtuous actions in previous lives come to an end. That being then takes another rebirth, one that is less pleasant than in heaven. Moreover, for the determined Buddhist seeker of liberation, a rebirth in heaven is not particularly desirable, since it amounts to a lengthy diversion from the task of liberating oneself from *samsara*.

Although for both traditions the ultimate goal is a type of spiritual perfection and though humility is regarded as a great virtue, the Buddhists achieve liberation through their own efforts and insight, whereas Christians achieve salvation through God's love and the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The Buddha, on his deathbed, instructed his followers: "Work out your own liberation with diligence." Jesus, on the other hand, instructed his followers to obey God's will. Consistent with this advice, Mother Teresa's path was to submit to the will of God and the grace of the Holy Spirit. She and her sisters believed that they belonged to Jesus and, like him, were simply doing God's work. The credit for any achievement therefore went to God and was not viewed as any personal merit. Thus the

methods used to reach the final goal reinforce the distinction between Buddhist notions of liberation and Christian notions of salvation, and strengthen the conclusion that renunciation ultimately means something quite different in the Buddhist and Christian contexts.

Compassion in Theory and Practice

The next task is to investigate the extent to which the Christian ideal of selfless service is commensurate with the Buddhist ideal of selfless service, as embodied in the *bodhisattva*. Compassion, the second principle of the *bodhisattva*'s way of life, is a central pillar of both the Buddhist and Christian traditions. Mother Teresa modeled her work on the love and compassion of Christ who is an incarnation of God's love for humanity. The Christian instruction to serve the hungry, naked, and imprisoned is found in Matthew 25:35: "Whenever you do this for the least of these, you do for me." Her work among indigent children fulfills the injunction "Suffer the little children to come unto me." (Matthew 19:14; Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16)

A question arises about whether her motivation was purely to benefit the poorest of the poor or whether she had the hidden agenda of converting the beneficiaries of her charity to Christianity. In reading the accounts of her life, I conclude that she was motivated by the hope of leading the beneficiaries of her charity to God, but that it was not a conversion effort of the flagrant "body count" variety like recent conversion efforts in Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Mongolia, and other developing countries in recent years. These aggressive conversion attempts by Evangelical Christian organizations are widely resented by people who feel that their own religious values and identities are under attack, whereas in reaching out to the abandoned indigent, Mother Teresa was working with people whose suffering was beyond religious identifications. In striving to bring people to God, I believe that she was motivated not by an exclusivistic conceptualization of God, but by a notion of pure goodness and love that is beyond selfish interests or religious agendas.

The Buddha taught the virtues of love and compassion – a spontaneous, effortless compassion toward all living beings that is unbounded in scope and guided by insight. Similarly, love is the commandment of Jesus and it is guided by the Holy Spirit that imparts insight. Although it is very doubtful that the Buddha had a social welfare ministry in mind, he did teach his followers to care for those who are suffering from sickness and other physical and emotional afflictions. This is parallel to Jesus's commandment, "Love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12) In the Mahayana tradition, the teachings emphasize an altruistic ideal that expands beyond individual expressions of love and compassion to a universal compassion for all living beings – human, animal, visible, and invisible. Finally, this great compassion expands to *bodhicitta*, the altruistic intention to liberate all living beings from the sufferings of *samsara*. This "enlightened attitude" is of two types: (1) aspiring *bodhicitta*, which is the strong determination to become fully awakened (i.e., a Buddha) in order to liberate all sentient beings from suffering, and (2) engaged *bodhicitta*, which is the implementation of this noble ideal in action. *Bodhicitta* begins either as a brief impulse or as a calculated response to the sufferings of living beings. Sporadic altruism gradually matures into spontaneous, effortless compassion toward all creatures and culminates in an unwavering determination to achieve perfect Buddhahood, a resolve that extends to all future lifetimes until perfect enlightenment is reached.

The *bodhisattva* is utterly devoid of self-interest, fully capable, and ready to relieve the sufferings of sentient beings at any time by providing them with whatever they need. A verse by Āryaśūra shows the extent of the *bodhisattva*'s commitment:

Even if someone should demand my flesh,

May I offer it with pleasure in my eyes;
May I always donate my limbs and so on,
For the welfare of all embodied beings.

May I, like a wish-fulfilling gem,
Provide all that beings desire
And may I, like the wish-granting tree,
Completely fulfill their hope.¹⁰

Mother Teresa and Mahayana Buddhists strongly believe in the dignity of human beings and are committed to expressing love and compassion in action, especially toward the most wretched. Mother Teresa demonstrated this commitment as she dressed the wounds of lepers and sacrificed her health to minister to society's throwaways. She did not go so far as to donate her eyes or limbs for the welfare of others, as Aryasura's *bodhisattva* is purportedly willing to do, but she did sacrifice her life to care for the poor. The *bodhisattva*'s willingness to sacrifice life and limb may be allegorical, since, as critics of the *bodhisattva* resolve have pointed out, to destroy the body or damage one's health impairs one's ability to serve living beings. In any case, the sacrifices of the *bodhisattva* are meant to inspire compassion and endurance in the course of liberating sentient beings from suffering. Although Mother Teresa never expressed her intention to become a Buddha or to liberate all beings from *samsara*, the tremendous hardships that she endured during her years of work among the unfortunate are abundant evidence of her commitment to the *bodhisattva* ethic of compassion.

Wisdom and Insight

The third principle of the *bodhisattva* way of life is *prajña* (wisdom, understanding, or insight), which in the Buddhist context is specifically understood as direct insight into emptiness, the true nature of all phenomena. Wisdom guides the altruism of the *bodhisattva*, such that it does not degenerate into mere sentimentalism, but entails skillful means to effectively accomplish the welfare of all beings. Wisdom and compassion operate in tandem; like the two wings of a bird, both qualities are essential to the achievement of enlightenment. After acquiring an intellectual understanding of the no-self (*anatman*) doctrine, the *bodhisattva* gains direct insight into the lack of true existence of phenomena, which is known as emptiness (*sunyata*). The *bodhisattva* practices meditation on emptiness throughout the ten stages of the *bodhisattva* path, accumulating wisdom and merit through the practice of the ten perfections (*paramita*)¹¹ for three countless aeons. The process culminates in the perfect wisdom of a Buddha – simultaneously knowing all things “as they are,” which is equivalent to omniscience.

The concept of wisdom has a different meaning for Roman Catholics: wisdom is God-given, not acquired through one's own efforts. In the Catholic context, wisdom refers to the revelations of divine wisdom contained in Job, Proverbs, Psalms, and the other books of the Hebrew Bible known as the “wisdom literature.”¹² Wisdom in the biblical context is not human insight, as with the Buddhists, but revelations of God's wisdom. These revelations are to be understood through prayer and contemplation, and expressed in daily conduct. In my view, Mother Teresa was both a contemplative and an apostolic, and her life reveals both the wisdom of God's revelation, as she experienced it, and wisdom as applied in everyday life. Although she may not have possessed the wisdom that directly understands emptiness, her daily devotions lead her to inspired insights and commonsense judgments that cut through accepted truths: “War is the killing of human beings. Who can even think that it could ever be ‘just’?”¹³ In addition, she had the practical wisdom that enabled her to negotiate the Indian

bureaucracy. She deserves sainthood for that alone. She successfully administered dozens of social welfare programs while dealing with significant cultural differences, and clearly had the wisdom to see beyond these differences to the essential dignity of all human beings.

Comparing Compassion

From studying the life and maxims of Mother Teresa, I conclude that, although she was probably a saint from any religious point of view, she may or may not have been a *bodhisattva* from a Buddhist point of view. She clearly qualifies as a *bodhisattva* in the broad outlines, in that she embodies the qualities of renunciation, compassion, and insight. However, she does not fulfill the specific criteria of the *bodhisattva* that are set forth in the Mahayana tradition and explicated by *Atiśa* in his *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*. Although she renounced worldly pleasures and personal benefit, there is no indication that she consciously renounced cyclic existence or even was familiar with the concept. Although she manifested great compassion in caring for the sick, destitute, and dying, and although she may well have aspired to relieve all human sufferings, there is no indication that she aspired to become an enlightened being in order to liberate all sentient beings from the sufferings of *samsara*, or that this *bodhisattva* aspiration was even in her vocabulary. Although she was wise in ways that appear to have been directly inspired by God, or her belief in God, there is no indication that she attained direct insight into emptiness or even that she had ever encountered the concept. Without these three specific qualifications, then, she cannot be considered a *bodhisattva* in the strict sense of the word.

When questioned about a Buddhist equivalent to Mother Teresa, Buddhists are hard-pressed to provide an example. His Holiness the Dalai Lama and other great Buddhist masters work day and night to benefit living beings through their prayers and by teaching about the path to enlightenment, but they are not in the trenches, cleaning the wounds of lepers or tending to indigent patients dying of AIDS. When it comes to active engagement in the world of suffering and affliction, perhaps Mother Teresa is closer to the *bodhisattva* ideal than any Buddhist. Does the *bodhisattva's* ambition to provide whatever living beings need require that person to be a professed Buddhist? Or can *bodhisattvas* emerge in any place, in any culture?

This raises several important questions: Is the *bodhisattva* ideal limited by culture? Is a *bodhisattva* necessarily Buddhist? If the *bodhisattva's* activity is dependent upon culture, the definition and scope of his or her work might be limited to a particular sphere. Is the *bodhisattva* active only in Buddhist countries? Is the *bodhisattva's* compassion limited only to Mahayana countries? If this is the case, can we infer that the recipients of the *bodhisattva's* compassion are limited to or more likely to be Mahayana Buddhists? This leads to a logical impasse: If a *bodhisattva's* compassion is circumscribed in any way, it cannot be said to be universal or impartial, which contradicts the *bodhisattva's* stated ideal of working to liberate all living beings from suffering. If the *bodhisattva's* activity is not limited, but extends to beings of all descriptions, then we run into a different problem: A person may be selflessly devoted to relieving the sufferings of living beings, but not use the language of the *bodhisattva* and not have the aim of becoming a Buddha. Such a person might, like Mother Teresa, define the ultimate in very different terms.

Looking at the question from another angle leads us to one further consideration. In the Mahayana tradition it is believed that a *bodhisattva* has the capacity to appear in myriad forms to benefit sentient beings. The *bodhisattva's* capacity to benefit all increases exponentially as she or he progresses along the paths and stages to awakening. At the first stage, a *bodhisattva* purportedly has the ability to manifest in one hundred forms in one hundred world systems; at the final stage of the process, a Buddha has the power to manifest innumerable forms in innumerable world systems. From this

perspective, a *bodhisattva* could appear in whatever form was most beneficial to living beings. Since in the world today more people profess Christianity than any other religious tradition, it stands to reason that a *bodhisattva* who uses Christian terminology and beliefs has the potential to reach the greatest number of people, by using a language they can understand. Using this logic, it is not impossible that Mother Teresa was a *bodhisattva* who manifested in a Christian form to propagate the ethic of compassion.

The question of commensurability that was raised at the beginning of this paper has yielded an unanticipated conclusion. The search for similarities has turned up a trove of differences, with many layers of meaning, and brought to the surface new questions regarding cultural and philosophical congruence. The point of greatest similarity that emerges is the value of a life lived with compassion and devoted to the service of all. In the present dialogical exercise, I have attempted to examine a Roman Catholic figure through the use of Buddhist terminology and criteria in an effort to understand the extent to which the *bodhisattva* ideal is culturally constructed and whether it has value outside the Buddhist context. Perhaps this is an exercise in futility, like trying to match round pegs and square holes, since the *bodhisattva* ideal is predicated on a set of assumptions that, as far as we know, the Catholic Mother Teresa never considered. At the same time, through such an exercise we can expand our understanding of compassion and of the cultural and religious categories that often divide human beings. After all, genuine compassion cannot be circumscribed, but must extend to the whole of humanity, transcending boundaries of culture, class, and gender.

Compassion, in Buddhist terms, must extend not only to human beings, but to all forms of life: animals, hell beings, hungry ghosts, and all. This has led Buddhists to a focus on intensive contemplation toward the goals of achieving spiritual awakening and liberating all beings from suffering as quickly as possible. It has also led to an ethics of not harming any living creature, which has profound ethical implications for peacebuilding, environmental protection, and global justice.

Wisdom, in Christian terms, is not an aptitude of human beings alone, but is necessarily inspired by God. At the same time, God's love as incarnated in Christ has inspired both profoundly compassionate service, such as that of Mother Teresa, and the social justice movement known as liberation theology.

In short, Buddhists and Christians have much to learn from one another. Many Roman Catholics are now using Buddhist teachings and meditation practices to renew their spiritual life. Many Buddhists are now recognizing the contributions of Roman Catholics to creating a more just society. Important figures such as Mother Teresa set examples not only within their own traditions, but for all traditions. All of us can learn from such a model and work to incorporate these exemplary forms of service into our own traditions. Further interaction and dialogue will surely expand the effectiveness of both Buddhists and Christians in relieving human misery.

NOTES

1. Kathryn Spink, *Mother Teresa: A Complete Authorized Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), pp. 3-22.

2. From the constitution of the Missionaries of Charity written by Mother Teresa. Quoted in Edward Le Joly, S. J., *Mother Teresa of Calcutta: A Biography* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), p. 28.

3. Christopher Hitchens, *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice* (London & New York: Verso, 1995) and a British Channel Four documentary called “Hell’s Angels.”
4. José Luis González-Balado, comp. *Mother Teresa: In My Own Words* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1996), p. 34.
5. Majjhima Nikāya, III.29ff. Quoted in Isaline Blew Horner, *The Early Buddhist Theory of Man Perfected*, Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1936, p. 127.
6. In the Buddhist view, the sense of community is limited neither to human beings nor to those born from a womb or a flesh and blood mother, but encompasses all sentient life, including those who take birth “from an egg, from moisture, and through miracle.”
7. Tenzin Gyatso, *The Global Community and the Need for Universal Responsibility*, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1991.
8. Geshe Sonam Rinchen (trans. and ed. by Ruth Sonam), *Atisha’s Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 1997).
9. For example, in Buddhist circles in Korea, a Mahayana Buddhist country, laypeople are routinely addressed as “*bosal*” (*bodhisattvas*).
10. Gendun Gyatso (trans. and ed. Brian C. Beresford), *Aryasura’s Aspiration and a Meditation on Compassion* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives), 1979, p. 25.
11. In the Mahayana literature, the ten perfections are generosity (*dāna*), ethical conduct (*sīla*), patience (*ksanti*), joyful effort (*virya*), meditation (*dhyaṇa*), wisdom (*prajña*), skillful means (*upāya-kausalya*), aspiration (*pranidhāna*), power (*bala*), and exalted wisdom (*jñāna*). In the Pali literature of the Theravada tradition, the ten perfections are slightly different: generosity (*dāna*), ethical conduct (*sīla*), renunciation (*nekkhamma*), wisdom (*pañña*), energy (*virīya*), patience (*ṭhappi*), truthfulness (*sacca*), determination (*aditthana*), loving kindness (*metta*), and equanimity (*upekkha*).
12. Namely, the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Songs, The Book of Wisdom, and Sirach. The Book of Wisdom gives this description: “[12] Resplendent and unfading is Wisdom, and she is readily perceived by those who love her, and found by those who seek her. [13] She hastens to make herself known in anticipation of men's desire; [14] he who watches for her at dawn shall not be disappointed, for he shall find her sitting by his gate. [15] For taking thought of her is the perfection of prudence, and he who for her sake keeps vigil shall quickly be free from care; [16] Because she makes her own rounds, seeking those worthy of her, and graciously appears to them in the ways, and meets them with all solicitude. [17] For the first step toward discipline is a very earnest desire for her; then, care for discipline is love of her; [18] love means the keeping of her laws; To observe her laws is the basis for incorruptibility; [19] and incorruptibility makes one close to God; [20] thus the desire for Wisdom leads up to a kingdom.” *The New Catholic Bible* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2002).
13. Le Joly, *Mother Teresa of Calcutta*, p. 67.

The 100,000 Upasika Project: Young Buddhist Women as Models of Morality for the World

Boontha Leartthevorntham

The sole aim of Bhikkhu Phrarajbhavanavisudh, the abbot of Wat Phra Dhammakaya Temple, is to see peace prevail on earth for the betterment of humankind. Generally, people around the world share a common belief that peace and happiness can be found externally, thus everyone is on a quest to fulfill their physical needs. However, peace does not come from any physical factors. One cannot find peace by killing, fighting, or competing for wealth or power. True peace comes from within each and every individual. Anyone can achieve peace and happiness simply by practicing meditation.

Bhikkhu Phrarajbhavanavisudh recognizes the importance of creating genuine peace. He promotes and teaches meditation to everyone regardless of race, religion, or creed, to help them find inner peace. He recognizes the importance of moral development in the youth. For these reasons, Wat Phra Phra Dhammakaya Temple provides meditation every Sunday from 9:30 am to 4:30 pm. Training camps for various groups are organized annually, such as the Youth Moral Camp, Summer Novice Mass Ordination, Female University Student Buddhist Camp, Female Secondary School Student Buddhist Camp, Male University Student Ordination, International Monk Ordination, Nationwide 100,000 Monks Ordination Program, and Nationwide One Million Upasika Ordination and Training Program. Each program is arranged to provide the most suitable and effective training for people of every age group and gender.

An *upasika* training is a program for laywomen attended by women from various age groups, young and old. The program is supported by the Thai Sangha, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and Buddhist organizations both in Thailand and abroad.

Definition and Importance of Upasika Kaew

The term *upasika kaew* is given to one who is accomplished in *sila*, *samadhi*, and *panna*. Bhikkhu Phrarajbhavanavisudh defined such a person as one who volunteers, understands, and is ready to be a role model for others. Thus, the image of an *upasika kaew* makes a positive impression of Thai women on global audiences. These women's dedication in developing themselves and practicing meditation is an inspiration for others to follow. They help bring peace to society and can help preserve Buddhism in Thailand for many years to come.

Women are not born only for the purpose of bearing a child; they have many other abilities, too. Throughout history, Thai women have been known for their heroic acts of defending the country from invasion. Women can be both mothers of children and also mothers of the world. Women have immense power to help bring peace to the world and disseminate Buddhism globally.

An *upasika* is not just an ordinary woman, but a pillar upholding Buddhism. She supports and protects Buddhism from all threats. *Upasikas* are one component of the four-fold Buddhist society, which is comprised of *bhikkhus* (fully ordained monks), *bhikkhunis* (fully ordained nuns), *upasakas* (laymen), and *upasikas* (laywomen). *Upasikas* have played crucial roles in Buddhism since the time of the Lord Buddha. Although the term *upasika* is not widely known at present, *upasikas* are still as valuable as ever for the well-being of society.

At the time of the Buddha, a woman named Visakha was born into a wealthy family. She lived a privileged life and could have anything she wished. Her wedding dress was said to be more beautiful than any other dress ever before in history. Even after she married, she continued to support the

Sangha. She was remarkable in her roles as an *upasika*. She donated a great sum of money to construct Buppharam Monastery, which was one of the most important temples at the time of the Buddha and a center for disseminating Buddhism. Hence, an *upasika* played a crucial in transmitting Buddhism into the future.

The term *upasika kaew* is translated from the Pali term *upasika rattanam*. It usually refers to a Buddhist laywomen with the following characteristics:

1. Strong faith in the Dhamma
2. Diligence in keeping the precepts
3. Not being gullible and understanding the law of *karma* (cause and effect)
4. Not relying on worldly gods
5. Continually accumulating merit to support Buddhism

The *upasika kaew* training lasts for a period of 7 or 15 days. The age of participants range from 15 to 65 years old. Although participants are different ages and come from different backgrounds, they share the same desire to train themselves to become a better person, internally and externally. In the training, they learn both theoretical and practical aspects of the Dhamma. Teacher and mentors guide the participants throughout the training.

Three *Upasika Kaew* Trainings in Thailand

The first 13-day training was held from March 8 to 15, 2010, the second from April 16 to 29, the third training from December 16-29, 2010. This project plays an essential role in strengthening Buddhism in Thailand. The women who complete the training become invaluable resources for spreading Buddhism. The project objectives are: (1) to train Buddhist women in ethics and educate them in Buddhist values; (2) to restore ethics and Buddhist culture to their former prosperity; and (3) to develop society and the country through fostering virtue. Qualified participants for the program are healthy Buddhist woman between the ages of 15 and 65 who are able to keep the eight precepts throughout the training period and can easily adjust to simple food and living conditions. To receive maximum benefit, each participant must follow the daily schedule:

04:30	Rise
05:15	Morning chanting and meditation
06:15	Daily chores
07:00	Breakfast
09:00	Meditation session
11:00	Lunch
13:30	Meditation and Dhamma talk
16:00	Exercise
16:30	Refreshments
18:00	Evening chanting and meditation
19:40	Listening to the Dhamma, walk through the Inner Dream Kindergarten program
22:00	Rest

The training curriculum includes: basic rules of training, etiquette for women, dining etiquette, Buddhist customs (such as bowing and showing respect to monks), Buddhist etiquette; the importance of

respect, the meaning and importance of *sanghadana* (offerings to the Sangha); making resolutions; the qualifications of an *upasika* and biographies of *upasika* at the time of the Buddha's time, the meaning of meditation, basic meditation practice, right view, the restoration of ethics in the world and in Buddhism, being a *kalyana mitra*, human psychology, time management, and the first five stages of personal development.

At the conclusion of the training, each participant is presented with a white sash. The sash symbolizes that the person is a qualified *upasika*. During the ceremony, participants receive certificates and teachings from renowned senior monks.

Results of the Training

Although the *upasika kaew* training is brief, each participant receives many benefits. Often it is life transformative. Adapting the teachings of the Buddha to modern lifestyles helps everyone develop themselves from an ordinary woman to a perfect *upasika*.

The trainings described here were all held in Thailand, but Dhammakaya branch temples worldwide, including the United States, Europe, Asia, and Australia also organize similar trainings. The training period and concept are slightly adjusted to suit the local culture. For example, three Dhammakaya branches in Taiwan organized trainings last year at Wat Phra Dhammakata Taipei, Wat Bhavana TaoYuan, and Wat Bhavana Tai Jong. Many interested people, both Thai and Taiwanese, attended the trainings. Two training have also been organized in India.

Upsika kaew are not just women who are born to study and start a family. They are women who develop themselves through the teachings of the Buddha and who are beautiful inside and out. They are a strong force for upholding the Dhamma and pass it on to future generations.

Children's Ethics Programs at the Sakyadhita Center, Sri Lanka

Bhikkhuni Madulle Vijithananda

Children whose minds are unspoiled by expectations and desires are a valuable resource, since they will inherit the responsibilities of society in the future. They develop language skills, methods of communication, and behavioral patterns by emulating adults and from observing their environment. They may be exposed to good as well as bad examples in their families. Bad examples can corrupt the minds of young innocent children, thus hampering the development of the country they inherit.

Dysfunctional families can fill children's minds with negative thoughts such as hatred, remorse, jealousy, anger, revenge, and harassment. As adults, these children may become involved in criminal activities, creating a society rife with crime, corruption, murder, robbery, and violence. These activities impede the healthy development of society, including security, health, education, and economic development, not to mention social and religious harmony in the country. The aim of the Sakyadhita Center's programs for children is to minimize these unhealthy development by nurturing well-disciplined, peace-loving members of society.

Training the Body, Speech, and Mind

A series of programs developed at the Sakyadhita Center in Sri Lanka focus on children's physical, verbal, and mental development. "Physical development" means helping children learn courteous, disciplined behavior so as to avoid problems for themselves or others. To stimulate this, their young minds should be involved in pleasant activities. Their minds can be developed through their various talents such as drama, sports, and creative work. Through these activities, children learn physical self-control and discipline.

"Verbal development" means helping children learn to distinguish between speech that is helpful and detrimental to oneself and others. Language is essential for communications and the exchange of ideas among people. Use of spiteful, unpleasant or rough words hurts the feelings of others, which is detrimental to peace and unity. This may lead to various interwoven problems and fights, even ending up in crimes such as murder. The aim of verbal development is to prevent children from falling into such situations and crimes, and to lead them to unity, peace, and prosperity. This is accomplished by training them to use pleasant words, speak truthfully, and talk about meaningful things..

"Mental development" is as follows. The mind of a child is like clear water. Just as clear water becomes turbid through contamination, the child's mind too can become foul and polluted if it becomes filled with vicious, destructive and unwholesome feelings and ideas. From infancy a child's mind should be developed with proper moral behavior (Sila) and ethical values through a virtuous and religious background. The foundation for a person's character is laid during infancy. The development of mother and child should be considered together when talking about the development of a child's mind. Attention should be given to the child's mind from the time the child is still growing inside the mother's womb. The family environment as well as the mental conditions of the mother during pregnancy will affect the child. The mother should cultivate loving kindness and compassion for the child while the child is still inside the mother's womb.

Accordingly if the ethical and moral awareness of the children is to be achieved, it is essential that the family unit should be fortified with proper ethical and moral conduct. From the time a child

utters his or her first words, the child learns his or her principal behavioral patterns from the mother and father. If the parents do not lead their children with proper examples the children will copy their bad behavior. Scaring a child often, shattering hopes, cheating through lies and deception, subjecting children to various kinds of abuse will eventually lead them to be the destructive elements of a country. According to Buddhadhamma a child's character development should commence from the time a child is conceived.

Accordingly, a series of programs aimed at the development of ethical and moral values of children are being conducted at our center:

1. Programs to educate the youth before their marriage.
2. Counselling programs to build up a peaceful and harmonious family after marriage.
3. Programs to educate pregnant mothers and their husbands,
4. Special meditation programs and chanting 'Seth Pirith' (Suttas) for pregnant mothers,
- 5 Programs to educate parents of infants and children of school age,
6. Open counseling for all members of a family.

These programs are held from time to time to without considering religious or racial differences in order to develop ethical and moral values within a family. Our initial program drew children to the center by offering a program on the theme "Buddhadhamma in English," where Dhamma is taught in English medium. The syllabus covers the life of Buddha, Buddhist stories, Buddhist way of life, kindness, compassion, the act of giving free of greed (*dana*), and proper moral behavior (*sila*).

Children's Programs on Ethics

Programs on ethical behavior (*sila*) designed especially for children are conducted every month on full-moon Poya days. While learning Dhamma, children especially learn practical methods to discipline and control their mind, body, and speech. They learn and practice disciplined behavior, proper eating habits, pleasant words, truthful speech, loving kindness (*metta*), and so on. These programs teach children how to distinguish between right and wrong and how to get rid of bad habits and develop virtuous habits. The programs, which last for 12 weeks, teach children the fundamentals of good character and gives them practical training in how to accomplish it. Poems, stanzas (*gathas*), and Jataka stories depicting the life of the Buddha as a *bodhisatta* are used as teaching methods.

A meditation program for children is conducted every Sunday evening for about two hours. In fact, children train in meditation during all the programs conducted at the center. Many children have developed the ability to sit in the same posture and concentrate their minds for 45 minutes. Children also get special training in how to recite the Pali *suttas* and chants (*pirith*) that are part of the Sinhala New Year ceremonies, Sanghamitta Procession, and other religious activities. With great devotion, they travel around the village in a vehicle to perform these chants as a blessing for the villagers.

Children also learn to cultivate loving kindness, observing the first precept to abstain from killing and to protect all living beings. They cultivate loving kindness and compassion for all living beings by thinking and feeling: 'May all living beings be blessed, live without fear, and be protected.' Inspired by loving kindness and compassion, they buy animals from the slaughter houses that have been condemned to death and give them their freedom (*abhaya dana*). For example, a small calf that had been condemned to slaughter when it was still sucking milk from its mother was purchased from a butcher and donated to a few families, who are taking care of it. Not only that, but the children also

help to look after these helpless animals by providing them with food and drink as part of their work. Helping the Needy is another program that helps children develop Buddhist ethical values. Each child, with the blessings of their parents, collects dried food items, according to their abilities, and donates them to selected deserving families in the village. Through this kind of social service, they learn to share what they have. The children have established Shining Star Children's Society, which meets once a month and conducts various programs based on the children's own creative ideas and proposals. For example, on Poya days, they clean the temple premises, offer flowers and soft drinks as "giving free of greed" (*dan sala*), and do other voluntary works.

The Children's Camp, conducted during school holidays, is another opportunity to help encourage the children's creative ideas, talents, and skills. Artistic drawings and creations are given a special place here, because these activities help teachers to identify and help children with psychological problems. For example, children who think they "cannot do anything," learn that they can draw and become capable artists. They are also able to develop their abilities and talents through singing, acting, and other creative activities. Those children whose parents scolded them for being lazy instead became very active and obedient through this program.

Learning the Five Precepts

Observing the five precepts is another way to develop ethical values in children. Teaching them to recite this verse is a practical way to prevent them from killing:

All tremble at violence,
All fear death.
Putting oneself in the place of another,
One should not kill nor cause another to kill.¹

All beings are afraid of punishment and death. The Buddha demonstrated that hurting and killing others is wrong by imagining oneself in the receiver's end. We help the children understand that killing for any reason, whether for food, for fun, for experimentation (medical or otherwise), or out of fear for one's own life, is unwholesome and will generate unfortunate results. In addition, we teach them to cultivate wholesome deeds. We demonstrate the advantages and rewards of being vegetarian and show them how to cultivate kindness, compassion, and loving kindness in their hearts. They learn this in a concrete and practical way by collecting small sums of money in a tin until, once a year, they are able to liberate some animals condemned to slaughter. They give meals and drinks to the innocent animals and provide them with security and love.

Concerning the second precept, children are taught that theft – taking other's belongings by force or deception – is an unwholesome deed. They are taught to imagine the mental distress they would feel if this happened to them. At the same time, they are encouraged to provide food items, clothes, educational materials for children, and medicines to poor families. This way, they learn that poverty, wealth, sorrow, and happiness are the karmic effects of actions; therefore, they should refrain from unwholesome deeds and instead engage in wholesome deeds and activities.

Although the deep meaning of the third precept may not be fully comprehended by children, it is important to help them identify and understand the negative results and repercussions of sexual misconduct. For example, the children participated in a workshop where they saw reports and posters depicting the sufferings of various social diseases that result from careless sexual behavior. They seem to understand the repercussions of only thinking about the pleasure of the moment.

Children are also taught the importance of truthful speech and develop verbal discipline. They learn that lying, deception, harsh words, and destructive speech are unwholesome. They are taught to speak the truth and use wholesome, pleasant words. The techniques used include respectfully chanting the *suttas*, singing Buddhist devotional songs, reading exemplary stories, and reciting poetry and stanzas aloud. The children also learn that pleasant, meaningful speech helps create harmony with other children.

Concerning the fifth precept, the children try to send a message to society by creating posters that show the harmful effects of intoxicants. Understanding the crimes that are committed and sufferings that are caused by drugs and alcohol, they tried to teach their community to abstain from them.

Developing Mental Discipline

Greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*) may appear even in young, innocent minds, but thoughts can be controlled by learning to discipline the mind. Meditation methods such as *buddhānussati* (meditation on the Buddha's qualities) and *metta* (loving kindness meditation) are very appropriate methods to help children learn to discipline their minds and avoid negative thoughts. These meditation practices help settle the distractions in children's minds and help them develop mental discipline and ethical sensibility. We earnestly believe that children who participate in these programs will take leadership roles in social development in the future, becoming exemplars for their generation.

NOTE

1. Verse 129 of *The Dhammapada*, trans. Achariya Buddharakkhita (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2003).

Than Hsiang Kalyana Mitra Centre in Pajam, Negeri Sembilan: A Case Study

Zhen Yuan Shi

Than Hsiang Kalyana Mitra Centre in Pajam, Malaysia, serves as a center for education and cultivation for all age groups. The center began with a children's camp that was held in March 2004, with a total number of 84 participants. In time, this seed has flourished and produced good results through the efforts and diligence of all its members. In line with Than Hsiang Monastery's commitment to learning and service, we sincerely hope to create a society filled with love and care. Members strongly hold to the concept of Kalyana Mitra ("good friends") and the Ten Good Deeds¹ in helping and encouraging each other in holding hands, learning, and walking on the path to enlightenment. All members contribute heartily for the benefit to all sentient beings by propagating the Buddhadharma and directing their minds and bodies to liberation through education.

The uniqueness of the Kalyana Mitra concept is that it leads our on the path together with all generations of their family members. We have groups for infants, children from 2 to 6 years and from 7 to 11, teenagers from 12 to 16, youths who 17 years and older, and adults who are 40 and older. We have grandmother and grandfather groups, too. The continuous strength of good deeds and merit grounds the development of Than Hsiang Kalyana Mitra Center from one branch to another. Today, there are five branches: one in Pajam, three in Seremban and one in Kajang.

All phenomena arise and deacease according to causes and conditions. Buddhists spread the Dhamma with devoted hearts and aspirations for the benefit of others. Than Hsiang Kalyana Mitra Centre has grown to be a calm and peaceful environment in the south, with a view of the countryside, in the state of Negeri Sembilan. The serene environment is suitable for any indoor and outdoor activities. It was established due to the loving-kindness and great compassion of Bhiksu Wei Wu, who founded Than Hsiang Temple in Penang in 1985. The strong conviction of the Center is: "The young to learn; the strong and healthy to serve; the aged and sick to be cared for; the departed to find a pleasant future existence." The Center's core ideals are spiritual cultivation and Buddhist education here and now, creating good causes for the future.

Education

The Buddha said that we are not born into occupations, but create them. For example, we can become farmers or teachers or something else. Therefore, we decided to combine our knowledge and teaching skills to initiate Than Hsiang Kalyana Mitra Center with a children's camp and received an overwhelming response. The first camp was attended by 84 children, including both Chinese and local Indians. Over 60 volunteers came from all over Malaysia to offer their assistance. I was assisted in this first activity by a team of members from Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Selangor, and other states. With this auspicious beginning, we began the first Buddhist educational center in the state.

Volunteers served as foster parents, brothers and sisters, helpers for cleaning and setting up the center, preparers of food and beverages for the camp, and much more. The foster parents, brothers, and sisters played very important roles. They are taught to care for one another and to consider others' needs and act as *kalyanamitra*² to the younger ones. The younger ones are taught how to behave and respect their elders. This program became the foundation for three study centers at Seremban and Kajang, where primary school children can come and do their homework, with supervision and guidance, in a Buddhist environment. In these programs, primary school children learn ten moral

precepts and participate in games, activities, and studies that illustrate Buddhist values, particularly understanding and keeping the ten precepts and expressing gratitude. Courses for the Dharma study groups are more structured and systematic. Children come to the center after school from Monday to Friday. Children camps are organized every year. These educational camps are the strongest of the center's activities.

Members of the youth groups, including the Malaysia National Services Training Camp and Universities Buddhist Society Camp, are generally in their twenties. The Dharma talks and courses offered to these groups are designed to give the members a sound understanding of the different traditions of teachings and approaches in theory and practice. Buddhist values are reflected in the course contents and activities. The youth start living the Buddhist way of life according to the eightfold path and ten moral precepts, which are important guidelines at this impressionable age. The teachings on honesty in thought, speech, and actions became our strongest emphasis for promoting moral values in ourselves and others, and lead to liberation from the unsatisfactoriness of greed, hatred, and delusion. The role of the leaders is to show the way to break the chain of suffering (*dukkha*) and attain liberation by working very closely with their colleagues and the children, giving their time, patience, love, compassion, and wisdom.

Feedback

Buddhist education stresses morality. The teachings of the Buddha can be applied to practical issues and situations. The teaching method is portable, in terms of language, culture, and age. The purpose is to upgrade the quality of one's life by gaining peace in mind and body. This is reflected in the feedback our programs received from our members, through many years of trial and error. One member found that leading the children's camp for five years helped her gain experience in leadership, communications, and responsibility, based on mutual respect between leaders and subordinates. Another mentioned how important it is to make the camps lively and allow the children to express themselves. One thought that the best and strongest point of the camps is when the children express their gratitude by serving tea and hugging their parents and promising to behave better. Another emphasized the importance of leadership training in Buddhist organizations, especially since the younger generation today has many choices and priorities other than education. Members gain experience in administrative affairs; event management; center management; organizing talks, games, and songs; sharing opinions and knowledge; learning about food, beverage, safety and health requirements, and so on. The Dhamma training camps are an opportunity for leaders to upgrade their knowledge and skills. They gained insight into the teachings on cause and effect and applied their experience to their family relationships and feel contented, as faithful Buddhist disciples walking the path to enlightenment.

Organic Farming

Children are given education on becoming self-reliant by growing vegetables and living a quality life in a clean and safe environment with a re-cycling campaign that protects the natural greenery being destroyed by technology and science. Think before you throw. Save before you waste. Reduce! Reuse! Recycle! One earth, one water source, What we discharge is what we drink. We are reminded of the Buddha's teachings on cause and effect.

We can grow our own vegetables for a healthier and happier lifestyle. We can grow vegetables the same way we cultivate the precepts. Without chemicals, pesticides, or insecticides, we obtain

healthier vegetables. Use natural organic materials as fertilizer and no killing of insects whatsoever on the soil. Shower all sentient beings with loving kindness and compassion, since they may be our parents in previous life. In this way, members spend time doing reflections and research to improve their understanding of the Buddhadharma and their skills in dealing with daily chores and communications with others.

Cultivation

As Buddhists, we are encouraged to love all living beings and not restrict our love only to human beings. We should practice loving kindness towards every living being. The Buddha's advice is that it is not right for us to take away the life of any living being, since every living being has the right to exist. Animals also feel fear and pain, just as human beings do. It is wrong to take away their lives. We should not misuse our intelligence and strength to destroy them. Every living being is contributing something to maintain this world. It is unfair for us to deprive them of their right to live.

Cultivation simply means to develop and improve our minds, manners, qualities, and skills. These are the main objectives of Than Hsiang Kalyana Mitra Center, a center that encourages and fosters the development of truth, compassion, and practice of the Buddha's teachings. The aim is to foster companionship and goodwill among members, promote healthy recreational activities, and render charitable services for the welfare of communities, regardless of race, creed, or religion. We encourage cultivation for the young, service for the strong and capable, care for the old and sick, and a pleasant rebirth for the departed. We support the day-to-day practice of the five precepts and the eight precepts, and the development and sharing of great compassion and loving-kindness to all sentient beings, Buddhist and non-Buddhist. We promote an understanding of the Ten Good Deeds and putting them into practice in everyday life.

NOTES

¹ The Ten Good Deeds are to: (1) be filial to parents; (2) respect teachers and elders; (3) have religious faith; (4) study diligently; (5) avoid bad companions; (6) do not mistreat or kill animals; (7) do not rob or steal; (8) do not tell lies or use abusive words; (9) do not take cigarettes, alcoholic drinks, or drugs; and (10) do not read unbeneficial materials.

² *Kalyanamitra* is the Sanskrit word for spiritual friendship. Roshi Wendy Egyoku Nakao explains that this friendship is something much more than someone to hang out with. Rather, it connotes a person or even a thing that becomes our guide, a teacher, and serves to inspire us along our path to awakening.

Buddhism in Culturally Responsive Engineering and Science Education

Marisol Mercado Santiago

Is it possible to integrate Buddhist philosophy in a culturally responsive engineering and science education for youngsters in Buddhist communities? And through what pedagogical approaches may we accomplish this? In this paper, we will share part of our initial work in the idea of a culturally sensitive education in engineering for communities who self-identify as Buddhists.¹ Although the approach of culturally responsive education came from American educators, we would like to explore the possibilities that some of its characteristics may bring to students in Buddhist communities. This theory postulates that the academic achievement problem of low-income students of color may improve if in the pedagogical methods the teachers draw upon their language and cultural strengths.² In the case of Buddhist settings, depending on the contextual situation, we posit that the foundations of this theory can inform the pedagogy of their educational programs to help students comprehend engineering and science principles through the most proximal structures, architecture, and technology of their communities and culture.

Culturally Sensitive Approach to Engineering and Science Education

Culturally sensitive (or responsive) pedagogy uses the “cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. It teaches *to and through* the strengths of these students. It is culturally *validating and affirming*.”³ This educational approach does not only limit the curriculum content, but also the learning experiences, classroom culture, student-teacher interactions, instructional methods, and assessment.⁴ The characteristics of these learning experiences include (1) the perspective of other cultural heritages, (2) establishment of a relationship between academic abstractions and the children’s sociocultural reality, (3) diverse instructional methods that seek to appeal to different learning styles, (4) respect of the group’s cultural heritage, and (5) incorporation of multicultural education in the information, resources, and materials.⁵

An example of an intercultural engineering education framework, which relates to culturally responsive education, can be found in “Toward an Indigenized Engineering Education: Andean Peasant Technologies as Engineering Education Resources for Andean Peoples.”⁶ Although it is focused for Andean peoples, it shows examples of how traditional technologies, which can be found accessible in the community, can be educational resources through which the educator can explain concepts of engineering and science principles to students.

Buddhist Philosophy that can be Integrated in Engineering and Science Education: The Four Noble Truths

The Four Noble Truths were taught by Buddha in his first sermon:

1. *dukkha* (suffering or dissatisfaction),
2. *samudaya* (arising of suffering),
3. *nirodha* (cessation of suffering), and
4. *magga* (the way that leads to the cessation of suffering).⁷

The application of the four noble truths as response to the environmental crisis has been discussed by many scholars.⁸ Samdhong Rinpoche said that the Four Noble Truths, can be also interpreted in “(1) the crisis to be identified; (2) the cause of crisis is to be eliminated; (3) the cessation of the crisis is to be achieved, and (4) the method for doing so is to be implemented.”⁹

The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, a non-profit organization in Sri Lanka, has applied the Four Noble Truths to village development (which relates to engineering):

The first truth, *dukkha* (suffering or unsatisfactoriness), is translated as “There is a decadent village.” This concrete form of suffering becomes the focus of mundane awakening. Villagers should recognize the problems in their environment, such as poverty, disease, oppression, and disunity. The second truth, *samudaya* (the origin of suffering), signifies that the decadent condition of the village has one or more causes. The third truth, *nirodha* (cessation), understood in traditional Buddhism to indicate *nibbāna*, here is the hope that the villagers’ suffering can cease. The means to solving the problem lies in the fourth truth, the Eightfold Path. Joanna Macy offers an excellent example of the mundane explication of the stages of the Eightfold Path when she cites a Sarvodaya teacher’s explanation of right mindfulness or awareness, (*sati*): “Right Mindfulness – that means stay open and alert to the needs of the village....Look to see what is needed – latrines, water, road.”¹⁰

This example can also be applied in the context of a children’s village, a nunnery, or a settlement. With the help of the engineering educator, a group of students can identify their village’s engineering problems, the causes of the problem, the awareness that there are solutions to the problems, and the active steps to solve them.

Dependent Arising and Interdependence

Dependent arising is one of the basic philosophical concepts of the Buddha. It is intrinsically related to interdependence¹¹ and emptiness. Emptiness has not have the same definition and understanding as in Western culture. Emptiness is related to the idea that everything lacks inherent existence and is interconnected in a nexus of interdependence.

An example of dependent arising that can be presented in engineering education is the use of biofuels and its extended impact on the environment.¹² A prime example is the use of biofuels derived from Indian corn and other crops. Considered locally, they appear very positive. The carbon is recycled through a fast-growing plant; next year's corn takes up this year's exhaust and the long-cycle carbon bound up in petrochemicals can be left in the ground. However, when the full picture of the production of the crops, the transportation of the raw grain, the processing of the alcohol, and so on are taken into account, it is found that there is actually a huge net increase in energy consumption. What is more, with current agricultural practices, even the use of fossil fuel is increased because the chemical inputs are largely derived from petrochemicals. All of this is in addition to the food crisis that is already beginning as more and more cropland is diverted to biofuel production. The diversion of land to corn and other crops has even resulted in the clearing of rainforest in Indonesia and elsewhere, in order to cash in on the biofuel boom. Considered with all its causes and conditions, biofuels, far from being a solution, are an unmitigated environmental disaster.¹³

With the example cited by Punnadhammo, the students can begin to reflect on the impact of biofuels on the resources of Third World countries, their impact on the lifespan of the forests, and on the people who depend on these forests to live.¹⁴ Students may even be living in countries where this situation is happening. Being informed about the consequences of these engineering practices, they can bring an awareness of these issues to their villages.

Greed (*Lobha*) as a Poison of the Mind that Affects the World

In Buddhist philosophy, greed is seen as a poison of the mind. If actions are committed through greed, their effects foster destructive actions at all levels. Many authors have related greed to practices that have made a strong negative impact on the environment.¹⁵ Heng Sure reminds us that greed is the initial cause of actions that affect nature in a negative way:

The Buddha called greed a poison of the mind, and said essentially that both the destruction and the healing of the world is done in a single thought. The mind purged of greed opens the road to awakening. The mind filled with greed poisons the earth and creates the potential for affliction and suffering for all its inhabitants equally. You don't flush greed away; you transform it, transmute it by generosity and by giving.¹⁶

How does greed relate to engineering and science? Engineering, as a profession demanded in industries, is dedicated to serve the needs of the economic market. Capitalist societies depend on engineering and consumerism to continue the cycle. Greed is one factor that drives consumerist attitudes toward products that engineers help manufacture. Engineers then becomes part of the cycle of consumerism: corporations, production, and consumerism. Baillie argued that, although engineers play an important role in the chain of consumerism, they can also have an active role in societal change:

Engineers do many good things which contribute to a cleaner, safer world and for that we should be proud. However, engineers also for example, make the machines which are used in sweat shops. Engineers create the machines which are used to replace workers and so create more unemployment. Engineers build factories which cause health and environmental hazards. Engineers create factories in towns and cause villagers to move away from their families to find work. Engineers contribute more than possibly any other profession (apart from business itself) to the movement of capital throughout the world which causes all developing countries to become increasingly market driven. These are what we need to guard against, are responsible for and can do something about.¹⁷

A method to help students see the impact of greed is to show them what happens when a society keeps cultivating an urge to consume, never being satisfied with what they have. Products indeed have an end. In engineering terms, this is regarded as the product lifecycle. In Buddhist terms, products are associated with the principle of impermanence. "The Story of Stuff," an international website produced in 2010, offers free educational resources and media that explain in a very simple yet effective way the products lifecycle and how it is linked to consumerism and environmental pollution.¹⁸ In classes, the engineering educator can help students see the enormous necessity of mindfulness in engineering design decisions.

The Principle of *Ahimsa* (Non-violence or Non-harm)

Ahimsa is a commitment to non-harm. Stephanie Kaza argues that there is a relationship between the harmful actions of manufacturers, where many engineers work, and environmental pollution, although they may not harm intentionally:

While consumer good manufacturers may not intentionally choose to cause harm, their actions

nonetheless often leave death and injury in their wake. In some cases the choice is deliberate – to clear-cut forests, to pollute waterways, to abuse workers on the production line. Producers justify tremendous harm to many forms of life to meet the bottom line of profit and gain.¹⁹

The principle of *ahimsa* is closely related to (1) ethical conduct in science and engineering, and (2) the decisions taken during engineering design and implementation. The unethical actions of scientists have created the causes for the propagation of imbalanced and unequal conditions for people in disadvantaged positions and people in Third World countries.²⁰ Teachers can help science and engineering students reflect on the power that they exercise over others. In this way, we seek to help them cultivate mindfulness of their actions and decisions throughout all their engineering designs and scientific experiments. Mindful that our scientific and engineering actions inevitably affects others, educators can bring this conversation into the classroom as a way to create reflective dialogue about the importance of ethics in science and engineering.

Conclusion

We have presented an overview of culturally responsive approaches to engineering and science education for youngsters in Buddhist communities. In addition, we presented four major Buddhist philosophy concepts in our initial applications of science and engineering educational scenarios for Buddhist students. We hope that these examples may support other grassroots educational initiatives connecting engineering, science, sustainability, ethics, and Buddhist culture.

NOTES

1. This paper is written in collaboration with Alice L. Pawley, Donald W. Mitchell. The author wishes to thank Carlos A. Santiago Quintana and the Buddhist communities of Puerto Rico, and Hilda and Carmen Santiago de la Cruz for their unconditional support.
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3. Ibid., p. 29.
4. Ibid., p. 31.
5. Ibid., p. 29.
6. M. Mercado-Santiago, "Toward an Indigenized Engineering Education: Andean Peasant Technologies as Engineering Education Resources for Andean Peoples," paper presented at the VIII Jornadas Latinoamericanas de Estudios Sociales de la Ciencia y la Tecnología [VIII Latin American Proceedings of Science and Technology Studies], Buenos Aires, Argentina, July 20-23, 2010.
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16. Heng Sure, "The Monastic Rules of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism: The Bhikshu Pattimokha and the Ten Major and Forty-eight Minor Bodhisattva Precepts from the Net of Brahma (Brahmajala) Sutra," Mitchell and Skudlarek, *Green Monasticism*, op cit, pp. 69-70.

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Severina Balabanova

This paper will compare two works, *Biqiuni zhuan* (Biographies of Buddhist Nuns, edited in 516 CE) and scroll 23 of *Jinglü yixiang* (Classified Excerpts from the Sutra and Vinaya Pitakas),¹ both compiled by Baochang^{3a} (fl. 495-516) during the period of the Six Dynasties (222-589) in medieval China. One of the outcomes of this comparison would be a deeper understanding of the relation between Six Dynasties Chinese Buddhism and literature. This period is noted for its specific religious discourse. Imperial bibliographical collections of Buddhist texts were already under development at the time that the renowned compiler Baochang was active.² This ongoing compiling and cataloguing activity is one aspect of Baochang's historical context.

These two collections describe the fates of women devoted to Buddhism in a different cultural and literary environment. *Biqiuni zhuan* is the first such work in Chinese literary and religious history known to us. *Jinglü yixiang*, the earliest Buddhist encyclopedia in China, consists of translated material from Indian Buddhism and includes a great number of stories. These facts contribute to the similarity and distinctions between these two works. *Biqiuni zhuan* records the lives of 65 Chinese Buddhist nuns spanning the fourth through sixth century CE. It encompasses significant historical information relating to the initial stages of the spread of Buddhism in China, and reflects the attitude of admiration of its author who, necessarily, undertakes the task of describing an example of ideal Buddhist women for future generations. It takes the form of *zhuanji*, traditional Chinese biographical writing. *Jinglü yixiang* on the other hand depicts Indian women/nuns from the time of the Buddha and pertains to the genre of *avadāna*. The nuns in *Jinglü yixiang* are included in the section on *shengwen* (*śrāvaka*, hearers). The differences in the formal features of the two works are informed not only by certain conceptual and didactic principles, but also by cultural features that influence the two works.

In Buddhism, the term used for a biographical account is *avadāna*, which is transliterated as *a bo tuo na* and translated into Chinese as *piyu*, meaning comparison. The term signifies a literary genre in which the present act of a person is referred to by comparison with an episode that occurred in the past.³ It is also defined as the narration of the religiously significant deeds of an individual whose actions exemplify Buddhist truths from the doctrine (Dharma) and the Vinaya. The sources for this genre are the biography of the Buddha and tales of his former births (*jātaka*), biographies that are found in the canonical literature or Indian story literature and folklore. In terms of structure, they consist of a story of the present, a story of the past, and a juncture where the narrator (the Buddha or an enlightened saint) identifies characters in the past as the former births of characters in the present.⁴ We can trace these features of *avadāna* in most of the stories of the *Jinglü yixiang*. Thus defined, they contain elements which set them apart from *Biqiuni zhuan*. The formal structure and specifics of the *avadāna* stories after which most of these nuns' lives are modeled presuppose a multilevel, interpenetrating narration that encompasses different temporalities and places. These features are largely absent in *Biqiuni zhuan*.

In comparison, the *zhuanji* format of *Biqiuni zhuan* developed from the *liezhuan* literary form, which is closely related to history and is used to describe historical events where attention is given to individuals. The first work in this category that is distinct from historical writings is *Biographies of Chinese Women* (*Lienü zhuan*) by Liu Xiang (79-78 BCE). It should be noted that the *zhuanji* format is a category of *shibu* history and a sub-category of *zazhuan* (miscellaneous transmissions) in the bibliographical treatises of dynastic histories. *Suishu jingji zhi* (the bibliographical section of *Book of the Sui Dynasty*, seventh century), for example, includes both works under this heading. *Biqiuni zhuan* followed the

tradition of *Lienii zhuan* in order to present the nuns as model women in terms familiar to traditional Chinese culture. It served to show that “the Buddhist effort in China is not antagonistic to prevailing Confucian attitudes.”⁵

In *Biqiuni zhuan*, Baochang’s biographies of nuns are arranged in chronological order. This ordering allowed Baochang to present the nuns historically and therefore place them in his time and society. At first glance, from a textual perspective, these biographies are composed on a linear principle and resist a multiple-level reading – starting from point A (the nun’s birthplace, family background, etc.) and leading without any obstructions to point B (her life achievements), or point C (her death). The biographical genre generally presupposes a clear and uninterrupted temporal line and does not allow for the complexities of plot or narration. Significantly, even when details characteristic of miracle tales are involved, such as dreams or flying to other worlds, this pattern is preserved. The presence of miracles (typical for religious biography) usually requires a different narrative order, a type that is crucial for the overall development of the story and its understanding. Yet, in these cases, this order is inscribed logically into the general flow of events. This indicates the ease and degree of acceptability of the miracles presented in the *zhuanji* genre. As noted, in the period under discussion, this genre was always included in the history section of dynastic books. This fact demonstrates a very important feature of *Biqiuni zhuan*; it simultaneously reflects religious subjectivity and adheres to the verisimilitude of historically recorded fact. To Baochang and his audience, miracles were as real as the material in the biographies.

Baochang states his method for eulogizing the nuns in the preface. He only uses information found in multiple sources – miracle tales, epitaphs, eulogies, collections of writing, and oral tradition. With their abundant historical facts and events, most of the nuns’ biographies are grounded in a solid historical background. Yet, because of the need to eulogize the nuns and their virtues, along with possible cross-references to historical figures (emperors, officials, monks), in many biographies we find miracles recorded as a part of the nun’s life (for example, in the lives of *Kang Minggan*, *Daorong*, *Lingzong*, *Sengjing*, *Zhisheng*, *Tanhui*, and *Faxuan*). As a result, *Biqiuni zhuan* is a collection of biographies that moves between historically recorded facts and religious eulogy, between “historiographic” tradition and hagiographical inspiration.

Jinglü yixiang, the other collection of our analysis, is the earliest extant Buddhist encyclopedia in China. Working with the monk Sengmin of Zhuangyan Monastery, Baochang compiled this set of 50 scrolls in 516. Baochang collected more than 600 Buddhist tales, most of which belong to the tradition of Indian Buddhism. The term *jinglü* refers to translated works that have come from the western regions and are related to Buddhism (specifically, the *sutras* and *Vinaya*). The term *yixiang* is used in relation to *tongxiang*, a term that designates a common character or true source for all the things – their appearance “as it is” (*zhenru*). *Yixiang* is the specific phenomena of existence (including myths and tales), and is the concrete expression of *zhenru*. In terms of literary theory, *yixiang* is a literary device that uses a tale, fable, simile, or myth to express aspects of the Buddhist teachings. *Jinglü yixiang* as a collection pertains more to the narrative genre of tales, while *Biqiuni zhuan* is a biographical work following specific narrative convention. Beyond this formal difference, the conceptual level of the two works accords with their formal expression. Therefore, from a literary and conceptual standpoint, although both works are about nuns’ lives, they recount episodes from their lives differently.

The Chinese work uses a more straightforward depiction and relies on established models, at times incorporating miracle episodes. The Indian narratives are constructed using allegory and comparison and rarely provide personal details about the nuns. The Chinese biographies, especially the earliest ones, conform to the official historiographic model of writing. Conversely, religious Buddhist biographies from India are set within a religious context closely connected with the life of the Buddha

himself. Apart from having different motivations for their creation – the former as a biography, the latter as a tale – I attribute this to cultural differences and to different cultural configurations of Buddhism.⁶

In my analysis of the texts, I pay attention to two of Arthur Wright's paradigms as he defines them in *Studies in Chinese Buddhism*: literary modes and time/space characteristics. In the case of *Biqiuni zhuan*, for example, we see a straightforward narration of events whose credibility can usually be supported by reference to a contemporaneous historical figure or event. We have the exact name of the nun, details about her birthplace or family, and sometimes about her demise. Except for one biography (Fayuan), there are no imaginative leaps or challenges to conventional notions of in time and space.

In contrast, nearly all of the biographies in *Jinglü yixiang* relate to the Buddha's (previous) live(s). Subordinated to this idea, they do not simply recount an event in a nun's life. Instead, these biographies explicate a truth and demonstrate the abilities, power, and wisdom of the Buddha. Thus, a secondary role is assigned to the nuns' lives. This is an important and stark difference from the place of the nuns in *Biqiuni zhuan*, where the nuns function as autonomous subjects. The biographical narrative develops around them. They are the reason for it. The *Jinglü yixiang* biographies exemplify the concept of *karma* through the transformation of characters and exhibit multilevel narration. This multilevel literary world creates its own sense of time and space, and disrupts conventional depictions. Some of them (for example, Numbers 1, 2, and 11) "escape" from normal time/space frames into an imaginary universe; only rarely can we relate them to a historical figure or period, and these are connected to the Buddha himself. Despite certain linear narrations (for example, No. 9), we still witness the "imaginative leaps" in other worlds that are orchestrated by the Buddha in the present flow of time, which coincides with the time flow of the narration. These narratives create their own universe, which is subordinated to logic and ways of thinking associated with religious experience. Within this experience, the characters acquire logical characteristics and the readers, "suspending our disbelief," can follow and understand the narratives.

Unlike the *Jinglü yixiang* characters, those in the *Biqiuni zhuan* biographies are single-mindedly devoted to the teachings. They never waver from their chosen path; they are models to be followed. However, the nuns in *Jinglü yixiang* show hesitation, or we are told about their previous lives which led them to choose the path of Buddhism. The characters in *Biqiuni zhuan*, except for one biography (Fayuan), do not have direct contact with the Buddha himself; they have visionary or dream experiences where they might see an image of him or a *bodhisattva*, but never directly converse with him. Contact comes during the time/space of the miracle. The nuns in *Jinglü yixiang*, on the other hand, are *shengwen* – a term that presupposes closeness and communication with the Buddha himself. As hearers, the nuns listen to him and learn the truth directly from him. All of the miracles/transformations in *Jinglü yixiang* are performed by the Buddha, with the nuns as objects of his miraculous power. *Jinglü yixiang* relies on *yixiang*, concrete existence (including tales), to express *zhenru*, their ultimate character. Therefore, the stories affirm our belief by including miracles of transformation. The same holds true for the biographies in *Biqiuni zhuan*. Thus in *Biqiuni zhuan* we are led to belief through miracles which, despite being miraculous, have a firm place within a time/space frame justified by the numerous appearances of historical figures. Situating the stories within a historical context enhances their credibility. In *Jinglü yixiang* the stories resist rationalization except when they are situated within the Buddha's time, with the sole historical evidence being references to him. Here the miracles are logical only as embedded in religious discourse. The use of these different rhetorical approaches in the two works may be attributed to differences in attitudes toward Buddhist women in the two cultures – and to differences in beliefs about the most skillful means of teaching the Dharma.

NOTES

¹ Hereafter referred to as *Jinglü yixiang* meaning only scroll 23. I have used the electronic version of the texts in CBETA (CBETA, T53, no. 2121, p. 121.b.23-p. 128.c.12).

² In *Qilu xumu*, “Preface to the *Seven Records*.” The Liang Dynasty bibliographer Ruan Xiaoxu classifies the Buddhist texts in the so-called “outer chapters.”

³ Hōbōgirin, *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du bouddhisme, d'après les sources Chinoises et Japonaises*, redacteur en chef Paul Demiéville. Tokyo: Maison Franco-Japonaise; Paris: Librairie d'Amerique et d'Orient, 1929-1984, v. 1-2, p. 9b.

⁴ Robert E. Buswell, Jr., ed., *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, vol. 1 (New York : Macmillan Reference, 2004), p. 36.

⁵ Kathryn A. Tsai, “The Chinese Buddhist Monastic Order for Women: The First Two Centuries,” *Women in China: Current Directions in Historical Scholarship* (*Historical Reflections* 8:3(1981), 13-14, 19.

⁶ Arthur Wright has observed that the differences between the Chinese and the Indian cultures can be concisely summarized in several characteristics: language, literary modes, time and space, psychology of the individual, and sociopolitical values. Arthur F. Wright, *Studies in Chinese Buddhism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 8.

Hyangsoon Yi

My presentation concerns Buddhist nuns depicted in nectar ritual paintings. These paintings are a genre of Korean Buddhist art that was produced mostly in the latter half of the Chosŏn Dynasty (1392-1910). They were used for the universal Water-and-Land Ritual conducted at a Buddhist temple. Presently, there are about 70 extant pieces of nectar ritual paintings from the Chosŏn era, which have been preserved in Korea and Japan. The earliest one among them dates back to 1580. My preliminary research shows that among the extant nectar ritual paintings, roughly 30 contain figures that can be identified as Buddhist nuns. The majority of them are marked either linguistically and/or pictorially as “*bhiksunis*” or “*sramanikas*.” To our great surprise, however, nun figures in some works are labeled “*siksamanas*.” Considering a deplorable paucity of historical records on nuns of Chosŏn Korea, these paintings can serve as extraordinary sources of information on them.

In this paper, I first survey the salient characteristics of the iconography of Buddhist nuns in nectar ritual paintings. Next, I discuss the portrayals of *siksamanas*. Unlike the images of *bhiksunis* and *sramanikas*, those of *siksamanas* pose a host of puzzling questions. Their iconographic features, their position within a canvas, their relations to other groups of people depicted in the paintings, and especially their spatial proximity to itinerant artists will be examined. The lively visual images of female monastics in the nectar ritual paintings clearly display how active nuns were, countering the general perception that they became invisible in the latter half of the Chosŏn era. Some of the paintings capture nuns in the dynamic poses of a ritual dance. Two paintings from the Undae Heritage (1741) and Hŭngguk Temple (1801), respectively, present not only *bhiksunis*, but also *siksamanas*, marking their differences explicitly in linguistic as well as pictorial terms. These works provide the first and most striking evidence thus far of *siksamanas*’ possible existence in Chosŏn society. They seem to be the only pre-modern iconic record of *siksamanas* in the world.

My paper addresses three major issues raised by the visual representation of Buddhist nuns in the sweet nectar paintings. Of roughly 60 extant works in this category of painting, at least one third contains figures identifiable as nuns. Focusing on some of the representative pieces from different periods of Chosŏn, I first examine the iconographic characteristics of the nun figures. In the second section of my paper, I analyze the actions of the nuns, paying special attention to the multifaceted significance of their ritual performances. It is well known that the nectar ritual paintings are a uniquely Korean genre of Buddhist art that mirrors diverse groups of people and their day-to-day lives and concerns. In light of the realistic orientation of this genre, my analysis aims to define the nature and extent of nuns’ social integration and religious engagement in middle to late Chosŏn. The third part of my presentation is devoted to the *siksamanas* depicted in the aforementioned two paintings. My purpose is to explore their implications as to a nun’s ordination procedure under the combined pressure of anti-Buddhist policy and Confucian patriarchy in Chosŏn times. In doing so, I demonstrate the ways in which the *siksamana* figures reinforce the legitimacy of the Korean nuns’ ordination lineage and the historical continuity of their *sangha*. As is indicated by the rarity of *siksamanas* in Buddhist art in general, the nectar ritual paintings open up a truly uncharted area of research for scholars in religious studies, women’s studies, and art history.

Launch of a Bhikkhuni Order in Thailand: Monastic Education and Establishment of Tradition

Tomomi Ito

It is already a decade since the first generation of Theravada *bhikkhunis* took root in modern Sri Lanka, and it is nearly a decade since the first recent case of *samaneri* ordination was examined in Thailand. *Bhikkhuni* ordination in Thailand is not yet as common as in Sri Lanka, but now brave Thai women may consider taking the full monastic precepts, rather than keeping the eight precepts for a renounced religious life, as has generally been the case for most Thai women. In the Thai National Sangha there is no formal progress towards the sanctioning of a *bhikkhuni* order or the lifting of the ban on *bhikkhu* and *samanera* ordaining women; nevertheless, it has been noticed that so far no authority has forbidden Thai women to be ordained as *bhikkhunis* by a foreign Sangha, and the pioneering *bhikkhunis* and *samaneris* have been able to maintain their robes. As a result, several individuals and groups were inspired to find their own ways to ordain in Sri Lanka or in Thailand.

For Thai women to receive ordination in Thailand entails a risk of controversy, whereas receiving ordination in Sri Lanka is no longer considered a problem in Thailand. However, the opportunity of temporary *samaneri* ordination offered at some Thai *bhikkhuni* temples has elicited curiosity and allowed women to experiment with ordination without the burdens of overseas travel and foreign language communication. The number of Thai *bhikkhunis* and *samaneris* appears to be increasing, although quite a few have been unable to find a place for their practice and have left the nunhood. Social conditions in Thailand still present a considerable challenge for Thai *bhikkhunis*.

For pioneering Thai *bhikkhunis* who have successfully settled in their own temples, the most important task is to lay the foundation for a new *bhikkhuni* community where coming generations of ordained women may lead monastic lives. Opponents have indicated that once it is lost, the Bhikkhuni Sangha can never be restored, on the grounds that the absence of a senior *bhikkhuni* who passes on the tradition from the previous generation means that there is no one who can teach discipline and deal with the numerous practical matters of monastic life. This paper will examine how pioneering Thai *bhikkhunis* are developing their monastic order and educating newly ordained *samaneris*, as seen in the case of a *bhikkhuni* nunnery located in northern Thailand.

Diverse Strategies for Supporting the Revival of the Theravada *Bhikkhuni* Sangha

Susan Pem bro ke

As late as the mid-1980s, there were no known Theravada *bhikkhunis* in the world. Beginning in 1988, women began ordaining in the U.S., India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Taiwan, and Australia. Today, there are approximately 900 to 1,000 *bhikkhunis* worldwide.¹ The revival of the Theravada Bhikkhuni Sangha remains fragile, due to an absence of institutional acknowledgment and assistance from Bhikkhu Sanghas and government agencies.² As a consequence, during this time of transition and expansion, it is essential that the laity and *bhikkhus* who are free to act supply needed aid if the Bhikkhuni Sangha is to prevail and flourish.

The objectives of this paper are to reveal what organizational and grassroots endeavors are providing accurate information about *bhikkhunis*, generating in-depth dialogue between and among monastics and lay people, educating the global Buddhist community about the essential role of ordained women, empowering *bhikkhunis* to assume leadership positions, and offering needed financial support. The ultimate aim of this paper is to encourage *bhikkhunis* and the laity to implement existing templates designed by their contemporaries, templates that are already producing measurable results on behalf of *bhikkhunis*.

Given the limitations of this paper, I cannot include all the many people and groups who are diligently working on behalf of *bhikkhunis*. I also cannot write as comprehensively as I would like about the organizations and individuals I do mention. My apologies to all. As mentioned above, my focus is to highlight successful themes, techniques, and interventions so that these can be understood and replicated. In short, I am focusing on what can be learned and applied, not provide a detailed history of each entity or individual.

International Organizations and Conferences

Sakyadhita: International Association of Buddhist Women, founded in 1987, is the best known and most respected organization for its work on behalf of Buddhist women. Their bi-annual conferences, publications, newsletter, and website forums advance research, encourage dialogue and sharing of information, and create an environment to brainstorm how to integrate and apply the Dhamma to current social and political challenges. In addition to the actual content that emerges from these conferences, there is also no minimizing the effect of hundreds of committed women assembling at one time to discuss their personal issues as well as wider concerns and goals.

In 2009, I traveled through Thailand and interviewed *bhikkhunis* and *samaneris* about their reasons for ordaining and the situation for ordained women in that country. One question I routinely asked was, do you think the revival of the Bhikkhuni Sangha will succeed? Women have ordained in the past, but most have disrobed. Why do you think women will remain in robes this time? The answer I often heard was, we are not alone. We are part of an international community. These Thai monastics not only felt connected to women abroad but also felt protected by them. A number of the women I interviewed had never seen a woman in robes until coming to an international conference. I recall one woman who cried as she discussed the impact of seeing a female monastic for the first time. Suddenly her life held possibilities it never had before.

Some of the women interviewed reported finding the courage to ordain after meeting accomplished *bhikkhunis* at the Outstanding Women in Buddhism Awards (OWBA), an annual awards

ceremony which began in 2002 in Bangkok and continues to honor eminent Buddhist women.

Another international organization is the Alliance for Bhikkhunis (AfB), a fledgling, U.S.-based non-profit established in 2007 to provide financial support for ordained women. In attempting to raise funds for *bhikkhunis*, it rapidly became apparent how little the average Western practitioner knew about *bhikkhunis*. As a consequence, AfB shifted its first priority to educating lay people about *bhikkhunis* via its digital Library and online magazine *Present*. Fundraising remains a critical AfB task. On September 17, 2011, AfB is launching the 1st Annual International Bhikkhuni Day, a day of awareness raising as well as fundraising through its meditation Pledge-A-Thon.

Conferences such as the 2007 Hamburg International Congress on Women's Role in the Sangha and the Bhikkhuni Seminar held at Australia's Santi Forest Monastery in 2008 also play a crucial role in correcting inaccuracies about female monastics found in the Pali Canon

Western Grassroots Organizations

In Buddhist countries such as Thailand and Sri Lanka, many laypeople have transitioned relatively effortlessly from offering alms to *bhikkhus* to now offering food and other requisites to *bhikkhunis*. During an alms round with Thailand's Bhikkhuni Dhammamitta in northern Thailand in 2009, I witnessed dozens of families offer food and kneel while receiving a blessing. These same people constructed her vihara and come to her Dhamma talks. Bhikkhuni Dhammamitta's experience is not unique among female Thai monastics.

Outside of Asia, there is not a tradition of supporting monks as part of one's overall Buddhist practice except in immigrant communities. Often in the West, meditation has become a stand-alone technology rather than merely being one aspect of a larger mosaic intended to purify the mind. This section of the paper is devoted to examining the strategies some Western organizations have used to generate support for *bhikkhunis*. The groups studied are a mix of exclusively lay groups which formed to support *bhikkhunis* as well as *bhikkhuni* *viharas*.

Saranaloka Foundation, a California-based lay initiative, was established in 2004 to create a permanent monastery in the United States for *siladharas*, a 10-precept order of nuns created by monks in England in the Ajahn Chah Thai Forest tradition. In December 2009, sufficient money had been donated to establish Aloka Vihara in San Francisco, a temporary residence housing monastics until rural property is located for a women's training monastery. Saranaloka found its mission in jeopardy when the two *siladharas* at Aloka Vihara, the respected Ajahn Anandabodhi and Ajahn Santacitta, announced they were planning to take *bhikkhuni* ordination in the fall of 2011.

After deliberation, the board of Saranaloka expanded its mission to include the support of *bhikkhunis* as well as remaining committed to helping *siladharas*.³ One of the ways they elicit donations is to arrange retreats and talks given by the nuns to predominantly Western lay groups and centers. Saranaloka also uses their website to disseminate information about current activities as well as post articles, audio Dhamma talks, and a monthly calendar of events. Tapping into social media, they employ Yahoo Groups and Facebook to stay connected with their supporters.

Dhammadharini was founded in California in 2005 with the vision of creating a residential monastic community for *bhikkhunis*. Dhammadharini began with a circle of twenty friends and supporters of Bhikkhuni Tathaaloka Theri. These volunteers incorporated, developed a website, and located housing. I questioned Brenda Walsh, a board member from its inception, about the difficulties Dhammadharini faces. She identified four problems: a lack of supporters with diverse talents and skills to create and run their organization; an inability to find a volunteer webmaster and, as a result, having overlapping sites and other internet problems; too much work for only one monastic; and a lack of

knowledge about how to operate a monastery as a lay support group.

She explained that “Southeast Asian monasteries are populated by lay volunteers who understand how to network, who are used to giving *dana*, who have communities that know how to cook, decorate and celebrate.”⁴ Expanding its email list and being diligent about keeping supporters informed have been their most effective outreach efforts. In practice, Dhammadharini is utilizing social media in much the same manner as Saranaloka. Dhammadharini, however, is reaching out more to ethnic communities and is persistent in their effort at “counter-education and re-education” with regard to misinformation about the validity of *bhikkhuni* ordination and the low opinion of women held by ethnic Theravada Buddhists and individuals trained by them.

Another example of a *bhikkhuni vihara* is the Carolina Buddhist Vihara, located in Greenville, NC, and headed by Bhikkhuni Sudhamma. The *vihara* was founded by Sri Lankan families in the region who met in each other’s homes for approximately 20 years. In 1999, they invited a Sri Lankan *bhikkhu* to reside in a house owned by one of the families and incorporated in 2000 as a church. Several monks came and went until Bhikkhuni Sudhamma arrived in July 2003.

The *vihara*’s board remains all Sri Lankan except for Bhikkhuni Sudhamma. An American supporter manages the *vihara*’s website and coordinates the daily donation of food. Donations come from those attending talks and puja services, local businesses and families, and from teachings given outside the *vihara* or when Bhikkhuni Sudhamma attends ceremonies. Volunteers help with yard work, maintenance, and transportation. Assistance with medical care remains inconsistent.

Awakening Truth is a relatively new religious nonprofit started in April 2009 by former *siladhara* Ajahn Thanasanti Bhikkhuni. She ended her formal 19-year affiliation with the Ajahn Chah-Ajahn Sumedho monasteries in 2009 after their Council of Elders rejected the “Statement of Intention.”⁵ She subsequently ordained as a *bhikkhuni* in August 2010.

Awakening Truth is renting and renovating property in Colorado. When the remodel is complete, the monastery will have a meditation hall and rooms to house four to seven residents. Like her former *siladhara* sisters, Ajahn Thanasanti Bhikkhuni raises money from extensive teaching tours to places such as the Harvard Divinity School, Boston University, and the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies. She has also reached out to diverse populations, including the Dharma Punx, a *sangha* of practitioners ranging in age from 25 to 45, to people of color and people with disabilities.

She has cited as problems a lack of infrastructure to support a growing nonprofit and the need for more volunteers. Similar to Dhammadharini’s experience, she also remarks on the same issue of working with Westerners who have never experienced firsthand “the reciprocal relationship between monastic and lay communities that enables both to thrive.”

The Role of Social Media in Gaining Support for *Bhikkhunis*

Two separate but related events in 2009 rocked Theravada Buddhism: the repercussion from delisting Ajahn Brahmavamso’s monastery as a branch of Thailand’s Wat Pah Pong (WPP) Forest Sangha following his participation in *bhikkhuni* ordinations and the insistence of the U.K.-based “Forest Sangha,” another branch of Wat Pah Pong, that *siladharas* agree to the 5 Points, legislation institutionalizing a permanent, second-class role for females. With both controversies originating from monks of the Ajahn Chah lineage, these separate events converged in people’s minds and produced a blizzard of emails, blogs, press releases, articles on web sites, Facebook posts, and the emergence of new web sites.

When the Alliance for Bhikkhunis’ online magazine Present was published on May 24, 2010, 23,907 people came to their site. From May 25 through June 10, 2010, another 52,635 individuals visited

the site, creating a total of 76,542 unique visitors in a little over two weeks, such is the viral effect of social media and so hungry were people for information on the subject of *bhikkhunis*.⁸ Thousands of visitors continue to visit the site monthly to read library or magazine articles, discover the locations of *bhikkhuni* monasteries, or connect and share news on AfB's Facebook page.

Another social media phenomenon was the launching of an online petition in November 2009, asking for reform within the Ajahn Chah lineage. By late December 2009, 2,900 people signed the petition which stated its opposition to the 5 Points and the expulsion of Ven. Ajahn Brahmavamso as well as requesting the legitimacy of *bhikkhuni* ordination be acknowledged.⁹

In the midst of all of this, Bhante Sujato, the Australian abbot of Santi Monastery, was regularly weighing in via his Wordpress blog in addition to breaking stories about the WPP Forest Sangha's actions. From the inception of the blog in October 2009 through November date 2010, the blog drew 258,289 views from around the world. The busiest day was November 5, 2009 when 3,862 came to his Wordpress site, a day when three of the four blogs had to do with *bhikkhuni* ordination.¹⁰

Regarding the impact of social media, Bhante Sujato writes: "We are a global Sangha, and the only realistic way we can communicate is via new media. It will become the norm, and it will inevitably flatten discourse: there's no hierarchy on the web. There were many astonishing things that happened, not least of which was to see the Thai Forest monks actually coming out and using media: websites, statements, press conferences. For the first time many people heard the voice of the Forest Tradition as it is, not as imagined in a romantic past, or as filtered by Western interpreters."¹¹

Social media brought needed transparency about monastic decisions and actions, alerted the laity to Sangha practices which violate social justice values, created a forum to debate issues confronting contemporary Buddhism, and mobilized lay practitioners to lobby for gender equality.

Summary

Depending on their circumstances, lay practitioners have a variety of options available to them to support the growing Theravada Bhikkhuni Sangha. Certainly individually donating money to local *viharas* as well as international organizations is critical. Organizing fundraisers is another option. The money to purchase a meditation yurt at one *bhikkhuni* hermitage was raised through a series of charitable events which included a pizza party.¹² Another option is to follow the example of individuals who have donated land or property for *bhikkhuni* *viharas*.¹³ Bequeathing money is another possibility.

For those lacking funds but wishing to help, volunteering specialized skills is a vital way to contribute, especially since *viharas* and lay groups are usually operating on shoe-string budgets and are dependent on volunteers to stay afloat. Other low-cost or zero-cost methods of assisting include staying informed of *bhikkhuni* history and developments and posting comments on a Facebook page or blog, or writing a letter to an editor of a Buddhist publication. Taking the time to develop a friendship with a *bhikkhuni* is another powerful way to encourage a woman to remain in robes. Offering a meal or transportation, manifestations of concern, are continually needed and are heartening as well.

Inviting *bhikkhunis* to speak at a center or sitting group promotes the spreading of the Dhamma and connects *bhikkhunis* with potential supporters. Meditation centers can also assist female monastics by offering retreat scholarships. If there are no *bhikkhuni* *viharas* in an area, banding together with like-minded individuals to establish one is another strategy which has led to the formation of *bhikkhuni* *viharas*.

Participating in conferences and seminars is a practical way to stay informed while helping to shape the discourse on ordained women. Paying some or all of the transportation costs so that monastics can attend these conferences is equally key. There is a need for more research and books on

bhikkhunis, and assistance with college costs for future *bhikkhuni* linguists, translators, historians, and Dhamma teachers.

Strikingly, most of the endeavors outlined above involve individuals developing relationships with *bhikkhunis*. These intimate spiritual connections appear to be what the Buddha intended and urged, spiritual friendships that are mutually enriching and instructive.

NOTES

¹ A workshop held at the 11th Sakyadhita Conference in Vietnam on Sri Lankan *bhikkhunis* in 2009 reported 800 *bhikkhunis* ordained since 1998. And, in a December 9, 2010 email, American Bhikkhuni Tathaaloka listed approximately 75 additional *bhikkhunis* known to her. More Sri Lankan women have ordained since 2009. The exact number of *bhikkhunis* is unknown.

² Thailand's Supreme Patriarch's June 18, 1928 decree banning bhikkhus from ordaining women has never been revoked. On June 16, 2010, leading Sri Lankan monk Ven. Sumangala Thero lodged a complaint with the Human Rights Commission after the Sri Lankan Commissioner of Buddhist Affairs rejected a request to legally register the monasteries of female monks (*bhikkhunis*). Women risk imprisonment in Burma if they declare they are *bhikkhunis*. See Alliance for Bhikkhunis Spring Issue 2010 of *Present* for an article about former Burmese *bhikkhuni* Saccavadi's arrest: bhikkhuni.net/present/spring2010/present-spring2010.pdf.

³ Information taken from their website www.saranaloka.org on November 28, 2010.

⁴ December 3, 2010 email response to interview questions.

⁵ "The Statement of Intention" requested gender equality within the Ajahn Chah branch monasteries and was written by Ajahn Thanasanti and three other siladharas. Senior Amaravati monks rejected the document in October 2008.

⁸ Statistics generated on June 11, 2010 from Alliance for Bhikkhunis' iPage website.

⁹ The 5 Points legislation as well as the petition and signatures can be found on the [fourfoldsangha.org](http://www.fourfoldsangha.org) website at: <http://www.fourfoldsangha.org>.

¹⁰ Bhante Sujato's December 4, 2010 email response to interview questions. Statistics taken from his Wordpress site.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² During a conversation I had with Australian-based Anagarika Kemanthie, she disclosed she raised \$7,500 to purchase a meditation yurt for Northern California's Aranya Bodhi through various grassroots fund-raising efforts, including sponsoring a pizza party.

¹³ Jill Rayna of DharmaCreek Sangha donated over 100 acres of land to Aranya Bodhi, a *bhikkhuni* hermitage in Sonoma County, California.

Sri Lankan Buddhist Nuns in Transition: From Religious Rights to Social Power

Hema Goonatilake

Contrary to the misunderstanding created by Max Weber of Buddhism as “otherworldly,” Buddhists and Buddhism have been “engaged” in various forms of social work since the time of Emperor Asoka in the fourth century BCE up to the present day. For example, four years ago, on one of my numerous visits to nunneries in Sri Lanka, I met a nun who elatedly explained to me the service she was rendering to her community by initiating “rural development projects” such as construction of roads and bridges. She narrated how she met with a local politician and requested him to construct a road, which was a vital necessity for the people in the village. During the process of the road construction, she came to know all the local politicians and bureaucrats. I found that this nun devoted a large portion of her daily routine to “social action.” She appeared to enjoy the respect she commanded among the local politicians, bureaucrats, and community. This nun impressed me as a dynamic leader in the community, but at the same time, the somewhat unusual role that she played made me wonder whether she was over-extending her authority as a religious figure in the community. I thought I would explore the topic to test my hypothesis. When I inquired about other nuns who were undertaking similar tasks, she informed me about two nuns she knew personally. Through talking to other nuns, I learned of three more nuns who are similarly engaged in social work in three other districts. In all, I interviewed six nuns from four districts for this paper.

The Study and its Methodology

Four years after my initial interviews, I resumed my study by again interviewing all six nuns in my original sample. The rest of the sample consisted of 18 nuns from the same four districts. The only criterion for selection was that the nuns be involved in “social action” in their communities. No structured questionnaire was used for the interviews. Instead, I initially posed three simple questions to elicit detailed responses:

1. What is your daily routine from the time you wake up until the time you go to sleep?
2. What “social service” activities you have undertaken? (In Sinhala language, there is no exact translation for the term “social action.” The word generally used is “social service.”)
3. What exactly are your relations with politicians and local authorities?

I gathered information on the following issues and made short notes under the following headings: the type of social service activities, the exact nature of their activities, and how the nuns participate in the wider social and political arena, especially their interactions with local authorities.

In discussions with the first six nuns I had interviewed earlier, I learned that the nuns had given up their role of initiating social service projects at the village level and bringing pressure on local politicians and authorities to implement such projects. The nuns continued the ceremonial roles that they had played, accepting invitations to social functions organized by local politicians and authorities, such as ground breaking ceremonies and the opening of roads, bridges, and buildings. If called upon to offer the five precepts or make a speech in the community, they would do so. The nuns continued performing their social role as advisors and presidents of various community development organizations, such as women’s societies, children’s societies and other rural development organizations

at the village level. Their close involvement with local politicians and authorities in community development activities had ceased and there was no longer a possibility that they would be tainted by power and conflict. This dramatic change took place, primarily due to the following three reasons: changes in the political situation in Sri Lanka, concerns about losing community respect, and the dangers of political factionalism.

Political and Social Changes in Sri Lanka

The introduction of the Provincial Council system in Sri Lanka in 1987 brought about a decentralization of administrative processes for the purpose of achieving rapid economic and social development at the regional level. However, excessive military expenditures at the time prevented the allocation of sufficient funds for urgently needed projects at the village level. Village leaders were therefore compelled to solicit the support of local politicians to get approval even for small projects that had already been approved. Such projects included repairing roads damaged by heavy rains, upgrading footpaths leading to proper roads, and building bridges of wooden planks to replace flimsy bamboo bridges over rivers. Water scarcities also compelled village leaders to take the initiative to demand a fair supply of water to their villagers.

After the civil war ended in May 2009, sufficient funds were allocated by the government for these badly needed projects. With greater resources available after the war, many improvements were made. For example, larger and more economical water or electricity supply systems were implemented to replace smaller, inadequate operations. Village leaders were no longer required to bring pressure on politicians to get certain urgent needs in the community addressed or initiated various projects at the village level.

As a result of these changes, the nuns I spoke with reconsidered their socially active roles in the community. They realized that they were likely to lose the respect they commanded among their *daayakas* (benefactors) if they continued to associate with politicians. Since these politicians were generally seen as corrupt, being visibly linked with them could damage the nuns' reputations and their standing as religious figures. These changes occurred at a time when the religious status of nuns was increasingly being recognized in their communities. As in every temple in Sri Lanka, the activities of monastics are planned and executed by an appointed committee of community leaders (*daayaka sabhaa*). By this time, all the nunneries studied were well established and had established their own *daayaka sabhaa*.

Another reason the nuns curtailed their social service activities was that some monks formed a political party called Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU National Heritage Party). The formation of this party was supported by a small group of middle-class ultra-nationalists who were denounced by the vast majority of monks and laity. Two nuns revealed that they were approached by the JHU to solicit the political support of some village communities to help win parliamentary elections in their respective districts. The two nuns had immediately discussed the issue with their benefactors and decided that they would not get involved with political parties, since they realized that to do so would have been to use Buddhism for the party's political gain. In the interviews, all the nuns emphasized that their role was purely religious and that they did not want to be associated with the "political monks."¹

The Changing Socio-political Roles of Nuns

Today, the only nuns who play a quasi-socio-political roles are those who serve in the honorary position of Justice of Peace (JP). This is a voluntary position institute by the Ministry of Justice to persons of standing in society. Their jurisdiction may be either at the district level or extend to the

whole country. When the services of a JP are required, members of the community forward their recommendations of a person to serve in this role at the community or national level. Inquiries are made about the recommended person's credentials and worthiness from the district secretary and the village headman. Two nuns I interviewed currently serve as JPs for the whole country and two others serve in the districts where they reside.

JPs have the authority to certify a variety of affidavits, for example, to verify the residence of parents whose children seek admission to school or sit for examinations or in case of lost identity cards, bank deposit books and other valuable documents. A JP also has to certify that a person applying for government land does not own other land and verify applications for loans for low-income residents in the community.² One of the two nuns who serve as JPs for the whole country was the second most senior nun to receive higher ordination in Bodhgaya in 1998. She also serves as a member of the Reconciliation Board that functions under the Ministry of Justice. A Buddhist monk from a nearby village serves on the same Reconciliation Board as the nun.

In general, monks seek better facilities and are a major presence in the towns and cities where their monasteries are located. By contrast, nuns live in remote villages with few facilities in areas that lack motorable roads, bus service, and so on. The villagers who donate a small piece of land for nunneries are themselves poor. When the nuns received these pieces of land, they were *dasa-sil-matas* (ten-precept nuns). Over the years, they have become well accepted as an integral part of their village communities. Their nunneries are constructed with donations from the village community and their own families. Nuns live a simple lifestyle. They are vegetarian and it is not difficult for the villagers to offer them a simple meal of rice and vegetables from their home gardens for breakfast and lunch. *Daayakas* invite nuns to their homes on special occasions for a meal (*dana*). The nuns chant *paritta* (chants of protection and blessing) and serve the spiritual needs of the community. Over the years, the villagers develop strong bonds with the nuns.

It is significant that when *dasa-sil-matas* seek *upasampada* (higher ordination), the villagers give the nuns their full support. It is a moving sight to witness busloads of villagers camping out overnight (for example, at the **Dambulla Rangiri Vihara complex**) to witness the *upasampada* ceremony of "their nun candidates." When the nuns return to their villages after receiving *upasampada*, the resourceful villagers organize reception ceremonies in the village, even inviting the village monks to grace the event. The villagers benefit from the enhanced status ("a bonus") that accrues when a *dasa-sil-mata* receives *upasampada*. *Dasa-sil-matas* are not qualified to participate in a *sanghika dana* (an offering of alms to a group of five or more full ordained members of the *sangha* (*bhikkhus* and/or *bhikkhunis*)), which is believed to grant great merit to the donor. Traditionally, well-to-do sponsors assemble five or more *bhikkhus* to offer *sanghika dana* in their village and cover the expenses of transportation and offerings. These days, villagers who cannot afford to invite *bhikkhus* are happy to have a *bhikkhuni* in their village to whom they can make offerings.

Nuns's Social Service Activities

The most common social service activity for nuns is chanting *paritta* (Sinhala: *pirith*) to invoke blessings for the laity. The nuns chant on numerous occasions, such as the birth of a baby, a child's first day of school, and before children sit for important examinations. Monks invoke blessings on such occasions only for those who visit their temples, whereas nuns accept invitations to visit laypeople's homes. When informed of an illness in the community, both monks and nuns visit the patient, either in the home or hospital, and chant *paritta*. A common practice in the village is to conduct either three or seven sessions of *paritta* recitation in the house of a bride or bridegroom prior to the wedding.

ceremony. Earlier, this practice was the purview of monks, but now that nuns are receiving *upasampada*, nuns are invited and even preferred to monks, because it is difficult to find more than two monks who will find time to attend three to seven consecutive sessions. If the nuns are available, they will find time to perform these recitations.

Invoking blessings for pregnant women is a special task performed by nuns, whether they are *dasa-sil-matas* or *bhikkhunis*. At the invitation of family members, nuns visit the homes of pregnant women. The *paritta* that is chanted to invoke blessings for safe child birth is the *Angulimala Sutta*. It is useful to recount the origins of this *sutta*. A teacher at Taxila University who fell into the trap of a student who was envious of a brighter student named Ahimsaka, ordered that student to collect a thousand human fingers as homage to his teacher. The student came to be known as Angulimala, because he wore a garland of the fingers he collected. After Angulimala had gathered 999 fingers, his mother appeared and implored him to renounce this evil practice. Just as he was preparing to get the 1000th finger he needed, by sacrificing his mother, the Buddha approached. Angulimala was subdued by his presence, recanted, and was subsequently ordained as a monk. Some time later, as he went for alms in his hometown, he heard a woman suffering with labor pains. When he reported this incident, the Buddha suggested that he say to that woman: “Sister, since ordaining as a monk (literally, “taking a noble birth,” I have never purposely deprived a living being of life. By this truth may you and the infant be safe!” After Angulimala performed this “act of truth,” the woman safely delivered her child.

Another common activity performed by almost all nuns is *bodhi puja* (imparting the blessings of the *bodhi* tree). Devotees make a circle surrounding the *bodhi* tree; offer flowers, lamps, and incense to the Buddha image in front of the *bodhi* tree; and recite a special set of Pali stanzas. This form of invoking blessings is performed by both monks and nuns on numerous occasions, such as those mentioned above. This form of worship at a *bodhi* tree, a symbol of the Buddha’s enlightenment, is a common practice in all temples in Sri Lanka. The practice appears to be unique to Sri Lanka and is not found in Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Laos, although *bodhi* trees are found in some temples – often saplings taken from the *bodhi* tree in Anuradhapura.

Counselling is increasingly becoming a specialized task for the nuns. From the time nuns become *dasa-sil-matas*, they function as “natural informal counselors,” a task that are compelled to perform in response to needs in their communities. Nuns counsel mothers who are having problems with their children, for example, young children who skip school or young adults who try to marry against the parents’ wishes. Most commonly, a wife who has been beaten by a drunken husband will run to a nearby nunnery “in search of refuge” or will seek help from the village nun and stay overnight. If these women go to a relative’s home, their husbands will find them and may even berate the relatives for giving their wives refuge. This practice has been in operation in Sri Lanka since the time of the ancient kings, as documented in ancient Sinhala inscriptions, which state that no husband has the right to drag his wife if she is staying in a nunnery. Buddhist nunneries in ancient Japan, “divorce temple,” served a similar purpose.³

Four nuns narrated how they had prevented women from committing suicide. One nun saved two young women, one suffering from a break-up and another who faced strong opposition from her family over a love affair. In the former case, the nun had heard from neighbors that a young woman was suffering from depression after being jilted. The nun visited the woman’s home, brought her to the nunnery, and looked after her there for a couple of weeks until she recovered. In the second case, a childless woman married to a carpenter employed in the Middle East had become involved with a married man. When her parents expressed strong disapproval of her behavior, the woman appeared at the nunnery in a confused state of mind. In separate incidences, three other nuns had dealt with young women who had come to their nunneries in a confused state of mind or on the verge of suicide.

After providing informal counseling for some time, all these four nuns had decided to receive formal training in counseling. Two had taken a two-year diploma course conducted by the National Institute of Social Development in Colombo that includes both theory and practice, beginning with village social development. One of the others had taken a six-month diploma course and the other had attended a two-day workshop.

Of the 24 nuns who were interviewed for this study, ten had completed counseling courses of various durations. These formal programs provided training in listening skills and practical counseling skills that helped the nuns develop confidence to tackle cases. One nun happily announced that the cases of wife-beating by drunken husbands in her locality had drastically decreased due to a special program she had launched. Initially, she holds separate sessions with the wife and husband, then meets with them together over a period of several months.

The 2004 tsunami disaster gave the nuns experience in responding quickly to emergency situations at the national level. Earlier, three of the nuns had collected goods for distribution among flood victims. None of the nuns interviewed came from the coastal areas where the tsunami hit hardest, but when the newspapers reported the unprecedented disaster, shocked *dayakas* flocked to the nunneries to discuss what they could do. The villagers donated whatever goods they could spare, while the nuns donated various items that had been donated to them by the villagers. Three nuns managed to find vans with the help of their *dayakas* and took the collected goods to distribute at the tsunami refugee centers. One nun later collected money from her relatives and friends and built a house for a tsunami victim.

During the last decade, there have been an unprecedented number of floods, landslides, cyclones, and other natural disasters. All the nuns interviewed had participated in flood relief and similar activities, collecting goods and distributing to the affected. In two nunneries that help the poor and needy, the nuns had brought needy persons to the nunnery, where they were taken care of. In one case, a frail 88-year-old woman whose caretaker daughter had been admitted to the hospital was cared for at the nunnery until the daughter returned two weeks later. In the other case, a poor 75-year-old man who eked out a living from his small vegetable garden fell ill and was cared for in a separate area in the nunnery until he recovered.

Dhamma Teaching

Teaching children is another area in which the nuns excel. All but four of the nunneries surveyed conduct Dhamma schools. Three of the four that do not run a school because there are already well-organized Dhamma schools in the vicinity; the other does not have room, so the local children go to a Dhamma school five miles away. One nun had started a Dhamma school for adults. To motivate the elderly to attend classes, the nun announced a scholarship for the best student and plans to award annual prizes like other Dhamma schools. Conducting of pre-schools is another popular activity among the nuns; parents pay a small fee that is used for teachers' salaries and teaching materials.

A challenging activity the nuns have ventured into is nuns' training centers that provide monastic education (*pirivenas*). There are currently three training centers that conduct primary monastic training course. Nuns trained in these centers sit for the nation-wide examinations taken by monks, nuns, and laypeople. Nuns' centers receive no financial support from the government, unlike monks' study centers, which are supported by government grants. Nuns manage their centers with small donations from inside and outside the community. One center has three student nuns, while another has six, taught by 2 teachers. The largest nuns' training center has 13 resident nuns from several districts of the province. This nunnery is a hive of activity with a variety of programs under the direct

supervision of the head nun, including a large Dhamma school with 403 students, 11 teachers, and a pre-school for 53 children. In 2008, The head nun at this school took the initiative to establish a computer training center, with the aim of providing the youth with better employment opportunities. Two young men trained at the National Information Communication Technology Center in Narahenpita are employed as teachers. With three computers, classes are held five days a week for students from grade one to advanced level for a reasonable fee. Children whose parents who cannot afford the fee may attend for free. Already around 500 students have received certificates after completing courses and two have found employment.

Social Accepted by monks

As *dasa-sil-matas*, these nuns fought for their rights in a moderate voice. But after they received *upasampada*, they adopted a new diplomatic strategy that has yielded remarkable results. Four of the nuns invited monks to participate in the “welcome ceremony” after their ordinations. Within two years, the nuns had won the monks over. They visited the monks in the locality during the Sinhala New Year season with betel sheaves to pay their respects in the traditional way. They sought the monks’ advice on their activities and developed cordial relationships based on mutual trust. The monks sought also sought the nuns’ services to help meet the religious needs of the community. The numbers of monks has recently decreased, with many young monks disrobing after completing university degrees. Meanwhile, the nuns, most of whom are university educated, excel in meditation, teaching Dhamma, giving talks, and conducting *bodhi pujas*. Increasingly, monks have begun inviting nuns to their temples to conduct these activities. Some monks even visit the nunneries to invite nuns for these occasions. One monk even arranged for a visiting nun to be welcomed into the Dhamma hall with a jeweled parasol. The nuns are deeply respectful to the monks and seek their advice on important religious and social matters. Monks, in turn, appreciate the nuns’ help to the temples and their strict discipline. Due to their competence and empathy, nuns are becoming increasingly popular with devotees in the monks’ temples.

Nuns Gain Full Religious Rights

Nuns, working in close collaboration with monks, have been successful in achieving almost all religious rights. Monastics are expected to regularly observe the recitation of the Patimokkha rules within a *sima malaka* (a hall with a demarcated boundary specially constructed for the purpose). There are currently 10 *sima malakas* for nuns in the country. Until these were built, nuns assembled at Dambulla Monastery or Newgala Monastery, where most of them received *upasampada*, or in a temple *sima malaka* with the permission of a monk who was sympathetic to them. *Sanghika dana*, is a tradition of giving alms to a group of five or more members of the Sangha, following the recitation of the verse: “We offer this food to the Bhikkhu/Bhikkhuni Sangha, is said to accrue the greatest possible merit. After a lapse of nearly a thousand years, Buddhists can now accrued great merit by offering *sanghika dana* to the Bhikkhuni Sangha as well. When both Bhikkhu and Bhikkhuni Sanghas are invited to receive alms together, the verse is changed to include both *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis*. Monks and nuns sit in two rows facing each other on seats of the same height, with the donors in the middle. In most cases, the monks perform the ceremony, though the monks sometimes request the nuns to perform part of the ceremony.

Officiating at funeral ceremonies is the most important task monastics perform for the laity, since funeral rites are considered compulsory. On such occasions, a robe in memory of the deceased

is offered to the Sangha. Only six of the nuns in this study have so far been invited to participate in funeral ceremonies and these were cases where the nuns had good relations with the monks. On one occasion, nuns were offered the robe. In one instance, an equal number of monks and nuns participated in the funeral ceremony and in subsequent services held seven days, three months, and one year afterwards. This monk regularly organizes alms rounds (*pindapatha*) for monks and nuns in the community. In one rare instance, a monk organized an elaborate alms giving exclusively for nuns at the opening ceremony of a new village. In his opening address, the monk referred to the nuns as “those who have inherited the legacy of Prajapati Gothami,” which moved many to tears.

Conclusions

Changes in the political and social environment have been a blessing in disguise. Nuns are no longer required to associate closely with local politicians and authorities in order to solicit better roads, bridges, and other infra-structure for their communities. The nuns continue to be engaged in social service projects at their nunneries, but distancing themselves from politics has protected them from censure and earned them social recognition. The nuns’ personal approach to community issues has demonstrated their commitment to serving the needs of the villagers, in a manner less formal than the villagers’ interactions with monks. Nuns are more accessible to the villagers. They help the poor and needy, visit the sick in homes and hospitals, both women and men in case of need. Some nunneries have virtually become community centers.

The main theoretical obstacle is that the *bhikkhunis* still have not been officially recognized by the monks’ hierarchy. In recent years, however, no monk or layperson has registered opposition to the restoration of the *bhikkhuni* order. Over the last two years, I have received a series of requests from the nuns to take the issue of official recognition with the authorities, since I am a strong supporter of *upasampada* for nuns and since I am the only woman on the Sambuddhattva Jayanthi Presidential Steering Committee. Yet, although some of the senior monks on this committee and other privately agree, none is willing to come forward, for fear of offending the monk authorities. On the other hand, what difference would official approval make, when the *bhikkhunis* are already accepted by the people and the monks in their communities?

NOTES

1. The JHU was established in February 2004. In April 2004, the party fielded 260 candidates in the parliamentary elections, of whom nine won. Around 500-1,000 monks were seen at political meetings when the JHU was established and around 20 monks held leadership positions. Within a few months, a highly respected monk parliamentarian resigned after being physically harassed in the parliament. Another monk left the party for ideological reasons, but remained as an MP. In January 2007, eight of the JHU MPs joined the ruling UPFA (United People’s Freedom Alliance). In the elections held in 2010, two monks and one layman were elected. As the party lost its popularity, it became absorbed into the governing political party and is no longer an ideological force.

2. Qualified people apply in response to an announcement in the government gazette. After being short-listed, applicants are interviewed by a magistrate. Those who are selected receive training regarding their duties and responsibilities, and are required to pass a test. Land disputes, non-payment of bank loans, and family disputes may be referred to the Reconciliation Board as an

alternative to lengthy and costly court proceedings. The Reconciliation Board meets every Sunday afternoon for about three hours. Board members from the same neighborhood generally recuse themselves from these hearings to avoid any conflict of interest.

3. See Diana E. Wright, “Spiritual Piety, Social Activism, and Economic Realities: The Nuns of Mantokuji,” in *Buddhist Women and Social Justice: Ideals, Challenges, and Achievements*, ed. Karma Lekshe Tsomo (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2004).

Establishing Bhikshuni Sangha in Nepal: The Difficulties

Bhikkhuni Dhammananda

The very first batch of Nepali *anagarikas* (non-ordained ten-precept nuns) received full ordination as *bhikshunis* (from the Mahayana lineage) at Hsi Lai Temple in Los Angeles in 1988. As of today, the number of Nepali *bhikshunis* has increased to 29, yet they are neither recognized as, nor do they live the lifestyle of *bhikshunis*. This paper will try to understand the difficulties that *bhikshunis* face in Nepal.

An overall picture of Buddhism in Nepal is necessary before discussing the particulars of the *bhikshuni* issue. First, in terms of numbers, government statistics say that the Buddhist population in Nepal is only 9.8 percent, even though Nepali Buddhists themselves claim to represent 40 percent of the population. When we look around Nepal, we realize how difficult it is to pinpoint the exact number of Buddhists in the population, for Buddhism in Nepal is a blend of various sources of belief and practice. There is a strong stream of Buddhist practice from the Tibetan tradition intertwined in a strong Hindu-based society. There is also a female cult that practices both Tibetan and Hindu traditions. In its external expressions, the practice of many Nepali Buddhists resembles Hindu practice. The Theravada tradition has only recently been revived and there are fewer than 300 Theravada monks in Nepal. We can conclude that Nepal is not a strongly Buddhist country. Many Buddhist temples are run by laypeople; in fact, the Hiranavarna Mahavihara has no monks in residence, and is instead solely run by Buddhist laypeople who belong to Shakya and Vajracharya families. This is just one example of many. The situation is very different from the Buddhist temples we see in Southeast Asian countries.

The Emergence of *Bhikshunis* in Nepal

In Nepal, there are women who renounce worldly concerns and receive eight or ten precepts. These nuns have taken their lineage from Burma; therefore, they wear pink robes like the *thilashin* of Burma. Interestingly, according to the Vinaya, pink is a color that is not allowed for ordained Sangha members. Could this be a way for the monks to imply that religious women are not ordained after all?

Under the Rana Regime, Buddhists in Nepal were greatly suppressed, and under the restraints of a Hindu government, women were further suppressed by the male Sangha. This is evident in the story of Dhammacari, an early Nepali *anagarika*.

The story of *bhikshunis* in Nepal begins with the life story of a nun named Dhammawati. Born in 1933, she had great desire to study Buddhism and went on foot to Burma at the young age of 13. She spent many years in Burma (now Myanmar) and came back with the Buddhist knowledge she received in Burma. She started Dharmakirti Nunnery and offered it as a space for Buddhist laypeople to come both to practice and to learn more about the Buddhist teachings. Her teachings and practice followed the Theravada lineage from Burma.

However, Theravada does not offer ordination for women, in 1988 she went to join an international ordination offered by Fo Guang Shan at Hsi Lai Temple in Los Angeles. Three Nepali nuns received *bhiksuni* ordination at that time: Bhiksuni Dhammawati, Bhiksuni Dhammavijaya (now Dr. Dhammavijaya), and Bhiksuni Pannawati. In 1998, Professor Min Bahadur Shakya assisted 13 *anagarikas* who became ordained in Bodhgaya, India, at another international ordination organized by Fo Guang Shan. As of this year, the total number of *anagarikas* who have taken *upasampada* is 29 – a large number of *bhikshunis* dedicated to bringing benefit to their motherland.

The Difficulties

The first difficulty the nuns in Nepal face concerns their robes. The outer appearance of *bhikshunis* in Nepal is the same as that of *anagarikas* from Burma. Even after receiving the *upasampada* (full ordination), they still wear their pink outfit. The reason they do not replace these robes is, as they put it, “The monks don’t like it.”

To understand this, we need to consider the monks in Nepal. Although the *bhikshunis* receive ordination from the Mahayana tradition, they nevertheless practice Theravada Buddhism, that is, the training that Bhiksuni Dhammawati received from Burma. The total number of Theravada monks in Nepal – a very young Sangha – is only 300, about 100 of whom are studying abroad. Most Nepali monks were ordained in Thailand, Burma, or Sri Lanka. Monks in Thailand and Burma do not have a *bhikkhuni* tradition; even in Sri Lanka, the Bhikkhuni Sangha is still not universally recognized. Naturally, these monks continue the attitude of the land where they received their *upasampada*, training, and Buddhist education.

In late March 2011, when I attended an international conference on Buddhism in Nepal, organized by Tribhuvan University. I noticed something very interesting at the inaugural session where the President of Nepal, H. E. Dr. Yadav, was presiding. Though the Nepali *bhikshunis* were invited to give a blessing at the opening session, when the President made his formal speech, he addressed only “Venerable Bhikshus and respected academics.” As he was leaving, I offered him a booklet on *Bhikkhunis in Thailand* and reminded him, “Your Excellency, you did not address the *bhikshunis*.” He responded in a positive manner, saying “Oh, *bhikshunis* are also welcome!”

Even at international gatherings like this one, the existence of *bhikshunis* often goes unnoticed, partly because of the robes. The *bhikshunis* are not wearing the proper *civara* that is expected of the Sangha. A *civara* is a patched robe in brownish color. Originally, it was dyed by using the bark of trees that can be found in the forest. The shade of the *civara* may vary. We see saffron in Sri Lanka, maroon of the Tibetan lineage, and shades of brown in Southeast Asia, but pink is a color that the Vinaya specifically prohibits.

Bhiksuni Dr. Dhammavijaya and her nuns at Kimdol Vihara near Swayambhu, Kathmandu, wear brown color robes, but this is also not sufficient, since the robes are not properly stitched in the prescribed patchwork pattern – the pattern designed by Ananda at the time of the Buddha, modeled on the paddy fields of Magadha. This design was praised by the Buddha; in the Theravada tradition, we have tried our best to preserve it. I made a point of offering the *civara* to Bhiksuni Dhammavijaya and Bhiksuni Dhammawati on my recent visit to Nepal, but it is up to them to see the significance of wearing the robe as prescribed in the Vinaya.

A certain lifestyle is expected of ordained Sangha members. As outsiders, it is impossible to distinguish between *anagarikas* and *bhikshunis* in Nepal, because they all dress the same way. Although they know who has gone forth and received *upasampada*, it is not visible to outsiders. The nuns use handbags like laywomen, wrist watches like nuns in the Tibetan lineage, and slippers that are not distinctively for monastics.

Observing *Sanghakamma*

Sangha members are expected to observe the *sanghakamma*. The nuns of Nepal do not do so, not because they do not want to, but because they do not know how. The significant obstacle for Theravadin practitioners receiving ordination from the Mahayana lineage is that the *sangha kamma* given in the Chinese Mahayana tradition are based on Chinese language and Chinese tradition. It is next to

impossible to expect women who were brought up in a Theravadin context to learn the *sanghakamma* of the Mahayana tradition.

The Nepali *anagarikas* have taken full ordination without any proper training to establish them as a Bhikshuni Sangha. They have not been able to perform any *sanghakamma*, which include the determining of their robes, bowls, and so on; the *apatti desana* (confession every new and full moon); recitation of the Patimokkha (the 311 *sikkhapadas* or rules of training that the *bhikshunis* observe); receiving *ovada* (exhortation from a senior monk every new and full moon); *pavarana* before both the Bhiksu and Bhiksuni Sanghas at the end of *vassa* (rains retreat), which is an invitation to clarify matters among individuals in the Sangha; and receiving the *kathina* robe at the end of the *vassa*. The reason Sangha members are required by the Vinaya to follow their *upajjhaya* for two years is to learn all these *sanghakamma*. We do not learn these for ourselves, but so that we will be able to teach other new members and continue the Sangha – the Bhiksuni Sangha.

In order to follow the Vinaya, studying from a book is not sufficient. One must see how the procedures are actually done. For this, one needs close instruction from an *upajjhaya* for at least for two years. Monks require five years.

Ordination alone is not sufficient. One cannot establish a Bhikkhuni Sangha simply by receiving *upasampada*; one must follow the training after ordination in order to function properly as a *bhikkhuni* in the Bhikkhuni Sangha. For this reason, I feel that Buddhists in Southeast Asian countries should not take ordination from the Mahayana tradition, because they do not have access to the required cultural traditions.

My own mother, Bhiksuni Ta Tao Fa Tzu (Voramai Kabilsingh), was the earliest example of a *bhikshuni* who took ordination in the Mahayana tradition. She remained a good *bhikshuni* until the end of her life, but could not perform any *sanghakamma*. Not only did she not have a Sangha with whom to perform them, but she also did not receive any training to be able to do so.

Living in a Bhikkhuni Sangha

The *bhikkhuni* lifestyle is best suited to living in a community. Many of the *sanghakamma* require a minimum of five members. The recitation of the Patimokkha every full moon and new moon (twice a month) must be performed by minimum of five *bhikkhunis*. The place for reciting the Patimokkha is within the boundaries of a *sima*. The *sanghakamma* to establish the *sima* boundaries requires a large Bhikkhuni Sangha, but a minimum of five. Before the *sima* boundaries can be established, the *bhikkhunis* must have already completed their *apatti desana* (confession or declaration of any *apatti*, or transgression against the Patimokkha rules).

As one becomes familiar with the complicated procedures involved in following the Vinaya rules and regulations, one realizes that living a *bhikkhuni* lifestyle really requires the support of a Sangha community. There are at least three *sanghakamma* for which the Bhikkhuni Sangha require the presence of the Bhikkhu Sangha. First, after the recitation of the Patimokkha every new moon and full moon, the Bhikkhuni Sangha must seek *ovada* (instruction) from a senior monk, a *mahatthera*, which means 20 years' standing as a *bhikkhu*. Second, at the completion of the *vassa*, the Bhikkhuni Sangha must perform the *pavarana* procedure, both among the Bhikkhuni Sangha and then with the Bhikkhu Sangha. Third, at an *upasampada* (full ordination), the candidates who wish to become *bhikkhunis* must first be ordained by the Bhikkhuni Sangha (a minimum of five *bhikkhunis*), then again by the Bhikkhu Sangha, in what is known as *upatosangha*, or ordination by a dual Sangha.

In Thailand, even though the Bhikkhuni Sangha is not yet officially recognized, the *sanghakamma* described here have always been performed. The *bhikkhus* know that the Vinaya requires them to

comply with the request of the Bhikkhuni Sangha. The only *sanghakamma* that they have not yet performed is the ordination of *bhikkhunis*. For this reason, until now the *bhikkhuni* ordination in Thailand is still dependent on the Sri Lankan lineage.

The Support of Laypeople

As mentioned earlier, the situation of Buddhists in Nepal is not easy. Many who claim to be Buddhists do not have much understanding of the basic teachings. Their practice and beliefs are tainted by the practice of Hinduism. In addition, in Nepali Buddhism, the monastic lifestyle is still new. Members of the local Buddhist clergy are not celibate. They perform the necessary rites and rituals, but do not maintain a monastic lifestyle, such as we are accustomed to in Southeast Asian countries. The Theravada lineage of monks appeared only recently in Nepali Buddhist society.

When I addressed a gathering of Buddhists in Nepal, one woman in the audience asked me, “You are a Theravada nun. Why is that you do not have a bowl?” This is a clear reflection of the understanding or lack of thereof, among Buddhists in general. The establishment of the Bhikkhuni Sangha in Nepal needs strong support from Buddhist laymen and laywomen. Not only should Buddhist laymen and laywomen support the Bhikkhuni Sangha, but they themselves must also have some understanding of the Buddhist teachings. The relationships are interrelated.

The four sectors of a Buddhist society – *bhikkhus*, *bhikkhunis*, laymen, and laywomen – all need proper Buddhist education to be able to practice the Buddhist teachings properly and eventually support the Bhikkhuni Sangha. The Nagarjuna Institute of Exact Methods, a private institute directed by Professor Min Bahadur Shakya, works very hard to further an understanding of Buddhism, and an acceptance of the Bhikkhuni Sangha among Nepali Buddhists. He was instrumental in assisting the 13 *anagarikas* who received *upasamapada* in 1998 in Bodhgaya.

On the academic side, in Nepal there are professors who are Buddhist scholars and well versed in the scriptures. Some of them are Hindus and a few are practicing Buddhists. The Buddhist scholars should be a good source of information for establishing the Bhikkhuni Sangha in Nepal.

Assistance from the International Bhikkhuni Sangha

The international Bhikkhuni Sangha has been largely silent in response to the needs of *bhikkhunis* in Nepal. The reasons include a lack of communications, since very few Nepali *bhikkhunis* speak English, the international language. Even those who speak English often do not correspond. Therefore, the problems facing the Nepali Bhikkhuni Sangha are unknown to circles outside the country. They have been isolated for a long time.

When I gave my presentation on the *bhikkhuni* issue in Nepal to a group of international scholars from India, Japan, Korea, Thailand, and Nepal, I described the problems that *bhikkhunis* in Nepal are facing. An Indian scholar commented and correctly reminded me that there is only one Sangha. The problems of the Bhikkhuni Sangha in Nepal are also my problems. I was taken aback by his comment, which reminded me of my negligence.

Solutions

The *bhikkhunis* of Nepal have expressed their commitment by receiving full ordination. In their own country, however, the religious and social structures do not provide them with the support they need to live the lifestyle expected of *bhikkhunis*. This issue needs to be addressed. I proposed a simple

solution, suggesting that the Nepali Bhikshuni Sangha go through another *upasampada* in the Sri Lankan lineage to enable them to follow the Theravada Vinaya. A second *upasampada* is called *dalikamma*, or confirmation. The nuns would not lose their seniority. Bhikkhuni Dhammawati, the leading *bhikkhuni* in Nepal, has already been ordained for more than 26 years. If she were to receive the *upasampada* a second time, she would remain the senior *bhikkhuni* of Nepal.

During my recent trip to Nepal, in an interview with Bhikkhuni Dhammawati on April 29, I offered to help train her younger *bhikkhunis* during the *vassa*. I offered free board and lodging for all the Nepali *bhikkhunis* and said that, by the end of the *vassa*, they would have covered all the *sanghakamma* necessary for leading the life of a *bhikkhuni*. The nuns should also stay for the *kathina* ceremony at the end of the *vassa* to learn how the *sanghakamma* for the *kathina* is performed. In ways like these, the international Bhikkhuni Sangha can help our sisters to be fully established in the land where the Buddha was born.

Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women has been farsighted in moving around and strengthening Buddhist women around the world, so that they can fully participate in the roles expected of them by the Buddha. We take this opportunity to congratulate and rejoice in the wholesome actions of Sakyadhita. We are very much part of its evolution.

Lipstick Buddhists and Dharma Divas: Buddhism in the Most Unlikely Packages

Lisa J. Battaglia

“You’re a Buddhist?!” I am often met with this rejoinder when I identify myself as a Buddhist scholar/practitioner. Implicit, and sometimes explicit, in this quizzical declaration and its accompanying tone and facial gestures are puzzlement (even shock) and slight disbelief (or at least a seeming reassessment of any preconceived notion of who or what a Buddhist *is*.) My own personal experience as a Western female Buddhist scholar/practitioner and the responses that such an identity elicits from people (namely, the popular rejoinder, “You’re a Buddhist?!”) has spurred the current exploration of female Buddhist identity, of conceptions about “Self” and “Other,” of the real and imagined intersections of “the East” and “the West.”

The purpose of this paper is to challenge stereotypes and assumptions about female Buddhist scholars/practitioners while simultaneously highlighting the complex and multivalent nature of female Buddhist identity. This paper results from three overarching methodologies: pedagogical reflections on teaching Buddhism at the university; personal experience as a Western female Buddhist scholar/practitioner who does not seemingly fit the stereotypical profile of a Buddhist; and scholarship on contemporary transnational Buddhism, or “TransBuddhism,” that is, “intersections of the real and the imagined, and of the Asian and the Western.”¹

As a teacher of Buddhism at the college-level, a preliminary and ongoing task is to unearth and challenge stereotypes, assumptions, and misconceptions about Buddhism and Buddhist cultures and peoples. For example, the notion that “all Buddhists” are bald, vegetarian, meditate in full lotus, wear robes, are dreadfully serious, don’t wear makeup, don’t play sports, and never have any fun. Such insular and erroneous conceptions contribute to “Buddhism profiling,” or the creation of a normative Buddhist identity that is homogenous, static, timeless and “intellectually and morally wrong.”² In her exploration of “The Study of Non-Western Cultures,” Martha Nussbaum delineates two vices of cross-cultural description: *descriptive chauvinism* and *descriptive romanticism*. *Descriptive chauvinism* consists of recreating the other in the image of oneself, or, reading the strange as exactly like what is familiar.³ Such a maneuver erroneously masks difference, eschews cultural sensitivity, and implicitly privileges one’s own standpoint as universal and normative. Inversely, *descriptive romanticism* entails viewing another culture as excessively alien and virtually incompatible with one’s own.⁴ Elements of similarity are ignored while elements that seem “mysterious” and “exotic” are highlighted.

As a scholar and teacher of Buddhism in American universities, I encounter this romanticizing impulse time and time again—from students, in scholarship, and in broader social circles. In students’ imaginations, for example, Buddhist cultures inevitably emerge as paradisiacal, peaceful, and innocent (in contrast to a West that is imagined as materialistic, corrupt, and aggressive.)⁵ Interestingly, in a strange inversion, this very same romanticism – replete with the impulse to idealize and oversimplify – gets mapped onto Western Buddhist practitioners. It seems that descriptive romanticism takes precedence over descriptive accuracy, whether in the classroom or in life. Consider, for example, western Buddhist scholar/practitioner Stephen T. Asma’s unabashed self-identification as a Buddhist:

I’m not a monk, or even a member of a temple. I’ve studied Buddhism with some amazing scholars and practitioners, and I’ve taught Buddhism for many years in the States and Asia.... I probably drink too much, and I’m not the least bit interested in sexual abstinence. I like the White Sox, and I eat meat.⁶

He continues,

Frankly, I probably seem like an odd Buddhist. Whenever I mention it in conversation, people respond with incredulity. Apparently, I should look more diminutive, speak in more hushed tones, and garland myself with more hippie swag.⁷

While comical and brazen, Asma's reflections on his uncanny Buddhist identity illuminate broader and deeper issues of religious identity – how it is claimed, how it is categorized, and how it is perceived – as well as our encounters with and imaginings of “the Other.”

According to the United States Census Bureau, in 1990 there were 404,000 self-identified, adult Buddhists in the USA. In 2008, this number rose to 1,189,000.⁸ I consider myself one amongst these almost 2 million self-identified, adult Buddhists in the USA, though my Buddhist identity is often perceived – by both myself and others – as implausible and tenuous, at least on the surface. Like Asma, I identify as a Buddhist, yet not of the “severe Buddhist” type.⁹ Three personal anecdotes may serve to illustrate.

A year and a half ago, I attended the 11th Sakyadhita Conference in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. In the early morning hours, I would go to the hotel gym to log miles on the treadmill. (I am an avid runner.) I would sheepishly peer through the window as my Sakyadhita sisters walked past to attend the early morning meditation session. I experienced feelings of self-consciousness, bordering on shame. Despite my experience of running as meditation in motion, how could I possibly forgo formal meditation for a hot and sweaty fitness center? How un-Buddhist of me! And then, the strangest thing happened. I walked a *bhikshuni* in full monastic garb, and she began walking on the treadmill beside me. So, I thought, it is possible to be athletic and Buddhist?! (I later recounted this incident to a fellow western Buddhist scholar/practitioner who was attending the conference and she confided that, when she returned back home to Canada, she was going to train for a body building competition.)

Scene two (also at the 11th Sakyadhita Conference in Ho Chi Minh City): I was having breakfast before heading to the temple to attend Dharma talks and workshops. A small group of Dharma sisters approached my table and asked if I would like to go shopping at the Ben Thanh Market. I pause – shopping?! I was overcome with excitement at the prospect of exploring a new part of the city and searching for treasures to bring back home with me. I exchanged my conference program for my wallet and headed out the door. How *un-Buddhist*!¹⁰

A third vignette: I was attending “Exploring Buddhism: 2010 Wisdom Teachings,” a seminar at a nearby college (in Massachusetts, USA). While listening to the panel of Buddhist scholars and practitioners, my eyes wandered over to the door, where I scanned the shoes lined up neatly in a row: clogs, Birkenstocks, various eco-friendly slip-ons (all the “hippy swag” of Asma's musings). And then, standing out like a sore thumb, were my high-heeled black leather boots. *They don't belong there!*, I thought. This was immediately followed by the next revelation: *Perhaps I don't belong here?!*

So, this begs the question: What does it mean to be a Buddhist? A female Buddhist? An American (western) female Buddhist? Traditional and doctrinal criteria for assuming a Buddhist identity typically consist of taking refuge in the Triple Gems (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha) and abiding by the five ethical precepts (to refrain from taking life, stealing, lying, engaging in sexual misconduct, and ingesting intoxicants).¹¹ Yet, in reality, as Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo notes, “[E]stablishing religious identity is an elusive and multifaceted process, both for those who claim these identities and for those who attempt to categorize adherents according to their religious affiliation.”¹² Indeed, when we examine the category of Buddhism, we find that there are a variety of adherents, a variety of definitions (of what it means to be a Buddhist), and varied perceptions of what it means to be a follower of that faith

tradition. Turning the lens back on Western female Buddhists, we find that Buddhist women in North America “run the gamut”¹³: from mothers, to corporate executives, to celibate nuns; from women in “hippy swag” to Dharma divas in high-heels.

And so where does this leave unlikely Buddhists like me? Turning to the Buddhist record provides some insight, particularly in the metaphor of the lotus. It is said that after the Buddha’s Enlightenment experience he had a vision of the world as being like a lotus lake with lotuses in all stages of growth: some still beneath the water, some just little buds appearing above the water, some half open, and some completely out of the water and fully open. He saw that all living beings are at different stages of development just like the lotuses. The tradition affirms that the Buddhist path is many forked and furthermore, that different people are at different stages along the path.¹⁴ Examining the Buddhist historical record reveals a diversity of Buddhist practices and a diversity of Buddhists. Far from being static or uniform, Buddhist cultures and identities are complex, plural, and often fraught with contradictions and tensions.

We live in a world now characterized by “complicated interdependencies” in which “East” and “West,” “self” and “other,” do, and must, meet constantly.¹⁵ Such meetings across spatial and cultural boundaries require a self-critical perspective—namely, perceiving our own projections of oversimplification in relation to other cultures and traditions, as well as in relation to those cultures and traditions to which we claim allegiance. In his text, *Luminous Passage: The Practice and Study of Buddhism in America*, Charles Prebish challenges us to embrace diversity, both of Buddhist communities and Buddhist identities:

Perhaps the most critical issue is not how to develop some universally acceptable and probably presumptuous standard of acceptability, such as adaptation or acculturation or ethnicity, but instead to consider how American Buddhism might promote an ecumenical sense of itself that allows for and even encourages diversity, recognizing the integrity of each American Buddhist community [and, I would add, each American Buddhist individual] irrespective of how it defines itself.¹⁶

Recall the metaphor of the lotus. Some of us are still beneath the water, others of us are skimming the surface in full bloom. Some of us are in monastic garb, others of us are in Prada suits. Some of us shave our head in the morning, others of us reach for our mascara and hair dryer. Perhaps, it is our attachment to religious identities that causes alienation and even conflict.¹⁷ When encountering “the Other” – whether it is “East” meets “West,” or model Buddhist par excellence meets a rather unlikely Buddhist – Martha Nussbaum challenges us to think in terms of common human problems and the choices we all must make:

All human beings have to confront their own mortality and cope with the fear of death; all human beings have to regulate their bodily appetites, making judgments in the areas of food, drink, and sex; all have to take some stand about property and the distribution of scarce resources; all need to have some attitude to the planning of their own lives.¹⁸ As the Buddha teaches us, he came to make known two things: the truth of suffering and the cessation of suffering. Perhaps this is the crux of Buddhist identity: our shared humanity.

NOTES

¹ *TransBuddhism: Transmission, Translation, and Transformation*, edited by Nalini Bhushan, Jay L. Garfield, and Abraham Zablocki (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), p. 4.

² Martha C. Nussbaum, “The Study of Non-Western Cultures,” in *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (1997): 113-147.

³ Ibid., p. 118.

⁴ Nussbaum defines descriptive romanticism as “the expression of a romantic longing for exotic experiences that our own familiar lives seem to deny us.” Ibid., p. 123.

⁵ See Nussbaum, p. 134.

⁶ Stephen T. Asma, *Why I am a Buddhist*, p. 2.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Growth of Buddhism (statistically) in the USA. United States Census Bureau, *Self-Described Religious Identification of Adult Population: 1990 to 2008*.

<http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2011/tables/11s0075.pdf>. Accessed February 6, 2011.

⁹ Asma, 2.

¹⁰ The purpose of this anecdote is not to advocate consumerism or materialism, but rather to demystify the romanticizing and oversimplifying of Buddhist identity, both “Western” and “Eastern.” For critiques of consumerism, particularly in relation to American Buddhism, see the following: Norman Fischer, “Why We Need a Plan B,” *Buddhadharma: The Practitioner’s Quarterly* (Summer 2009): 36-39; Stephanie Kaza, ed., *Hooked!: Buddhist Writings on Greed, Desire, and the Urge to Consume* (Boston: Shambhala, 2005).

¹¹ When responding to the question, “What is it that makes us Buddhists?,” Ven. Dhammananda Bhikkhuni outlines the following criteria: (1) taking refuge in the Triple Gems (Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha), (2) believing in karma, and (3) observing the five precepts (the ethical foundations of a “good life”). See Dhammananda Bhikkhuni, *Beyond Gender*, published by the Foundation for Women, Law, and Rural Development (FORWARD) and Women’s Studies Center (WSC) Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University (Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2007), pp. 91-94. In a similar attempt to measure Buddhist identity, Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse asserts that one is a Buddhist if he or she accepts “the four seals”: (1) all compounded things are impermanent, (2) all emotions are pain, (3) all things have no inherent existence, and (4) *nirvana* is beyond concepts. See Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse, *What Makes You Not a Buddhist* (Boston: Shambhala, 2008).

¹² Karma Lekshe Tsomo, “Creating Religious Identity,” *Religion East & West*, Issue 9, October 2009, p. 78.

¹³ See Karma Lekshe Tsomo, “Global Exchange: Women in the Transmission and Transformation of Buddhism,” in *TransBuddhism: Transmission, Translation, and Transformation*, edited by Nalini Bhushan, Jay L. Garfield, and Abraham Zablocki (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), p. 162.

¹⁴ See Donald K. Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*, 2nd edition (SUNY Press, 2010). As Swearer warns, explanations that seek to somewhat arbitrarily differentiate the ideal and the actual “run the risk of sacrificing the interwoven threads of religion as they are culturally embodied to the logic of consistency” (2-3).

¹⁵ Nussbaum, pp. 114-15. Historically, the West’s relationship to Non-Western cultures has been mediated by colonial domination and orientalist projections.

¹⁶ Charles S. Prebish, *Luminous Passage: The Practice and Study of Buddhism in America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), p. x.

¹⁷ As Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo reminds us, “From a Buddhist perspective, the problem is not religion per se but attachment to religious identities.” See Karma Lekshe Tsomo, “Creating Religious Identity,” *Religion East & West*, Issue 9, October 2009, p. 77.

¹⁸ Nussbaum, p. 138.

The issue of whether lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) people can attain enlightenment is currently drawing people's attention in Thailand, due to discrimination against the LGBTQ community. Although Thai society is quite tolerant in terms of sexual diversity, many conservative Buddhist scholars, such as Dr. Sanong Vora-Urai, still believe LGBTQ people cannot attain enlightenment, reasoning that their sexual orientation is the result of sexual misconduct committed in their past lives. He also believes that LGBTQ cannot be ordained. Discrimination against members of the LGBTQ community has barred them from spiritual development in the Buddhist context. This paper attempts to answer these questions in a different way and will discuss genders, sexualities, and the ultimate goal of Buddhism.

Attitudes in Thailand

Thailand is well-known as one of the most tolerant countries in the world when it comes to sexual diversity. Violence against the LGBTQ community has not been significant. In the religious context of Thai Buddhism, however, a bias against LGBTQ still exists. A conservative Buddhist scholar named Dr. Sanong Vora-Urai gave an interview published in *Secret*, a popular Thai magazine, regarding lifestyles and Dharma.¹ In this article, titled "*Gay and Dharma*," Dr. Sanong expressed many prejudices against LGBTQ, such as the following:

1. LGBTQ cannot attain liberation, so they cannot be ordained.
2. LGBTQ is sexual deviance resulting from sexual misconduct committed in past lives.
3. Same-sex love is a transgression of the rules of training (*silabbataparāmāsa*).
4. People are born LGBTQ because of the misconduct of their parents.

When I first read this interview, I was surprised to learn about his views and explanations. As a feminist Buddhist scholar, I would like to offer different perspectives on these issues.

1. LGBTQ Cannot Attain Liberation, So They Cannot be Ordained

This belief derives from a *vinaya* rule that says *hermaphrodites*, people who have both male and female genitals, are not allowed to be ordained. According to traditional Buddhist thinking, being a hermaphrodite is believed to be a result of bad karma created in past lives. Dr. Sanong assumes that LGBTQ people fall into this category. However, in general, LGBTQ people are not hermaphrodites. They are either men or women who have normal genital organs. The difference is that they do not conform to heterosexual social norms.

2. LGBTQ is Sexual Deviance Resulting from Sexual Misconduct Committed in Past Lives

According to the *Tripitaka*, the results of sexual misconduct are: (1) feeling regret; (2) not being able to sleep well; (3) being gossiped about; and (4) being reborn in hell. There is no passage in the texts stating that rebirth as LGBTQ is the result of sexual misconduct. When Dr. Sanong explained the

causes that lead people to be LGBTQ, he quoted the story of a *bhikkhuni* named Isidasi who committed sexual misconduct when she was a man in one of her past lives. The consequence of her previous sexual misconduct was that she was abandoned by men three times when she lived during the Buddha's time. I found his example to be irrelevant and unrelated to LGBTQ issues.

3. Same-sex Love is a Transgression of the Rules of Training (*Silabbataparāmāsa*)

In Buddhism, the definition of *silabbataparāmāsa* is indulgence in wrong rites and ceremonies, such as the worship of unusual trees or animals. There is no relationship between LGBTQ and such *silabbataparāmāsa* activities.

4. People are Born LGBTQ Because of the Misconduct of Their Parents

This belief is contradictory to the law of *karma*, one of Buddhism's key teachings. The law of *karma* insists on individual responsibility and the existence of past and future lives. The theory of *karma* stipulates that a person experiences the results of her or his own actions. It is not possible for one person to commit an unwholesome deed and another person to experience the result of that deed. Some may argue that family members have collective *karma*, but that belief is controversial and requires further investigation.

Although none of Dr. Sanong's explanation can be found in the *Tripitaka* or any primary Buddhist texts, his views are representatives of mainstream beliefs and attitudes towards LGBTQ in Thai Buddhism. These attitudes and explanations seem to be widely accepted in Thai Buddhist society. As a result, many Thai LGBTQ people have been discriminated against. For example, some have not been allowed to ordain and have not been allowed to practice Dharma in some temples or meditation centers. In these settings, if LGBTQ want to be accepted in these settings, they must try to conceal their sexual identities and behave as is typically expected of a man or woman in heterosexual societies. When people cannot be themselves, however, they feel that their identities are not acceptable and this kind of identity conflict is not healthy in terms of Dharma practice. In this regard, discrimination against members of the LGBTQ community has barred them from spiritual development in Thai Buddhist contexts.

Other Perspectives on Sexual Identity

For my Master's thesis, titled "Thoughts and Ethics of Sexuality in Theravada Buddhism," completed in 2002, I researched cause and effect in relation to gender and sexualities and arrived at totally different conclusions from Dr. Sanong. According to my findings, to be born as a male or female depends on an individual's powerful *karma*, whether wholesome or unwholesome. For example, if a man committed sexual misconduct, was promiscuous, or abandoned his partner, he might be born as a woman in the next life and be cheated or abandoned by his or her partners. As for powerful wholesome karma, a person might make a vow to be born as a person of the opposite sex in order to learn more about those sexual characteristics and experience what it feels like to be that particular sex. Some might make a vow to transform themselves into a person of the opposite sex in order to complete some mission, such as Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara who transformed himself into a female, the *bodhisattva* Guanyin, who is a goddess in Chinese Buddhism.

If one has no such powerful *karma*, one's sex will depend on an individual's cultivation and

accumulation of sexual characteristics. Although the mind is distinct from the physiological sex organs, it can incorporate certain sexual characteristics, or gender attributes. For example, a person who was born as a woman in many consecutive lives might have strong female characteristics, even though she commits actions that result in her being born as a man. Therefore, it is very possible for people to be conflicted in terms of their sexual identity when their physiological sex characteristics and body do not match the psychological predispositions of accumulated sexual characteristics and inner feelings.

Education and Right Understanding

Solutions to discrimination against LGBTQ require cooperation and action from both the LGBTQ population and society in general. Thai Buddhists should not cling to preconceptions of gender and sexuality, which are worldly concepts; instead, they should focus on core human values, actions, and intentions. If receiving ordination is virtuous, then whoever receives ordination should be respected and supported, no matter whether that person is straight or LGBTQ. According to Buddhist beliefs, as long as LGBTQ are not hermaphrodite or congenitally handicapped, they are eligible to be ordained and are capable of working toward enlightenment like other human beings.

LGBTQ also need to have right understanding regarding Buddhist ordination. In the Theravada tradition, such as in Thailand, questions of gender and sexuality should be set aside after ordination, no matter whether one is straight or LGBTQ. Monks and nuns should not be involved in any form of sexual activity and should devote their energy to the attainment of enlightenment. As long as they follow the Vinaya and practice the Dharma, they should be respected regardless of their gender or sexual identity.

In general, Dr. Sanong's view of gender and sexuality appears to be quite inflexible. According to the Buddha's teachings, however, everything is impermanent, and notions of gender and sexuality are no exception. Buddhists should not forget that the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice is *nirvana*, a state of liberation that goes beyond all dualities of good and bad, merit and sin, light and dark, yin and yang, masculine and feminine, man and woman, including straight and LGBTQ!

At this point, one might legitimately ask about the ethics of sexual relationship. It is my view that, as long as one is not promiscuous and is respectful toward one's partner, then such a relationship is ethical. It does not matter whether your partner is of the same sex or the opposite sex, as long as both partners are honest and respectful toward each other. In an ideal relationship, one should be able to support the other person's well-being and the aim of the relationship should be the spiritual development of both parties. Although this may sound idealistic, I believe it is possible.

NOTES

1. *Secret* 1:6, 94-95. Available online in Thai language.
[<http://www.bloggang.com/viewdiary.php?id=oozingplanet&month=01-2009&date=15&group=6&gblog=6>].

Robina Courtin: an Unconventional Buddhist?

Anna Halafoff

Robina Courtin is one of Australia's most prominent Buddhist teachers. Born in Melbourne in 1944, Courtin has been a Buddhist nun in the Tibetan tradition for over 30 years. As founder of the Liberation Prison Project and a teacher of international renown, Courtin has been the subject of two Australian documentaries *Chasing Buddha* (2000) and *Key to Freedom* (2007). The wisdom, directness, and humor of her teachings, coupled with her limitless compassion, have served as inspirations to Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. Arguably, it is her particularly Australian down-to-earth style that has enabled her to deliver Buddhism in a practical and accessible way to Westerners both in and beyond Australia. This paper draws on Australian media sources, including transcripts of documentaries, radio interviews, and newspaper articles, to provide an account of Courtin's life story and her insights on practicing and teaching Buddhism, particularly in the Australian context. In so doing, I examine her supposedly unconventional approach to Buddhism, arguing that Courtin may in fact be more traditional than the Australian media have led its readers to believe.

Robina Courtin in and Beyond Australia

Robina Courtin was born into a Catholic family, the second of seven children. Despite economic hardships, she was educated at Sacré Cœur, a prestigious girls' school in East Malvern, Melbourne. As a young girl, Courtin was a devout Catholic with a questioning and rebellious nature whose good heart remained largely hidden behind her bad behavior. At the age of 12, she begged her mother to let her become a Carmelite nun like her hero, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, who was ordained at 14. Yet by 19, Courtin had traded her religious aspirations for the experimental life of a hippie in the 1960s. She moved to London in 1967 and dedicated the next decade of her life to left-wing, black, and feminist politics in the United Kingdom and Australia.¹

In the mid-1970s, Courtin became a passionate student of the martial arts, until a car accident abruptly cut short her karate career. During her recuperation in Melbourne, she saw a poster advertising a course on Buddhism with Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche, the first Tibetan *lamas* to visit and teach in Australia, at Chenrezig Institute in southern Queensland.² Courtin was immediately attracted to the reflexive and devotional nature of Tibetan Buddhism, which was well suited to her questioning mind and sat comfortably with her Catholic upbringing. It was at Chenrezig Institute that she finally realized, "Ah! That's the kind of nun I want to be." She was ordained 18 months later by Lama Zopa at Kopan, the *lama's* monastery in Kathmandu, Nepal.³

Courtin spent the next ten years studying Buddhism while working for Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa's Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT), helping to develop Wisdom Publications in the United Kingdom and overseeing its editorial and production departments. In 1987, at the request of Lama Zopa, she began teaching Buddhism in Australia and in 1994 she was appointed editor of FPMT's *Mandala Magazine* in California. In 1996, the magazine received a letter from an 18-year-old Mexican-American prisoner named Arturo, a Los Angeles gang member who had been incarcerated since he was twelve. Courtin responded to his message and sent him a book on Buddhism. Word spread, and by the end of 1997 she was writing to more than 40 inmates throughout the U.S. This led her to establish Liberation Prison Project (LPP) as a non-profit organization in California.⁴

Courtin's story was widely publicized in Australia when "Chasing Buddha" an award-winning Australian Film Industry documentary about her was shown on SBS⁵ in 2000 and given a theatrical release in several Australian cities. The film follows Courtin criss-crossing America as she teaches Buddhism at FPMT centres and in maximum-security prisons. Due to the success of "Chasing Buddha," Courtin was invited to visit prisons and to give public talks throughout Australia.⁶ What began with a letter from one prisoner in 1996 has grown into an organization with offices in the United States and Australia and branches in Mongolia, Spain, and Mexico. LPP receives hundreds of letters a month and over a period of 13 years has corresponded with or visited thousands of prisoners. In 2007, *Key to Freedom*, a documentary about Courtin's work in Australian prisons was screened on Australia's ABC TV.⁷

Despite what appear to be many different tracks within one lifetime, Courtin well describes the continuity of her experiences:

[I]f I look back on my life, externally it looks very different, the threads... but internally to me ... it's completely constant, and from the beginning that I can remember, I always had this wish to understand the world... and... having a lot of energy, wanting to do something about it. So that really hasn't changed....⁸

Not Your Average Nun? Aussie, Down-to-earth, and Accessible

Following the release of "Chasing Buddha," which includes a scene of Courtin using four-letter words, journalists frequently used extreme and sensationalist descriptions depicting her as a somewhat subversive superhero. This is well illustrated by headlines and phrases such as "There is Nothing Passive about this Buddhist Nun," "a violator of expectations," "wilder than your average nun,"¹⁰ and "the gal who put some attitude into Buddhism."¹¹ Journalists have concurrently juxtaposed Courtin's "unflinching honesty and gutter-mouthed outbursts" with "her brilliant... compassion and wisdom,"¹² her "open and infectious" smile,¹³ and "hard-boiled humanity."¹⁴ She has been described as "a diminutive dynamo with a big heart"¹⁵ and a "surprisingly soft-centre."¹⁶ Indeed it is her "life of extremes" that has arguably made her so interesting to the Australian media and public.¹⁷

"Forget your image of an obedient and mild-mannered Buddhist," says Rachel Kohn, "She does wear the maroon robes of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, but Australian, Robina Courtin, has brought her edgy personality and boundless energy to her 24 years as a Buddhist nun."¹⁸ Indeed it is her "forthright" and "matter-of-fact Aussie attitude" that has been described as having "prepared her perfectly for her work with prisoners in some of the United States" toughest jails."¹⁹ Prisoners from Kentucky State Penitentiary described her teachings as "very easy to relate to because she puts them in a way that everyone can understand". They also described her as having an "easy-going" style, and her teachings as "accessible," "fun," and "interesting."²⁰

In addition, Courtin's own experiences of suffering and violence in her youth, including incest and rape, have enabled a level of empathy to develop between her and the prisoners, and also with female students both inside and outside of the prison system.²¹ As the majority of Buddhist teachers (particularly Tibetan Buddhist *lamas*) who have visited and taught in Australia have been men, it follows that Australian women are drawn to the teachings of Buddhist nuns in the Tibetan tradition, such as Robina Courtin and Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, with whom they can more easily identify. In 1996, Lama Zopa Rinpoche wrote in a 21st-birthday card to Arturo, the first prisoner that Courtin had responded to, saying: "Your prison is nothing in comparison to the inner prison of ordinary people," referring to the prison of attachment, anger, depression, and other everyday unhappy emotions.²² Consequently,

Courtin's advice is the same to all "prisoners," regardless of gender. It's about developing self-respect through enhancing one's positive qualities: "The bottom line... is that a human being looks at themselves, takes responsibility and knows they've got potential to change" for the better.²³ According to Aileen Barry of Liberation Prison Project in Australia, not only does Courtin have a profound understanding of suffering, but "what she's able to put across to people very clearly is it is possible to transform [it] ... she's a very grounded, practical, living example of that."²⁴

Unconventional or Traditional?

Scholars have noted that Australians, and the media, have a very limited understanding of diverse Buddhist traditions and of Buddhism's history in Australia.²⁵ While Australians commonly view Buddhists as either in silent contemplation or jovial laughter, the contributions that Buddhism has made to social change and that women have made to Buddhism in Australia remain largely unrecognized.²⁶ In actuality, eccentric, strong teachers and women have played leading roles in Buddhism in Australia since the 19th century. A commitment to a reflexive, pragmatic approach to Buddhism and to Buddhist-inspired methods of social change have long been prevalent in Australia.²⁷ As Sherwood explains, a commitment to social change among Buddhists is not new and is not a Western development. It is a continuation of the tradition of the *bodhisattva* path described by Shantideva (the eighth-century Indian scholar monk) that stresses the Mahayana ideal of altruism and the *bodhisattva*'s pledge to take whatever form may be necessary in order to be of most benefit to others.²⁸

It follows that the so-called unconventional Robina Courtin is actually quite traditional. She follows the *bodhisattva*'s path of altruistic motivation for personal and social change. She begins and ends her teachings with traditional prayers. She dispenses traditional methods of practices, meditations, and vows. She encourages her students to study the Buddhist teachings and to meet with qualified teachers.²⁹ Due to her appearance as an Australian woman and down-to-earth dynamo who has prevailed through many difficulties in her own life, it has been said that "in her own special way she has humanized Buddhism, made it more accessible and within reach for people with normal conditions and failings."³⁰ In so doing, she has proven that "inspiration comes in all shapes and sizes."³¹ She follows the *bodhisattva* tradition, appearing where and when needed, and enacting whatever it takes to help all beings to be free from suffering and to find happiness, thus challenging prevalent notions of what a Buddhist in Australia ought to be like. Consequently, Courtin can be viewed as a proponent of what Phillips and Aarons have defined as a traditional, rather than a new-age, approach to Buddhism that is little understood in contemporary Western contexts.³² Further research is necessary to substantiate this claim. This could include a sociological study focused on the experiences of Courtin's students, particularly prisoners and women, and also a comprehensive history of women in Buddhism in Australia to follow on from Croucher's and Adam's studies.³³

NOTES

¹ B. Hurrell, "New Face of Buddhism," *Herald Sun*, November 29, 2000, p. 26; G. Simpson, "Putting the Buddha in Prison," *The West Australian*, January 19, 2002, pp. 90-92; M. Irving, "The Many Lives of Robina Courtin," *West Weekend Magazine*, *The West Australian*, November 24, 2007b, p. 16; and "Compass: Key to Freedom" ABC TV, September 9, 2007 [http://www.abc.net.au/compass/s2039488.htm. Accessed 25 March 2009]

² Simpson, 2002; P. Croucher. *A History of Buddhism in Australia 1848-1988*, Kensington, NSW: New South Wales University Press, 1989. pp. 90-92.

³ Irving, 2000b.

⁴ “The Spirit of Things: Chasing Robina,” Radio National, July 13, 2003 [<http://www.abc.net.au>. Accessed 25 March 2009]; M. Curtis, “Dead Man’s Guru,” *The Age*, December 1, 1998, p. 14; “Compass;” Irving, 2000b.

⁵ The Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) is Australia’s multicultural and multilingual radio and television public broadcaster.

⁶ S. Waldon, “She’s a Tough, Foul-mouthed Brawler. She’s Also a Buddhist Nun,” *The Age*, March 15, 2000, p. 15; P. Hawker, “There is Nothing Passive about this Buddhist Nun,” *The Age*, September 12, 2000, p. 5; V. Walker, “Robina and the Hoods,” *The Australian*, November 15, 2000, p. 15.

⁷ M. Irving, “Buddha behind Bars,” *West Weekend Magazine*, *The West Australian*, November 24, 2007a, p. 12; Irving, 2000b; “Compass.”

⁸ “The Spirit of Things.”

⁹ Hawker, 2000.

¹⁰ J. Morgan, “Wilder than the Average Nun,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 4, 2000, p. 19.

¹¹ R. Brundrett, “Buddhist Behind,” *Herald Sun*, July 26, 2003, p. 25.

¹² Waldon, 2000.

¹³ Curtis, 1998.

¹⁴ V. Roach, “Travels with his Aunt,” *Daily Telegraph*, September 28, 2000.

¹⁵ Irving, 2007b.

¹⁶ S. Hall, “Retreating from Nothing: The Buddhist Nun Who’s Out There,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 28, 2000.

¹⁷ S. H. Byrnes, “Cinefile,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 30, 2000, p. 15.

¹⁸ “The Spirit of Things.”

¹⁹ Brundrett, 2003; D. Passmore, “Nun’s Wild Days of Drugs and Sex,” *Sunday Mail*, December 16, 2001.

²⁰ *Sunday Herald Sun*, “Last Word from a Nun,” September 3, 2000.

²¹ Irving, 2000b.

²² The Religion Report, "Venerable Robina Courtin," ABC Radio National, May 4, 2005. [http://www.abc.net.au] Accessed March 25, 2009.

²³ Irving, 2007a.

²⁴ "Compass."

²⁵ Croucher, 1989; P. Sherwood, P. *The Buddha is in the Street: Engaged Buddhism in Australia*. Bunbury, WA: Edith Cowan University, 2003. pp. 1, 3.

²⁶ Sherwood, 2003, pp. 1, 3; E. Adam, E. "Buddhist Women in Australia," *Journal of Global Buddhism*, 1 (2000): 38-43.

²⁷ Croucher 1989; E. Adam, and P. Hughes, *The Buddhists in Australia*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1996; Adam, 2000; Sherwood, 2003.

²⁸ Sherwood, 2003; Shantideva. "The Bodhisattva Path." *Dharma Rain*. Edited by Stephanie Kaza and Ken Kraft. Boston: Shambhala, 2000. p. 33.

²⁹ "The Spirit of Things"; Irving, 2007b.

³⁰ Brundrett, 2003.

³¹ Roach, 2000.

³² T. Phillips, T. and H. Aarons, "Choosing Buddhism in Australia: Towards a Traditional Style of Reflexive Spiritual Engagement." *The British Journal of Sociology* 56:2 (2005): 215-32.

³³ Croucher, 1989; Adam, 2000.

A Comparison of Menstrual and Birth Impurity in Brahminical Dharma Texts and Buddhist Vinaya

Amy Paris Langenberg

It is common for practitioners and scholars of Buddhism to attribute ideas of female impurity found in Indian Buddhist texts to the influence of purity-obsessed Brahmin tradition. If one compares Brahmin and Buddhist discussions of female purity from the classical period (stretching roughly from the Maurya¹ to the Gupta² dynasties), however, it turns out that this attribution is not supportable. Early Brahmin dharma texts: 1) attribute female impurity to the god Indra's wrongdoing, not the sins of women; 2) deal with female menstrual and birth impurity as temporary and washable; and 3) often declare women to be inherently pure. In Buddhist contexts, on the other hand, the impurity of women is presented as: 1) a symptom of women's past moral errors; 2) the source of human impurity in general; and 3) a life-long state. It seems likely that these more severe views of female impurity travelled the opposite direction from what is usually imagined to be the case, migrating into Brahmin literature from Buddhist sources. This paper will document some representative examples the rhetoric of female impurity in Buddhist and Brahmin sources in order to provide a more accurate historical accounting of classical Indian Buddhist approaches to female embodiment.

According to multiple Brahmin sources, menstruation in women is the result of the god Indra's ancient Brahminicide.³ After killing the Brahmin son of the divine engineer Tvastr, all of the creatures of the world blame him and call him a Brahmin-killer. Indra is desperate to rid himself of this great sin and runs to the women, who agree to take over one third of his sin in exchange for the boons of fertility and sexual pleasure. Thus, according to the *dharmasūtra* of Vasistha, "That guilt of killing a Brahmin manifests itself every month. Therefore, one should not eat the food of a menstruating woman, for such a woman has put on the aspect of the guilt of killing a Brahmin."⁴

This story is quite interesting. First, menstruation, which, in Buddhist sources is often taken as evidence of female sin, is here the result of the violent act of a male god. Second, women take on this sin knowingly and voluntarily, after negotiating a deal with Indra in which they are to receive in return two boons of their own choosing: the ability to bear children and the capacity to experience sexual pleasure. Third, Vasistha makes clear that the sin responsible for the impure nature of menstruation is merely an adventitious quality and not at all intrinsic to women: once a month, women "put on the aspect of the guilt of killing a Brahmin." At the end of their period of impurity, they shed this guilt.

Vedic texts such as the *Taittirīyasaṃhitā* and the various *grhyasūtras* provide specific instructions for coping with the impurity that accompanies monthly bleeding. These texts are primarily concerned primarily with the ritual status of the high-caste male, and with the reproductive necessity of taking maximum advantage of female fertility, believed to be at its peak during the days following monthly bleeding. The menstruating wife is instructed to wear a stained cloth for three nights and to refrain from, for instance, bathing, anointing herself, touching the fire, laughing, and household work.⁵ On the fourth day, she bathes and shampoos her hair, brushes her teeth, and replaces the stained cloth with a clean one. These actions signal to her husband that her period of impurity is at an end, and that she is, once again, sexually available. In fact, the period of three days, during which the wife performs a mild sort of penance, and the ritual bath at the end of the three-day period, remove all trace of Indra's sin, even, according to some lawgivers, if the blood has not actually ceased to flow.

The *dharmasūtras* and *grhyasūtras* belong to a transitional period between religious culture of the Vedic *samhitās* and the classical Brahmanism of the epics and *smṛti* texts. While undeniably paternalistic

and androcentric, these dharma texts are quite positive towards female sexuality and fertility. Women are declared pure not *despite* monthly bleeding, but *because* of monthly bleeding. The lawgiver Baudhāyana is not alone in commenting on the menstrual flow's unparalleled efficacy in periodically washing away women's sins so that they "never become sullied,"⁶ even in the case of rape, or abduction.⁷ During sex, legitimate wives are pure by definition, except if they are menstruating or have just given birth.⁸ In fact, the auspicious wife, who is purified by her marriage ceremony and periodically cleansed by her monthly flow appears to represent to these authors a peculiarly feminine apotheosis of purity. Baudhāyana and Vasisitha cite the same poetic accounting of the durable blessings girls receive at marriage as a result of their ritual union with three gods: "The Moon granted them purification; Gandharva, a sweet voice; and Fire, the capacity to eat anything. Women, therefore, are free from taint."⁹ Vasisitha even suggests that a woman's purity surpasses that of the back of a cow and the feet of a Brahmin and that she is "pure all over."¹⁰

While we should not forget that these statements are all made with the goal of perpetuating the purity and robust thriving of upper-caste patrilineages, and not with the specific intention of uplifting women, they nonetheless contrast sharply with the unremittingly negative Indian Buddhist posture towards female sexuality and fertility. In Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* texts that deal with menstrual regulations, for instance, the occurrence of menstrual bleeding is unfailingly attributed to the past moral failings of nuns. The *Bhikṣunivibhaṅga* commentary for a precept concerning the need for nuns to keep a special garment on hand to conceal the menstrual flow starts by stating, "For women, because of the degenerative force of previous karma, every month, blood trickles out."¹¹ A passage from the *Bhikṣunivastu* also prescribing the wearing of a special menstrual cloth begins with the phrase, "In Śrāvastī, not being without passion because of the (moral) deficiency of their previous actions, from time to time nuns bled from their genitals."¹² In another interesting passage from the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Bhikṣunivastu*, the Lord Buddha forbids initiating non-menstruating women into the order of nuns after one such young woman uses her amenorrhea as a reason to assume airs about her own spiritual attainments and disparage her elders. "Sisters," she says to the other more experienced nuns, "Have you understood [the Dharma] wrongly? Why do you menstruate?"¹³

Even more damaging to the moral status of Buddhist women are Buddhist teachings that attribute the pervasive impurity of embodied existence to birth in the foul female womb. The *Aggañña Sutta* from the *Dīgha Nikāya* is an early instance of this idea. Here, the Lord Buddha is explaining the baselessness of Brahmin caste-prejudice to a young Brahmin student who wishes to become a monk. Brahmins have no special claim to purity, he argues, and no basis for claiming to be born from Brahmā's mouth. After all, "we can see Brahmin women, the wives of Brahmins, who menstruate and become pregnant, have babies and give suck." Just like any *śūdra*, Brahmin boys are *of woman born*. The "Descent into the Womb Sūtra" (*Garbhāvakraṇṭisūtra*), a roughly second-century text embedded in the *Kṣudrakavastu* section of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*¹⁴ contains a more developed discussion of the impure female womb: It describes it, for example, as follows:

This wound-like cavity in a body that arises because of the ripening of past actions, covered over by a perforated skin, would inspire fear if glimpsed. It is a place like a nauseating reeking latrine, dark, heaped up with filth, inhabited by many thousands of types of worms, always full of effluent, continuously needing to be cleansed, made slimy, putrid and completely fetid by excrement, urine, blood, defilements and pus.¹⁵

This is just one of many such descriptions in Buddhist sources. Several centuries after the redaction of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, for instance, Candrakīrti makes good use of such descriptions in his

restatement of the Buddha's argument against Brahminical pretensions to pure birth in the *Aggañña Sutta*:

Someone before he was born lived inside his mother's womb – which is like an outhouse – between her intestines and stomach. Like a dung worm, he was nourished by the fluid of her waste products. It is only from ignorance that he thinks "I am pure."¹⁶

Thus, any creature born from the outhouse that is a woman's reproductive body has little claim to purity. No wonder, then, that the *Lalitavistara*, a Sanskrit telling of the Buddha's life story roughly contemporaneous to the *Garbhāvakraṇṭisūtra*, installs the embryonic Buddha inside a special jeweled tabernacle (*ratnavyūha*) within Queen Māyā's womb, sheltering him from its nefarious fluids.¹⁷

The mainstream of Buddhist thought on purity removes it from the realm of ritual and reestablishes it the realm of ethical conduct. According to *Dhammapada*, for instance:

By oneself is wrong done, by oneself is one defiled.
By oneself wrong is not done, by oneself, surely, is one cleansed.
One cannot purify another,
Purity and impurity are in oneself [alone].¹⁸

While this ethicized, spiritualized approach to purity may appear democratic, it ends up being a liability for Buddhist women. Specifically female sources of impurity like menstruation and childbirth are adventitious and easily removed in the Brahmin context. In the Buddhist context, they are deeply personal long-lasting symptoms of past wrongdoing, removed not by the passage of a few days and a bath, but by a lifetime of spiritual effort. The fact that women's bodies are so closely associated with the impure physical processes of samsāra itself also casts a long shadow over the female embodiment.

References to the horrific impurity of female bodies do occur in Brahminic texts such as the *Viṣṇu Purana*,¹⁹ and the much later *Samnyasa Upanisads*.²⁰ Given the history rehearsed above, however, it seems likely that more severe views of female impurity commonly found in Buddhist texts travelled the opposite direction from what is usually imagined to be the case, migrating into Brahmin literature from Buddhist sources long after the Vedic period.

NOTES

¹ Cf. 321-184 BCE.

² Cf. 320-550 CE.

³ This story appears in the *Taittirīyasambhitā* and is retold in various texts including the *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

⁴ *Vasistha Dharmasūtra* 5.6-10. Patrick Olivelle, ed., *Dharmasūtras?: the law codes of Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhayana, and Vasistha*, 1st ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2003), p. 375. Olivelle loosely dates Vasistha to the 200 year period between 100 BCE and 100 CE.

⁵ Taittirīyasamhitā 52,5,1,5-7. Discussed in Ute Hüsken, “Pure or Clean?,” *Traditional South Asian Medicine* 6 (2001): 85-96. Of the *dharmasūtra* authors, only Vasistha includes any instructions for menstruating women. Vasistha 5.6-7.

⁶ Baudhāyana 2.4.4. Olivelle, *Dharmasutras*, 257. Vasistha 5.5.

⁷ Vasistha 28.2-3. Ibid., 457. Manu 5.108.

⁸ Vasistha 28.8. Baudhāyana 1.9.2. Upper caste men should not, however, have sex with certain types of women for fear of losing caste. These include *śūdra* woman, the wife of an elder, and female relations.

⁹ Vasistha 28.6. Baudhāyana 2.4.5.

¹⁰ Vasistha 28.9.

¹¹ Derge ‘dul wa (Volume 9) Ta 299a.7.

¹² Derge ‘dul wa (Volume 11) Da 153a.7.

¹³ Derge ‘dul wa (Volume 11) Da 152b.7.

¹⁴ Two versions of this text can also be found in the *Ratnakūṭa* collection of Mahāyāna sutras.

¹⁵ Tog Palace Kanjur ‘Dul ba *Ksudrakavastu* (Volume 9) Ta 207b.6-208a.1.

¹⁶ Catuhśatakāṭikā 324-25. Candrakīrti, *Four illusions?: Candrakīrti’s advice for travelers on the Bodhisattva path*, trans. Karen Lang (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 180.

¹⁷ Parasurama Vaidya, ed., *Lalita-vistara* (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1958), p. 47.

¹⁸ Dhammapada 165. John Carter and Mahinda Palihawadana, trans., *The Dhammapada* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 31. Cited in Kim Gutschow, *Being a Buddhist Nun: The Struggle for Enlightenment in the Himalayas* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 200.

¹⁹ Visnu Purāṇa 6.5.9.

²⁰ For instance, *Nārada-parivṛāja Upaniṣad* 160; *Maitreya Upaniṣad* 114. Patrick Olivelle, *Samnyasa Upaniṣads: Hindu scriptures on asceticism and renunciation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

Some Aspects of Compassion: View from the Path

Adrienne Cochran

“Erring, erring I walk down the unerring path.”
~ Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso Rinpoche

At first, the Buddha was not going to teach after attaining enlightenment, but he showed profound compassion for all sentient beings when he gave his first teaching, the Four Noble Truths: suffering exists, suffering has causes, suffering may cease, the path is the remedy for suffering. The Buddha spent the rest of his life teaching the Dharma, so that all sentient beings would have the tools to let go of suffering. The *sutras* are packed with stories relating Sakyamuni Buddha’s acts of compassion towards human beings from all walks of life, both female and male, with a range of personality types and they also contain stories relating the Buddha’s altruism towards animals.

Compassion is the act of opening one’s heart to suffering. Suffering takes many forms, including the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change, and pervasive suffering. The suffering of suffering refers to intense pain, physical or mental, such as sustained illness. The suffering of change relates to minor and major shifts in one’s life, such as losing a job, ending a relationship, moving to a new place, and aging. Pervasive suffering – the “off-ness” of life in *samsara* – is perhaps the most difficult to notice. The term “*dukkha*,” (the Pali word usually translated as “suffering,”) is likened to cart wheels with axel holes that are off-center. As the cart rolls along, one gets jolted. Similarly, whenever we have ego clinging, we get a bumpy ride, even if our desires are being satisfied at that moment. By being present to the “off-ness” experienced by oneself and those around us, our heart begins to open like a lotus flower. It is by making a commitment to stay in the moment, even if it is uncomfortable, troubling, or painful, that we begin the journey to freedom.

There are three aspects of compassion: compassion for sentient beings relates to the ways suffering manifests, compassion for the way things are refers to the origin of suffering; and non-referential compassion is explained as the union of compassion and an understanding of no-self or emptiness. The first aspect of compassion, compassion for sentient beings, relates to the first noble truth, the reality of suffering. As a first step in this analysis, Buddhist practitioners need to be courageous and to generate compassion for themselves in order to look straight at this suffering. This courageous, compassionate stance allows them to apply the remedy for suffering, which is the fourth noble truth, the reality of the path. For some, it is much easier to contemplate the pain experienced by others than it is to deeply and directly contemplate their own. But through mindfulness, understanding, and meditation, practitioners can become aware of their own scary and unpleasant mental spaces. Once they have gained some stability in examining their own pain, they become more present, clear, and aware overall. Once they have a better understanding of the nature of suffering through self examination, they develop the clarity and understanding necessary to generate a genuine compassion for others. Of course, practitioners should strive to be compassionate towards family members and friends with whom it may be easiest to make an empathetic connection. A few ways that practitioners might manifest their compassion on a daily basis, is by giving their friends and families their full attention when listening to their concerns and by doing small acts of kindness throughout the day, like bringing a tired spouse his newspaper. However, sometimes practitioners have troubled family histories connected with great pain, so this might not be the best starting place. If this is the case, then it might be easier to begin generating

compassion towards those who are neutral, such as earthquake victims in a far off place. Giving donations or dedicating the merit of a practice to these victims is one way to open the heart of a follower of the Buddha.

A more difficult group to develop compassion towards might be those who are perceived as some type of enemy. In 2010, the Gulf of Mexico received severe environmental degradation when an oil well drilled by British Petroleum leaked vast quantities of oil. Many sentient beings living in the Gulf coast area were injured or killed. So, a practitioner might find it hard to generate compassion for the executives of British Petroleum. However, given the interdependence of sentient beings, these executives also deserve our compassion – no one should be demonized or excluded. Along the same lines, it might be difficult to cultivate compassion for those whom practitioners believe hold harmful or erroneous views, such as the Christian minister in the United States who wanted to burn copies of the *Quran* on the anniversary of the September 11th terrorist attacks. Given that his intended actions held the potential to incite further violence, followers on the Buddhist path might be challenged to open their hearts to this minister. Additionally, practitioners might also be hard pressed to extend compassion to those who have personally harmed them, such as burglarizing their homes or physically harming them. To use a colloquialism, examples such as those above are where “the rubber hits the road” – where Buddhist theory intersects with praxis.

Crucial to the ability to cultivate compassion, is having a clear understanding that all destructive actions, even those done with harmful intent, come from ignorance, attachment and aggression – all forms of samsaric suffering. The second aspect of compassion, compassion for the way things are, relates to the Second Noble Truth: suffering has an origination. Our ego-clinging and our false sense of self lead to painful experiences. When we perceive our “self” as a continuous entity, which is independent and “special,” the karmic ball begins to roll. From this misperception we generate views of “us” and “them,” grasping at those who attract us and being scared of those who repel us. According to the Mahayana Buddhist view, we cannot just choose to generate compassion for those who we like or find to be non-threatening. All sentient beings who are not enlightened suffer – even those who appear to be happy are still experiencing difficulties. So, all sentient beings, without exception, deserve our compassion.

However, practitioners do not begin their journey to freedom already fully awake and accordingly, they might need to develop their ability to extend compassion towards others in a realistic fashion. One method to cultivate a more inclusive compassion is to use the ripple effect. Like throwing a pebble in a pond, start with those who are neutral or those who are loved ones, wishing these people happiness and freedom from suffering. When this becomes easier, practitioners might let the ripple extend outwards by wishing the same to perceived public enemies and perceived wrong-thinkers. Finally, followers of the Buddhist path might extend their compassion to the highest level by wishing happiness and freedom from suffering to those who have done them direct harm.

Since the Buddha believed that all sentient beings have the potential to be enlightened, then compassion should also be extended to animals as well. Recently there have been several stories in the media of mother cats saving their kittens from burning buildings. One was a cat named Scarlett who repeatedly went back into a burning garage to save her five kittens, burning herself in the process. These touching stories demonstrate that some animals already possess compassionate qualities, or, at least a strong maternal instinct from which compassion may someday arise. The *Jataka* stories, which relate the previous lives of the Buddha, have many tales involving animals. Rafe Martin in his article, “Thoughts on the Jatakas” comments, “Was not the Buddha a hare, a

quail, a monkey, a lion, a deer or an ox? Who is to say that the dog guarding our porch or the cat twining around our legs is not a Bodhisattva?”

Given the interdependence of all things, practitioners might also wish to open their hearts to the suffering of the ecosystem itself. Thích Nhất Hạnh used the term “interbeing” receiving his inspiration for the term from the *Avatamsaka Sutra* which conjoins “mutual” and “to be.” Interbeing is the mutual interdependence that exists among all living things and nature itself. As an example of this connection, Nhất Hạnh notes that a single piece of paper evokes loggers, clouds, and trees. If a practitioner wishes to truly benefit beings, then he or she needs to have compassion for all things, including the natural world. Thích Nhất Hạnh says, “When true love is there, you shine like a lamp If you really have love in you, everyone around you will profit – not only humans, but animals, plants and minerals True love is equanimity.

The third aspect of compassion, non-referential compassion, relates to the view of emptiness. The realization of the emptiness of self is one of the fruits of following the path which leads to the cessation of suffering. Since there is no continuous, independent, special self, the notion of self is illusory or empty. When practitioners fully realize the emptiness of self, then their experience in the world becomes more spacious and open. Kind and compassionate acts spontaneously arise within the practitioner. Closely connected to understanding emptiness is realizing the equality of all things. When followers on the Buddhist path stop clinging to their own “specialness” as being more important than the worth of others, then they may relax and appreciate the value of all things. Given this more spacious viewpoint, compassionate acts no longer seem to take so much effort, and the practitioner does not find empathetic responses to be as emotionally draining.

However, non-referential compassion is a fruit of the path, not something immediately realized at the beginning of the journey. Sometimes, in a given situation when many beings are affected in different ways, it is difficult to see the best way to manifest compassion. At this time it is important for practitioners to put forth the intention that all beings involved should be happy and free of suffering. After setting forth this intention, practitioners should endeavor to stay mindful and open to the possibilities which arise. One method which might help a practitioner to stay open is letting go of the need to be “right.” That is not to say that anything goes, but when a practitioner is more interested in being right than being present, then often a clear awareness of the situation is lost.

For example, when a student in my class questions me in a disagreeable manner, often my first impulse is to vindicate myself. Now, before leaping into a reactive mode, I try to relax and be fully present to my student. Just this simple act generally shifts a potential confrontation into a genuine encounter. It opens the space for a heart connection instead of an ego clash. Of course, as a beginner on the path, unfortunately, I often opt to be “right.” But then that is the beauty of compassion – practitioners are given countless opportunities to exercise this quality, and sometimes the one who needs it most is the practitioner.

To conclude, compassion is the act of opening one’s heart to suffering. The most outward aspect of compassion is compassion for sentient beings which includes the practitioner, those who are close to the practitioner, those who are neutral, and those who are perceived as enemies. Additionally, animals should be included and the ecosystem itself. A deeper aspect of compassion is being present to the way things are – the origin of suffering. Ego-clinging and afflictive emotions are the source of so much samsaric suffering. Non-referential compassion constitutes the most profound heart connection. When practitioners realize the equality of all sentient beings and the emptiness of their own selves, then their experience becomes more spacious and their ability to

benefit others more pronounced. Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche notes:

The more awake you are, the more you feel that you're finally becoming your true self. Once you hit that spot, there's no turning back. Going beyond self, you discover the overwhelming power of selfless love and compassion. Beauty is everywhere because mind is beautiful. That's what we call the awakened heart.

Liberation from a Buddhist Feminist Perspective

Bhikkhuni Dhammananda (Su co Nguyen Huong)

This paper considers the meaning of liberation or freedom. During the last two centuries, this term has generally referred either to national liberation or, as in Marxist ideology, the struggle for freedom from class-based oppression. It may also denote liberation or freedom from oppression based on the color of one's skin and to social justice. In this century, a discussion of the term has often focused on liberation or freedom from gender-based discrimination. Thus, the term liberation has many usages, including the social, personal, political, religious, and economic, both collective and individual. At different periods in human history, the ideal and reality of liberation bear a distinct relationship to the values and movements of that particular time. In this current consumerist age, the freedom to pursue our desires is promoted, not the freedom from desires. However, in earlier days, liberation meant being freed from attachment to oneself and to the world.

In this paper, I will explore the concept of liberation from a Buddhist feminist perspective, based on passages from the *Therigatha*, the verses of enlightenment of ancient Buddhist nuns. In contrast to the present widespread belief that a woman has to transform herself into a man in order to gain final liberation, in the *Therigatha* and the *Bhikkhuni Vagga* of the *Samyutta Nikaya*, we find many accounts of nuns who freed themselves from the cycle of birth and death (*samsara*) in one lifetime. The ancient stories are very revealing. Some of the *bhikkhunis*, after listening to the sublime Dhamma, freed themselves from personal attachment, such as pride and vanity regarding beauty or status. Two of these were Bhikkhuni Khema (*Therigatha* 6:3), the former Queen Khema of the Magadha kingdom, and Bhikkhuni Abhinanda, (*Therigatha* 2:1), the former princess Abhinanda of the Sakya clan. They expressed the relief and sense of liberation they felt at having gone beyond social conventions and prejudices.

Around the same time in India, a Buddhist nun declared a similar sense of liberation as she renounced the world, saying, “Now I am freed of three crooked things: mortar, pestle, and a crooked husband!” When she had done away with all longings and psychological fetters, she proclaimed her freedom from birth and death (*Therigatha* 1:11). Yet another vivid exultation was uttered by a nun who was simply known as “the mother of Sumangala”:

So freed! So freed!
So thoroughly freed am I – from my pestle,
my shameless husband and his sun-shade making,
my moldy old pot with its water-snake smell.
Aversion and passion
I cut with a *chop*.
Having come to the foot of a tree,
I meditate, absorbed in the bliss: “What bliss!”¹

From a survey of Buddhist literature, we can see that, in Buddhism, the search for liberation is personal and seen through a cultural lens. Freedom in this context means ridding oneself of ignorance and tearing asunder the bonds of craving. The particular form of bondage is personal to the practitioner. But their heroic striving on the path of enlightenment sets an example for all of us, even at the distance of 2,500 years later. Here is another account of a nun who utterly renounced her elegant

world of comfort, after listening to the sublime Dhamma.

Born in a high-ranking family with much property,
great wealth, consummate in complexion and figure,
I was the daughter of Majjha, the treasurer.
Sons of kings sought for me,
sons of rich merchants longed for me.
One of them sent my father a messenger, saying,
“Give me Anopama.
I will give in return eight times her weight in jewels and gold.”
But I, having seen the One Self-awakened,
unsurpassed, excelling the world,
paid homage to his feet, sat down to one side.
He, Gotama, from sympathy, taught me the Dhamma.
And as I sat in that very seat, I attained the third fruit [of non-return.]
Then I cut off my hair, and went forth into homelessness.
Today is the seventh day since I made craving wither away.²

The theme of women finding freedom from desire and deliverance from afflictions (*kleśa*) occurs often in the old texts, for example:

Seeing dangers in the world, we both went forth
And are now both free of cankers, with well-tamed minds.
Cooled of passions, we have found deliverance;
Cooled of passions, we have found our freedom.³

A striking example of breaking through mental afflictions and emotional fetters is the expression of Theri Kisagotami, who blasted Mara (the tempter), saying that she no longer had a desire for sons, husband, or men.⁴ She claimed to successfully follow the deathless noble eightfold path, realized the highest goal of Buddhist practice (*nibbāna*). Having laid down the burden, she “did what was to be done” with a mind well liberated (*svimuttacittā*). A vivid illustration of liberation from gender prejudice is the expression of Theri Soma⁵ in response to Mara’s challenge about women’s wisdom:

What does womanhood matter at all
When the mind is concentrated well,
When knowledge flows on steadily
As one sees correctly into Dhamma.
One to whom it might occur,
“I’m a woman” or “I’m a man”
Or “I’m anything at all” –
Is fit for Mara to address.⁶

For millennia in India and up to the present day, women are culturally hard-wired to be mothers, preferably, the mother of sons. Since her place in the family is defined by her maternal role, the loss of a child or close relative occasions tremendous suffering, due to her traditional attachment and dependency. Only those women who have firmly grasped the concepts of impermanence and

suffering (*annatta* and *dukkha*) will be able to rise up from this mess of conditioned phenomena and ego-bound reactions, like “Why has this happened to me!”

Examples of women who achieved such liberating insight are found in many cases of enlightened nuns of ancient times. Patacara and Kisa Gotami, for example, suffered great family losses and then encountering the Dhamma taught by the Buddha himself. They recovered from their emotional distress, entered the order of nuns, and then worked hard to reach final liberation. This is Bhikkhuni Patacara’s verse of triumph after wise reflection:

Ploughing the field with plough,
sowing the ground with seed,
supporting their wives and children,
young men gather up wealth.
So why is it that I, perfect in virtue,
Following the teacher’s advices, don’t gain Unbinding?
I’m not lazy or proud.
Washing my feet, I noticed the water.
And in watching it flow from high to low,
my heart was composed like a fine thoroughbred steed.
Then taking a lamp, I entered the hut,
checked the bedding, sat down on the bed.
And taking a pin, I pulled out the wick:
Like the flame’s unbinding was the liberation of the heart.⁷

After having freed herself from ignorance and craving, Patacara became a very effective teacher who helped many people. Especially, the Dhamma she offered to grief-stricken women was the best medicine possible. We find the exclamations of many such women after hearing a discourse on the nature of ignorance and craving that holds us to this distressed world:

Today the dart (of sorrow) is pulled out from my heart,
Satisfying, finally released.
I go for refuge to the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha.⁸

In the Samyutta Nikaya, Bhikkhuni Kisa Gotami answered Mara the Tempter, saying that she’d done away with the longing for men, whether they were related to her as son or husband or father. Her life story and the circumstances that led her to the Buddha’s teaching show a very typical case of a woman’s traditional conditioning by the Indian society of her day. Having suffered many personal hardships, the final liberation she gained by realizing the Four Noble Truths is common to all enlightened beings, regardless of their gender. Her verses begin with a praise of noble friendship and evolve as she grows in wisdom, gains insight into reality, and ultimately transcends suffering.

Bhadda Kundalakesa, formerly a Jain nun, was liberated through wisdom (*paññā-vimutti*). She encountered the Buddha and became one of the few *bhikkhunis* to be ordained by a single utterance of the Buddha: “Come *bhikkhuni*!” The life circumstances that led her to be an ascetic and a renowned debater in India 2600 years ago are very dramatic. We cannot recount all the episodes of her life here, but this brief narrative reported by her in *Therīgāthā* is very distinctive:

I travelled before in a single cloth,

With shaven head, covered in dust,
 Thinking of faults in the faultless,
 While in the faulty seeing no faults.
 Having finished resting,
 I went to Mount Vulture Peak
 And saw the stainless Buddha
 By the Order of Bhikkhus revered.
 With folded hands, I approached Him,
 Humbly, I bowed down on my knees.
 “Come, Bhadda,” He said to me:
 And thus was I ordained.
 Debt-free, I travelled for fifty years
 In Anga, Magadha and Vajji,
 In Kasi and Kosala, too,
 Living on the alms of these countries.
 That lay-supporter – wise man indeed –
 Who gave a robe to Bhadda,
 May many merits accrue to him!
 For she is released of all ties.⁹

The nuns of long ago were brave and well informed indeed. Once liberated from wrong views and wrong practices, they were able to help many others break through the veil of superstition. During the Buddha’s time, there was a laywoman named Punika. Although Punika was born into a low caste and had to work as a servant, she gave wise advice to a *brahmin* of much higher caste and status than she. After he jumped into cold water as a ritual of purification, she politely asked what he was doing. When she heard him repeat the age-old, unfounded belief that bathing in the holy river wards off evil *kamma*, she refuted him as follows:

Who taught you this – the ignorant to the ignorant –
 “One, through water ablution,
 is from evil kamma set free?”
 In that case, they’d all go to heaven:
 all the frogs, turtles, serpents, crocodiles,
 and anything else that lives in the water.
 Sheep-butchers, pork-butchers,
 fishermen, trappers, thieves, executioners,
 and any other evil doers,
 would, through water ablution,
 be from evil kamma set free.
 If these rivers could carry off
 the evil kamma you’ve done in the past,
 they’d carry off your merit as well,
 and then you’d be completely left out.
 Whatever it is that you fear,
 that you’re always going down to the water, don’t do it.
 Don’t let the cold hurt your skin.

[*The Brahmin:*]

I've been following the miserable path, good lady,
and now you've brought me back to the noble.
I give you this robe for water-ablution.

[*Punnika:*]

Let the robe be yours. I don't need it.
If you're afraid of pain, if you dislike pain,
then don't do any evil kamma, in open, in secret.
But if you do or will do any evil kamma,
you'll gain no freedom from pain,
even if you fly up and hurry away.
If you're afraid of pain, if you dislike pain,
go to the Awakened One for refuge,
go to the Dhamma and Sangha.
Take on the precepts:
That will lead to your liberation.¹⁰

The renowned Bhikkhuni Gutta, whose insight was confirmed by all, once reflected on the Buddha's advice. In this verse, she admonishes herself, and transcends the cultural fetters of her day:

Gutta, devote yourself to the goal
for which you went forth,
having discarded [hope]
for a dear son of your own.
Don't fall under the sway of the mind.
Hoodwinked by mind,
beings in love with Mara's realm,
roam through the many-birth wandering-on, unknowing.
Abandoning these lower fetters, nun –
sensual desire, ill will, self-identity views,
grasping at rite and duty, and doubt as the fifth –
you won't come to this again.
Forsaking passion, conceit, ignorance, and restlessness
– cutting through [all] the fetters –
you will make an end of suffering and stress.
Discarding birth and wandering-on,
comprehending further becoming,
free from hunger in the right-here-and-now
you will go about totally calmed.¹¹

In these stories of women who surrounded the Buddha himself, we have the traditions of astonishingly brave and brilliant *bhikkunis* and laywomen to draw from.

NOTES

¹ *Therigatha* 2:3, translated from Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu [www.accesstoinsight.com]

² *Anopamatheri* (*Therigatha* 6:5, verses 151-56). Translation by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Ibid.

³ Bhadda Kapilani (*Therigatha* 4.1, verse 66). Adapted translation of Hellmuth Hecker and Sister Khema.

⁴ *Bhikkhuni*, SN 5:3.

⁵ *Bhikkhuni* SN 5:2.

⁶ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Gradual Saying* (Wisdom Publication 2000), pp. 222-23.

⁷ *Therigatha* 4.10, verses 112-16. Adapted from the translation of Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*, August 8, 2010.

⁸ *Therigatha*, v. 132.

⁹ *Therigatha* 5-9, verses 107-11. Adapted translation of Hellmuth Hecker and Sister Khema.

¹⁰ *Therigatha* 12.1, verses 236-51. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*, August 8, 2010,

¹¹ *Therigatha* 6.7, verses 163-68. Adapted translation of Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*, August 8, 2010.

Illusion, Brokenness and Addiction: Where Buddhism and Mental Health Converge and Diverge

Roseanne Freese

Under the *Adhikarana-Samatha* of the Buddhist monastic code, a monk may be considered responsible for an infraction or not, depending on whether he was considered sane or insane.¹ As used here, the term insanity is very general. We know something is broken, but what? Brokenness on the physical level is easily recognized and no one would question taking a child to see the doctor and have a broken bone repaired. But what do we mean when we say that the mind is broken? Can we as Buddhists accept that there is a role for psychotherapy, just as there is a role for medicine that treats the bones, flesh, and organs?

Cultural expectations can be very different,² so let me first clarify what I mean by the self. The term “self” is very tricky to understand, be it from the perspective of Buddhist logic or Western psychology. With the term “self,” I shall mean the “ordinary self” or the self that perceives that we are sitting in this room on this warm day and are glad to be here.³ This self is the place where both thoughts and feelings reside.⁴ This ordinary self is not “ego” or the covering that the self puts on in order to not feel naked, vulnerable, or unrecognized. We use our “ego” to create identity, avoid rejection, provide safety, and establish a connection to a larger community. The ego uses symbols to create order out of chaos by literally and figuratively donning attire that shows that we are neither an enemy nor a weakling. From this place, we establish connection and, preferably, constructive relationships. For example, by wearing a *mala*, I show the world that I am a Buddhist and hopefully you will all include me as your friend. The ego cares about how I am seen. The self, however, is the part that perceives and feels these choices and their consequences.

Broadly speaking, Buddhism is the practice of seeking liberation and attaining *nirvana*, while Western psychotherapy is the treatment of the broken self. Psychotherapy is not just about “afflictive emotions,”⁵ but all emotions. Buddhist texts frequently refer to six emotions: ignorance, attachment, anger, pride, deluded thoughts, and distorted views.⁶ By contrast, Western psychotherapy considers affect, anxiety, aphasia, apprehension, arousal, control, curiosity, denial, disassociation, disengagement, focus, fugue, hallucination, impulse, numbness, obsession, panic, phobia, rationalization, splitting, suspicion, transference, wonder, and many, many more. These terms describe, not the content of the feeling, not whether it is pleasurable or not, but the quality of the feeling. This includes the degree of intensity and the appropriateness of its presence or absence. We need arousal when we see a child hit by a car; this helps us summon the strength to lift up the car.⁷

From my experience and reading, brokenness can exist on five levels. The first is that the self itself is broken. The person literally cannot distinguish between I and not I. This person does not even know if s/he is dead, alive, or someone else. Second, the person cannot engage her senses to acquire or process information. This could be due to an injury to the brain or to short-term memory problems, which are common in the elderly. On a third level, the person cannot accept, manage, or otherwise utilize her feelings. S/he may have the addict’s issues of excessive craving for a particular substance.⁸ Or, it may be a crime or abuse victim’s overwhelming fear of loneliness, anger, or numbness that arrests her ability to interact with others. Lacking “affect” or the capacity to feel sadness or joy, s/he may disassociate, have no feeling, or misuse feelings, such as laughing at a tragedy. Fourth, s/he cannot engage in relationships. S/he can evaluate feelings, but s/he is pummeled by intrusive thoughts or painful memories and eventually chooses to act out violently or internally or commit suicide. The fifth

area of brokenness is when the person fails to recognize problems in any of the prior four areas. There is a disorder of the personality, where grandiosity, narcissism, paranoia, or intense insecurity plunges the person into a “me” against “the world” split, disconnected from themselves, their surroundings, from others, and from their past and future.

This failure to integrate is where Buddhist teachings on ignorance and Western psychotherapy most clearly converge. If the person is ignorant, there is no opportunity for a cure or for realization. Buddhism, however, is not about mental health. As the psychotherapist, linguist, and Buddhist teacher, Harvey B. Aronson observes in his stimulating work, *Buddhist Practice on Western Ground*, “Buddhist meditation was not devised to deal explicitly with pervasive interpersonal and emotional issues related to attachment difficulties.”⁹ He adds, “The skills related to one’s capacity to sustain a relationship differ significantly from the capacity to concentrate on the breath or understand the subtle nature of reality.”¹⁰ The noted Tibetan teacher Lama Yeshe observes, “There is no way you can understand your own mental problems without becoming your own psychologist.”¹¹ In short, we must become aware of suffering in order to wake up.¹²

Describing these areas of brokenness is not the same as defining their cause or treatment, however. While the human brain is made up of several regions, the ones of immediate interest are the brain stem, the amygdala, and the anterior frontal lobe. All three regulate our subconscious and conscious. The brain stem is responsible for our breathing, blood pressure, and our fight-or-flight reflex. It is the oldest part of our brain. The anterior frontal lobe, the most advanced portion of our brain, is responsible for planning, logic, organization, or filling out our tax forms. It can also map out where we are, where we are going, and how to get there. The amygdala, which is in the center of the brain, is responsible for feeling and the memory of feelings. The amygdala interprets the input from the five senses as well as our sixth sense, including our perceptions and feelings that constitute our consciousness. The amygdala is also responsible for memory, including lessons drawn from life experiences. This could be as simple as, “This soup smells like old cat food, so I had better not eat it.” It is this part of the brain that organizes memories into categories: good, pleasant, or helpful to life and bad, painful, or threatening to life.

In his work, *Deep Survival*, Laurence Gonzales reveals how the human brain functions at the analytical, emotional, and visceral levels. When these levels over function, under function, or fail to talk to one another, danger can turn into disaster. For Gonzales, there are two sets of dynamics. First, how are we defining reality? Fighter pilots become successful by using the frontal lobe to carry out discrete instructions, even when the visceral brain stem is telling them not to take off. Once a successful flying experience has occurred, the amygdala connects the analytical and visceral experiences and concludes, “This sequence of activities leads to happy results.” However, if the flying scenario unexpectedly changes, the brain may not be able to block out the fear and the pilot may crash the plane. The second dynamic Gonzales explores is: Can we change with changing realities? He tells of survivors who realize right from the start that they are in serious trouble and then use that realization to seek out new clues for survival; they are no longer trying to fit their reality into a preconceived map.

This complex brain also oversees and interacts with the neurochemical system. Every second, it subconsciously sends hormones, or chemical messengers, to and from our glands to our organs and limbs. This system is so powerful that just one extra microgram of a hormone can speed up the heart rate, slow respiration, alter the body’s temperature, or tell it when to prepare for food, sex, or sleep. This system continues to work even when the conscious mind is feeling suicidal, the body is in a coma, or in shock from multiple injuries. The human brain is engineered to keep us alive even when our consciousness shuts down or declares we don’t want to live. Interestingly, schizophrenic patients, those who are the most confused about their reality, are often known to say, “I had to die to keep from

dying.”¹³

Western psychology aims to treat what is broken in the self, be it at the physical, conceptual, perceptual, emotional, or some combination of these issues. As the Buddhist psychiatrist Mark Epstein describes it, “Many of us come to psychotherapy or meditation...because our lives are restricted by our own unacknowledged feelings. We carry with us a sense of falseness...”¹⁴ Indeed, like a good guru, a psychotherapist can help us navigate our inner shoals of “mind weeds”¹⁵ and separate out what is a challenge in the present, a wound from the past, or a brokenness that has gone unidentified and unaddressed. Let us use the Five Aggregates to explore what can be broken.

The first aggregate is the body or form. When we suffer from an impairment of one of our five sense organs – aphasia (damage to the sensory processing areas of the brain) or from a severed spinal cord, we literally cannot “see” what is around us or get to where we want to go. We walk into walls, we don’t hear a baby crying, we cannot smell the dangerous gas or the beautiful roses. We can compensate by using other senses or communications technology, but not all blind people can become talented musicians. Sometimes the senses are intact, but there is a different kind of organic damage. Aphasia affects the inability of the brain to make appropriate connections and can also distort memory and time. Is this person my best friend or a stranger? Is this 1943 or 2011? These disconnects will be so obvious that even a child could recognize them. Unfortunately, not all mental disturbances are so easy to recognize.

The next aggregate is feeling. When there is some impairment on this level, a person can perceive contact, but cannot properly discriminate whether it is good or bad. S/he lacks the ability to be use the emotion appropriate to the occasion. This could also include a lack of appropriate affect or an appropriate emotion for the situation. S/he may witness a small child putting its hand into a flame without responding, but may panic if a pet cat goes outside. The person may also be unable to summon any emotion at all and consider killing to be no different from reading a book.

Next is the aggregate of recognition. This aggregate functions to classify experience: whether something is safe or unsafe, pleasant or unpleasant, familiar or unfamiliar. Brokenness here could be mistaking a cat for a dog or a subtler problem. For example, a survivor of child abuse, neglect, or chaotic circumstances may seek out a “familiar” role or relationship, because it is predictable and therefore less threatening. This is largely because the injured mind cannot bear dealing with an unknown that could be even more unpredictable than the evil already experienced. Or, the frontal cortex may not be able to reason. An example would be a soldier who feels guilty that he could not save the lives of his three comrades. He is demobilized and goes home to rest, but dwells in a permanent state of arousal. He believes and feels every unexpected movement can be a new threat. Not only are his rage and terror blocked, but everyday feelings, such as the attraction to friends, music, and good food, are also blocked. His capacity to reason, “I am at home and I am safe” is short-circuited.

The fourth aggregate is karmic disposition. Each one of us is born into a particular family, whether we are the eldest or youngest, felt nurtured or didn’t, are good at languages or athletic, enjoy social networks or introspection. Brokenness here would be the inability to see our gifts and bring them forward. It may be an inability to see that our failings, such as debts, obsessions, or insecurities, are hurting others in a significant way. In other cases, with the inner and outer worlds significantly disconnected or an overwhelming sense of lack, we may have little capacity to regulate impulses and turn to addictions. For the unaware addictive personality, there is never “enough.”

The fifth aggregate is the stream-of-consciousness. A person who is suffering from brokenness at this level may be totally healthy with respect to form, feeling, perception, and karmic disposition, but get caught up in reliving intense experiences. This can be the trauma of surviving a rape, a tsunami, an earthquake, or, a crime. If adverse conditions last long enough, s/he may respond with extreme behavior

to cope. For example, although the genocide of native Americans technically ended before World War II, the rates of mental illness, unemployment, poor health, suicide, and addiction are the highest amongst ethnic groups. Sadly, this feeling of “being unfit” is one of the main attributes to gang membership, cults, crime, and prostitution. This brokenness may also devolve into a polarization between the “good self” and the “evil world.” If the polarization becomes grandiose, narcissistic, or manipulative, it may adversely affect one’s relationships.

While Buddhism sees the Five Aggregates as constituents of our personal reality, Western psychoanalysis would investigate where the brokenness occurred. Sadly, many recent Buddhist works introduce meditation as a method for being well and happy. While that may be true, any Buddhist work that denies the truth of suffering or the presence of internal and external negative energies should be regarded with great skepticism.

Buddhism and psychotherapy can mutually reinforce and complement one another. Just as physical therapy can restore flexibility and strength to an injured knee, Western psychotherapy can heal the broken self. As we wake up and begin to recognize *samsara* – the human capacity for genocide, addiction, trafficking, and abandonment that affect many generations of women – we also become aware of how the Buddhist community can provide healing. Just as we provide medicine for broken bones, we need to give medicine for broken hearts. We need to make a safe space for those whose ordinary minds are fragmented, absent, abused, or on fire even when there is no fuel. I would like to conclude by offering practical readings and resources for mental health issues and close with a dedication, sending *metta* to all those who suffer, know someone suffering, and bring healing to those who suffer.

May I be happy.
May I be free from suffering.
May I be free from all abuse, internal and external.
May I be free from all neglect, internal and external.
May all living beings,
all mothers and all fathers,
all sisters and all brothers,
all daughters and all sons,
all friends, all strangers, and all enemies,
May we all find peace and happiness.

NOTES

¹ Thanissaro Bhikku, *Buddhist Monastic Code I*, Chapter 11, Adhikara-samatha 3: “A verdict of past insanity may be given. This is another verdict of innocence given in an accusation, based on the fact that the accused was out of his mind when he committed the offense in question and so is absolved of any responsibility for it. “This verdict is valid only if given to a bhikkhu who: (1) does not remember what he did while insane; (2) remembers, but only as if in a dream; or (3) is still insane enough to believe that his behavior is proper. (“I act that way and so do you. It’s allowable for me and allowable for you!”) (Cv.IV.6.2).”

[<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/bmc1/bmc1.ch11.html>] Accessed December 26, 2010.

² Kim Insoo Berg, a Korean family therapist, noted that, while Americans punish their children by keeping them home and away from their friends and networks, Koreans punish by keeping them out of the house and away from the closeness of the extended family. See Harvey B. Aronson, *Buddhist Practice on Western Ground: Reconciling East Ideals with Western Psychology* (Shambhala, Boston and London, 2004), p. 19.

³ For an outstanding discussion of what is meant by self, ego, and other similar terms, please see Harvey B. Aronson's chapter "Ego, Ego on the Wall: What Is Ego After All?," in his *Buddhist Practice on Western Ground: Reconciling Eastern Ideals and Western Psychology* (Boston: Shambhala, 2004), pp. 64-90. Aronson is a psychotherapist, student of many teachers of the Theravada and Tibetan Traditions, and a teacher of the Dawn Mountain Tibetan Temple of Houston, Texas. Of the rapidly expanding number of excellent works on Buddhist and Western approaches to mental illness, his work shows the most profound and subtle understanding of the underlying terminologies and cultural contexts. He also includes many illuminating anecdotes of his 30 years of cultivation in Asian and Western Buddhist communities.

⁴ Many Westerners may be unaware that in Buddhism, the term "mind" also includes the "heart." When one meditates, one observes thoughts and feelings; it is not about cerebral analysis or suppression of the emotions. Similarly, the term *bodhicitta*, which is routinely translated as "enlightened mind," may also be just as accurately rendered as "enlightened heart."

⁵ Lama Yeshe, *Becoming Your Own Therapist* (Boston: Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, 1998), p. 6.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁷ Interestingly, emotions are universal and transcend culture. Experts have identified 66 gestures that receive the same interpretation regardless of the culture of the person viewing them. This is the work of Desmond Morris, *Body Talk*, cited in Gavin de Becker, *The Gift of Fear and Other Survival Signals that Protect Us from Violence* (New York: Dell, 1997), p. 108.

⁸ Perhaps the best definition of addiction that I have seen anywhere is that addiction is not an act but a reaction to the arising of negative feelings. Chonyi Taylor, in her work, *Enough! A Buddhist Approach to Finding Release from Addictive Patterns* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2010, pp. 6-7), describes it as, "Phobias are habits that have taken over...If I have a fear of spiders, then that fear is triggered whenever I see a spider, or even when I think I see a spider. The habit has become so strong that I am caught up in the reaction even before I know for certain whether the shape I can see is really a spider or just a clump of black thread. A strong addiction is like a phobia. When such things as fear or stress or anger demand to be relieved by the addictive substance or behavior, this demand is so strong that we can find we are caught in our addictive behavior before we are even aware of the severe discomfort that triggered it."

⁹ Aronson, *Buddhist Practice on Western Ground*, p. 193.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

¹¹ Lama Yeshe, *Becoming Your Own Therapist*, p. 83.

¹² It is interesting to note that the great psychologist Freud eventually came to the position that repression does not lead to anxiety but it is anxiety that leads to repression. See David Loy, *Lack and Transcendence: The Problem of Death and Life in Psychotherapy, Existentialism, and Buddhism* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1996), p. 3.

¹³ Ibid., p. xx.

¹⁴ Mark Epstein, *Going to Pieces Without Falling Apart – A Buddhist Perspective on Wholeness, Lessons from Meditation and Psychotherapy* (New York: Broadway Books, p. 103).

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 110.

Factors Contributing to Buddhist Nuns' Leadership in Taiwan

Guo Hsiang Shih

In societies where Buddhism has flourished, including China, Tibet, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Burma, the nuns of Taiwan stand out. Nuns in Taiwan have contributed considerably to cultural development, education, charitable work, social development, the spread of Buddhadharma, and the transmission of the Sangha. Much interest has been generated in determining the reasons for this phenomenon. Clearly, we cannot simply say that Taiwan has an unusually large number of innately smarter nuns when compared with other countries. Whether the phenomenon is due to a conducive social situation in Taiwan or just a favorable environment within Buddhist circles is a topic that is worthy of further discussion.

Equal Access to Liberation

In Taiwan, men and women enjoy equal access to education, which has liberated women from being confined to the roles of only managing household chores. Equal access to education has laid a good foundation for Taiwanese women to live independently and pursue their life goals based on their personal interests. This certainly has helped to boost women's stature in Taiwan across the board. However, what contributes most to the development of leadership and prestige of Buddhist nuns in Taiwan is the nourishing environment within Buddhist circles in Taiwan.

First of all, in Taiwan the most popular *sutras* are the *Mahayana Sutra*, the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, and the *Lotus Sutra*, all of which put a strong emphasis on equality between men and women. Another popular *sutra* in Taiwan is the *Sitigaba Sutra*, which promotes virtues in women. A touching story in this *sutra* writes that Sitigaba Bodhisattva was once a *brahmin* woman. Her mother was sent to hell after she died. She prayed to the Buddha to save her mother and made a vow to put in endless effort to deliver all sentient beings in order to gain her mother's utmost happiness. In addition to stories in the *Sitigaba Sutra*, the most compassionate and miraculous *bodhisattva* in the history of Chinese Buddhism, Avalokitesvara, has mainly manifested in the form of a woman. All these facts have created a favorable impact on Chinese Buddhists' mindset toward women.

Another important factor for nurturing the leadership of Buddhist nuns in Taiwan is that there is a lineage of *bhiksuni* precepts. Once a person is ordained as a *bhiksuni*, she receives a seal of approval regarding her status. She thus has more self-confidence for personal practice and teaching, which helps her to develop her role either as a leader or an initiator of any task.

Last but not least, the support of eminent Buddhist monks has had a favorable impact on leadership development among nuns in Taiwan. In spite of all the favorable elements mentioned earlier, it would still be fairly difficult for Buddhist nuns to gain popularity in Taiwanese society without the support of eminent Buddhist monks in the region. Fortunately, the most influential monks in Taiwan are extremely broad-minded. They strongly promote the idea of gender equality, which has played a vital role in developing the leadership qualities of nuns in Taiwan.

Misappropriating the Four Reasonable Respectful Rules

Among them, Master Yin-shun, one of the most outstanding scholars and masters in the history of Chinese Buddhism, was extremely supportive of nuns.¹ After thorough research on the

Eight Weighty Rules for nuns, Master Yin-shun concluded that these rules actually developed from the Four Reasonable Respectful Rules created by the Buddha's monk disciples soon after the Buddha entered into *parinirvana*.² These rules are:

1. Nuns must receive ordination in both the Bhiksu and Bhiksuni Sanghas.
2. Nuns should receive instructions and exhortation from monks every half a month.
3. Nuns should not hold summer retreats far from the monks,
4. Nuns should reveal their faults before both Bhiksu and *bhiksuni* orders after the summer retreat.

The reason that the Buddha implemented these four rules was due to the extremely severe gender discrimination against women in the social structures of ancient India. Women had very low social status and were not allowed access to education. Under the circumstances, women were generally illiterate, lacked knowledge and organizational skills, and naturally tended to be rather emotional. Without the help of the monks, it might have been difficult for them to form a pure and Dharma-oriented monastic order. No wonder the Buddha decided to resort to his monk disciples to help the nuns; in return, since the nuns were receiving help from the monks' order, the nuns were required to show proper respect to them.

At that time, it was common for the monks to instruct nuns to maintain peace and harmony in the nun's order. However, this does not necessarily mean that nuns are intrinsically inferior to monks. During the Buddha's time, many outstanding nuns' achievements were recorded in various *sutras*. It is fair to say that all these accomplishments had the support and encouragement of the Buddha and the Bhikkhu Sangha. Notwithstanding all these accomplishments and the Buddha's endorsement, during the first summer after the Buddha entered *paranirvana*, at the first assembly, Mahakashyapa forced Ananda to admit his guilt for asking the Buddha, in front of 500 monks, to accept his aunt Mahaprajapati and several other women to be the Buddha's nun disciples. Thus, it would appear that as soon as the Buddha passed away, the monks started taking action to reverse the progress for women that had been made under the Buddha's leadership by making it seem that Ananda had been the main proponent of nuns' inclusion in the Buddhist Sangha.

According to Master Yin-shun, the Buddha's hesitation to accept Mahaprajapati's request immediately was because an issue of such magnitude called for further consideration in his own mind.³ Master Yin-shun further noted that, even though Ananda helped Mahaprajapati to plead with the Buddha, it was the Buddha, the wisest person to live in this world, who made the decision to bring women into his Sangha. He did so because he was clearly aware that women have equal potential to reach the highest goal of Buddhist practice; thus, they are as qualified as men to become members of the Buddhist Sangha.

When the Buddha was no longer there to support the nuns, the more conservative monks quickly exerted power to make Ananda the scapegoat and move against the inclusion of nuns into the Sangha. This was a strong indication of the ongoing objections to women's inclusion that hovered around the core of the conservative monks at the time who did not want to change the stereotypical mindset generated by extremely strong gender bias in the minds of ordinary people at that time in Indian society. Forcing Ananda to plead guilty for helping Mahaprajapati was only the first step. The second step the conservative monks took was to change the four Reasonable Respectful Rules into the strict Eight Weighty Rules that authorized the monks to assume absolute authority over the nuns. The nuns were badly discriminated against and their voices were suppressed. Without nurturing, outstanding nuns were hard to come by, let alone nuns who were

able to take important roles in the Sangha. This was apparently exactly what the conservative monks wanted. Mahayana traditions such as the Mahasanghika and Sammitiya schools did not adopt the Eight Weighty Rules; instead, they preserved the Four Reasonable Respectful Rules, and the *sutras* that mentioned women's qualities gained popularity and wide acceptance. Among these traditions, people subscribed to a more liberal mindset toward gender equality and the monks showed more respect toward nuns.

The four newly added rules that can only be found in the most conservative orders of the Theravada traditions. They are:

1. A *bhiksuni* who has been ordained even for a hundred years must greet and pay respect to a *bhiksu* who has just been ordained.
2. A *bhiksuni* must not slander a *bhiksu*.
3. A *bhiksuni* must not revile in any way the faults of a *bhiksu*.
4. Penalties for the violation of the above rules must be imposed by both the *bhiksuni* and *bhiksuni* orders for half a month each.

Equal Opportunity at Dharma Drum

In the year 2000, a World Peace Summit was held in the Assembly Hall of the United Nations that was attended by spiritual and religious leaders from around the world. Bhiksu Sheng-yen, the founder of Dharma Drum Mountain, in his address to the religious leaders, stated that, if there are certain doctrines that run counter to peace and harmony among people, we should try to review and investigate these doctrines and agree on a reasonable approach or explanation to ensure world peace and harmony.

Being the first generation nun disciples of Bhiksu Sheng-yen, I have greatly benefited from his broadminded, equalitarian views toward his male and female disciples. I also have witnessed how Bhiksu Sheng-yen incorporated gender equality in training his disciples. Starting from the beginning stages of forming a Sangha at Dharma Drum, all the chores of daily life were taken up, by turn, by all his disciples, without distinctions as to gender. In addition to work responsibilities, all his nun and monk disciples had equal opportunities to receive monastic education and meditation training. They also shared equally the administrative tasks at the monastery.

Bhiksu Sheng-yen's will echoed his belief in gender equality in its provisions regarding the election of the future abbot president of Dharma Drum Mountain. Specifically, the president should be decided through an elective process conducted among qualified monks and nuns from either within or outside the DDM Sangha. He did not say that the future abbot president of DDM should be elected exclusively from among the monks or male disciples.

Another influential Buddhist organization in Taiwan is Buddha's Light Mountain (Foguangshan) that has nurtured numerous outstanding nuns who teach, work, and serve in different fields and geographical areas. Bhiksu Shing-yun, the founder, also promotes gender equality among his monk and nun disciples, which has contributed to the large number of outstanding *bhiksunis* in this organization. There are also several other *bhiksus* who are very supportive of nuns in Taiwan. Their support and guidance greatly contribute to nurturing the development of leadership among Buddhist nuns in Taiwan.

Correcting Illusions, Clearing Away Obstacles

As the world has become increasingly globalized, there has been an unprecedented, far-reaching spread of the Buddhist teachings. In the highly developed western countries that play a central role in the spread of Dharma in modern time, Buddhism has been distortedly labeled as backward with respect to gender equality. We who are disciples of the Buddha should strive to shoulder the responsibilities of correcting this illusion and clearing away such obstacles to the spread of Buddhadharma throughout the world.

May all the schools of Buddhism restore the lineage of *bhiksuni* precepts.

May all the *bhiksus* and *bhiksunis* be blessed to take up the Buddhadharma in a mutually respectful, cooperative, beneficial environment.

May all the *bhiksus* and *bhiksunis* endeavor to spread the authentic Buddhadharrma to every corner of the world.

NOTES

1. Bhiksu Yin-shun's argument on gender equality can be found mainly in his book entitled *The Origin and Development of Early Mahayana Buddhism* (in Chinese) (Taipei: The Right Hearing Publishing Co., 1992), pp. 190-96.
2. See *General Introduction to Buddhism* (in Chinese) (Taipei: The Right Hearing Publishing Co., 1998), pp. 171-72.
3. Bhiksu Yin-syun wrote that, for two thousand years, Buddhism has been in the hand of males and they have not tried to uplift or support females. On the contrary, they have tended to suppress and dislike women, as if women cannot be taught Buddhism, which indicates that they have actually misunderstood the Buddhadharma. "General Introduction to Buddhism," *Ibid.*, p. 172.

CONTRIBUTORS

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