



Sakyadhita

*INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF BUDDHIST WOMEN*

SUMMER 2000

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RESOLUTION

We, the participants of the 6th Sakyadhita International Conference held in Lumbini, Nepal, hereby resolve:

- 1. To strengthen the Sakyadhita alliance of Buddhist women and to help unite Buddhist women around the World to work for peace, harmony, and social justice;*
- 2. To promote education, both religious and secular, among Buddhist Women;*
- 3. To work for legal recognition of the Bhikshuni Sangha in Nepal, Sri Lanka, and throughout the world;*
- 4. To work for the abolition in trafficking of girls and women in Nepal and throughout the world;*
- 5. To promote gender equality within Buddhism.*

February 7, 2000

THE SIXTH SAKYADHITA CONFERENCE

by Ellie Waters

In the birthplace of the Buddha, Lumbini, the 6th Sakyadhita International Conference was held this past February the 6th. The conference provided the opportunity for Buddhist women from throughout the world to meet one another and to exchange experiences in an open and varied format.

The Conference, titled "Women as Peacemakers: Self, Family, Community and World" consisted of interactive presentations, lectures, small group exchanges,

and opportunities to visit Buddhist sacred sites in the Lumbini area as well as in the Kathmandu valley.

Attended by over 300 women from throughout the world, the conference attracted Buddhist nuns, academics, professionals and interested lay people from all walks of life. Lectures included such diverse topics as "Life in Dependence on Women and Water," "Dealing with Loneliness: Buddhist and Psychotherapeutic Approaches," "Japanese Buddhist Women's Healing Rituals," and "Loving Kindness: A Path to Peace."

Workshops included "Empowerment through Movement," "Dialogue, Conflict Transformation and Reconciliation," and "Transforming Concepts of Gender." These diverse topics and interactions among the participants allowed all to get to know one another in a format other than just through the listening process.

Even the simple act of sharing a meal and a smile opened all to the experience of being Buddhist women together solely for the purpose of helping one another in our respective efforts.

One of the highlights of the Conference was the exposure to different cultural practices. These included a daily meditation, led each day by a representative from a different cultural group in the style of her own

country--Tibetan, Sri Lankan, Vietnamese, Burmese, and many others. Chanting from the different countries and practices, although differing in tone and texture, nevertheless, reminded all that, although the form might be different, the spirit of Buddhism remains a rich and diverse manifestation throughout the world.

Monastics from these cultures came in their representative robes presenting a beautiful reminder of this same diversity with a unified purpose.



The importance of supporting the nuns came through indirectly throughout the Conference. As we all got to know one another, the dedication, wisdom, and perseverance of the nuns, even in the face of huge obstacles gave rise to sincere admiration and appreciation to all participants. Their commitment to the Buddha's path served as an inspiration to other nuns and lay participants as well.

May all beings be happy!



"Wonderful Lotus"

LIGHTS UP THE WORLD



Ven. Thich Thuan Dinh, ne Dieu Sen ("Wonderful Lotus") Nguyen, was born in 1941 into an aristocratic family in Hue, Vietnam. Her great-grandfather was an influential minister of the Vietnamese king, Duy Tan. Even as a young child, Ven. Thuan Dinh was known for her keen intelligence and her kind and loving disposition.

Because of the war in Vietnam, her family was forced to move from place to place many times. Despite many hardships, Ven. Thuan Dinh studied hard and graduated from the University of Can Tho with a major in French. After graduation she taught French at the prestigious Trung Vuong High School in Saigon and also volunteered as a teacher at a temple school.

Due to the fact of her sister's husband having worked at the American Embassy in 1975, she was able to leave

Vietnam for the United States with her family. She attended college in Los Angeles, California, and worked as a financial counselor at Gems Institute, a well-known jewelry design school. During this time, she became a vegetarian and started practicing Buddhist meditation.

After practicing Buddhism for many years, Ven. Thuan Dinh decided to become a nun. She studied under the famous Vietnamese meditation master Ven. Thich Thanh Tu, who tested her determination seriously before agreeing to confer the precepts. Always an independent spirit, she quietly received ordination without informing her family, fearing they would try to prevent her from entering monastic life.

Using her own resources, Ven. Thuan Dinh ("Proficient in Meditation") then founded a meditation center, Tue Thong Temple, in California. Very talented in sewing, music, and art, she was always called upon to do drawings of the Buddha for special celebrations at the temple.

In 1995, after years of teaching at the temple and intensive meditation practice in Vietnam, Ven. Thuan Dinh went to India to study at the renowned Varanasi Sanskrit University. After earning an M.A. in Pali with top marks, she began a doctoral program in Pali at the same university.

Ven. Thuan Dinh traveled to

February 28, 2000

Lumbini, Nepal, to attend the 6th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women. Loved and respected by all who met her, she spoke on "Understanding Vietnamese Buddhist Women," led meditation and chanting, and was a lively participant of group discussions at the conference. Tragically, on February 14, she was killed in a road accident while returning to Varanasi.

Ven. Thuan Dinh was an exemplary Buddhist practitioner and a light to the world. She will always be remembered for her warm heart and loving smile. She is survived by her sister in Florida, her brother in Vietnam, nieces, nephews, and a large community of Dharma friends around the world.

**May she quickly
achieve nirvana!**



Bhava-chakra, the Wheel of Life



Thien Vien Truc-Lam

*Hồ Tuyền Lam, Tỉnh Lâm Đồng
South Vietnam*

Dear Dharma Friends,

On behalf of Sakyadhita's members, I would like to express our great sorrow at the tragic passing of Venerable Thich Nu Thuan Dinh. Her passing is not only a great loss for the Buddhist community in Vietnam, but also for Buddhists in the international community. Although the Buddha taught that death is inevitable for all living beings, we are deeply saddened by this sudden loss.

Venerable Thuan Dinh will be warmly remembered for her compassion, friendliness, and wisdom, as well as her valuable Buddhist scholarship. It was a great honor for us all to have known such an outstanding Dharma practitioner. We greatly appreciate her efforts to create greater understanding of Vietnamese Buddhism and Vietnamese nuns. Not only was she a respected leader among Buddhist nuns in Vietnam, she was also a shining light and role model for Buddhist women around the world.

We join you in dedicating the merit of our virtuous actions for her higher rebirth and swift enlightenment.

*With deep respect,
Bhikkuni Karma Lekshe Tsomo
Secretary*

DEATH: A GIFT, A TEACHER...

by Karma Lekshe Tsomo

Death is certain for all living beings, yet it always somehow comes as a shock. Although death brings great sadness, it is also a blessing because it reminds us that human life is short, unpredictable, and fragile. The recognition that all living beings without exception will die one day engenders a strong wish to benefit others and create peace in the world.

Death is our common fate, our common denominator, and our wake-up call. It reminds us of the fleeting nature of this brief lifetime, and forces us to reflect on our lives. Death reminds to live a more meaningful life, one that is not frittered away in petty pursuits. Without this reminder, it is all too easy to waste our lives in frivolous activities, empty words, silly attachments, and material possessions that will only cause us grief in the end.

For the bereaved, the loss of a loved one is a tragedy. Yet such a loss can also be seen as a teaching, reminding us to love each other more warmly, more wholeheartedly, and without expectations. The loss of a loved one reminds us to be generous and kind, compassionate and loving, not only toward those who are lovable--that's easy--but also toward those who are miserable, neglected, irritating, or

mean, for they are the ones most in need of affection.

The loss of a great Dharma practitioner is heartbreaking, especially when it comes suddenly and tragically, but such a death is also a great teaching. It reveals to us that when we pass from this life, our possessions, accomplishments, fame and reputation are useless. It is the human qualities we have developed that are valuable--our ethical integrity, kindheartedness, patience, wisdom, and service to others. Having cultivated these excellent qualities of the heart, death need not be a devastating experience, but can be a gentle passing--indeed, a great accomplishment.

In Tibet, where temperatures dip far below freezing and nature's fury is a constant threat, people understand the fragility of life. For centuries, they have emphasized the value of meditating on death. The inevitability of death is a central theme--a regular part of morning and evening meditations. There is a Tibetan saying, "If you don't meditate on death in the morning, you will waste the day. If you don't meditate on death in the evening, you will waste the night."

Ordinarily in Western culture, people are somewhat removed from the reality of death. When animals get old, people do not kill them, they "put them to sleep." When I worked at Kuakini

Old Folks' Home, residents did not die, they "expired," like an old driver's license. When they "expired," we had no time to say goodbye. They were immediately taken to the morgue, removed from sight, sequestered from further contact.

In this way, many of us have been protected from close encounters with death. Our attitude becomes one of fear and denial: "Who me? There's no reason for me to think about death. I still have quite a few good years left in me. Death is a morbid topic." We may see death as a threat and try to avoid it, but everyone must confront death sooner or later.

The Buddha did not try to hide the reality of death from his followers. The first of the Four Noble Truths he taught was that living beings inevitably experience four miseries: birth, sickness, old age, and death. He taught people to face these problems honestly and try to find lasting solutions. Contemplating death is not designed to depress us, but to help us remember that death is inescapable and provoke us to live our lives more meaningfully, more fully.

If we do not contemplate death and its inevitability, we run the risk of being completely unprepared when death arrives--whether the person dying is a family member, friend, or oneself. It is worthwhile to prepare psychologically for a peaceful death. If we spend our

whole life in the material rat race, there is a good chance we may die with anxiety and regrets. If we spend our life in loving kindness and service, we can die with a happy mind. In the end, whether we believe in an afterlife or not, the best preparation for death is to live a life full of love, compassion, and service to others.



LOTUS LIGHTNING:

A Glimpse at Buddhist Cosmology

by Kala Perkins

Amongst an infinite number of worlds, human minds dwell, which are sparks of complex awareness, perhaps particles reflecting the great universal field of consciousness. Buddhism speaks to us of an eternal and boundless universe, where countless worlds are incessantly arising, enduring and dissolving. New worlds are created from the remnants of the old destroyed worlds. This interdependent organism, called a cosmos, is in a continual process of change.

In the early texts of the *Abhidharma* we are first presented with the "Great Trilocosm", the thousand fold triple universe of countless worlds. In Mahayana Buddhist thought, beginning with the Perfection of Wisdom text (*Prajnaparamita Sutra*), we are progressively led into ever expanding

dimensions of the infinite numbers of worlds, realms, beings, bodhisattvas and Buddhas. Here we are told the Bodhisattva contemplates with exquisite joy and bliss the infinite Buddha realms throughout their duration, from their arising through the cycles of teaching, to Supreme Enlightenment, and final Nirvana and extinction. All the wisdom and merit attained through this process is then incessantly reapplied for the benefit of countless beings.

The *Lotus Sutra* portrays the complex interactions and inter-relationships of all these worlds and their beings. For example, in the "Introduction", countless bodhisattvas from multitudes of other worlds appear to attend the teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha in response to his radiant projection of spiritual light. This light illuminates "eighteen thousand worlds in the western direction" and as many worlds in all the other ten directions.

The *Vimalakirti Sutra*, as well, conveys the infinite expanse of worlds, realms and buddha lands, populated with world transiting bodhisattvas.

The tour de force, or sublime banquet of the Mahayana Buddhist cosmological texts is "The Flower Ornament Scripture" (*Avatamsaka Sutra*). The entire Path, as well as the buddhas, bodhisattvas and the 'Totality of Being' are pictured on profoundly interdependent, vast, cosmological

scales. Bodhisattvas described here have names such as: "Matrix of Light of Majesty of the Stars", "Unhindered Knowledge of the Treasury of the Sky" and "Solar Matrix". The Supreme Buddha, "Great Illuminator", *Vairocana* (also a name for the Sun), is portrayed as embodying in his being the countless numbers of worlds, realms and beings of the vast, infinitely tiered cosmos, within his each and every pore.

The entire universe, with all its realms and several other worlds with their various characteristics and Buddhas, is intricately described as the infinite number of lotus realms with more and more vastly encompassing lotus petal fields. Central to the core teaching here is that each atom contains the totality of being. Each is supported by and expresses the entire universe and is inseparable from it.

Throughout the Buddhist teachings we find reference to countless numbers of worlds, with more realms and beings than "grains of sand on countless Ganges River banks." In the "Diamond Sutra", Sakyamuni appears, stating that as regards these infinite worlds and realms, "...however many living beings there are in all those buddha lands, though they have manifold modes of mind, the Tathagata understands them all." (1)

A fascinating and intriguing phenomenon is that now in the 21st

Century, the universe being revealed to the inquisitive scientific astronomers and cosmologists parallels very clearly that conveyed in ancient Buddhist cosmology. We find approximately 100 billion stars in our "lotus spiral" Milky Way Galaxy and more galaxies than all the grains of sand on Earth's beaches. Worlds (stars and planets) are continually being created and destroyed. New stars, planets and beings arise out of the elements forged in the nuclear furnaces of old dying stars undergoing supernova explosions. Thus, we are literally made out of ancient exploded star particles.

Finally as regards Buddhist cosmology, it must be stated that all worlds are said to be the creations of the minds of the beings that subsequently inhabit them. As well the beings and their minds are not really what we think of as inherently existing "beings" and "minds", for these are merely words, conveniences for the conceptualizing discriminative mind. The "Diamond Sutra" tells us that there is really no such thing as a "self existent cosmos": "‘Cosmos’ is merely a figure of speech; words cannot explain the real nature of a cosmos." (2)

The Tibetan teaching of the Great Perfection (*Dzog Chen*) refers to all phenomena as the play of the clear mind, which is reflected and projected onto the fabric of the great sea of pure

space. Within this clear mind, three bodies of the Universe (*Trikaya*) are present: the "Mind Body" or *Dharmakaya*, "Sound Body", *Sambogadaya*, and "Light Body", *Nirmanakaya*.

And thus, with all the vast and exquisite cosmological displays of the infinite omni-potential existent worlds, realms and beings, Buddhism awakens us with: Thus shall yet think of all this fleeting world:

*A star at dawn, a bubble in a stream;
A flash of lightning in a summer cloud,
A flickering light, a phantom and a dream. (3)*

Footnotes:

1. The Diamond Sutra and The Sutra of Hui Neng, Translators, Price, A.F. and Mou-Lam, Wong Shambhala Publication; Boston, 1985 p. 57.
2. Ibid, p. 71.
3. Ibid, p. 74.



THE LESSON WE LEARNED

by Tenzin Dadon (left)

Women's contribution in creating a living harmony for a more peaceful future was the main theme of the conference that was held in February 2000. Both lay women and nuns from different countries and traditions that participated taught us about universal unity among



Buddhist women. Appreciating and respecting our cultural diversity could not have been achieved more deeply than at this conference.

The discovery of organizing, hosting and welcoming women from all walks of life broadened our horizons more than ever seemed imaginable. In our cloistered and often isolated existence, this conference taught us a lot about the true existence of other peoples



and cultures. Learning firsthand from their talks and participating in workshops increased our vision of the world, strengthening in us the desire of achieving a peaceful future. It also increased our self-confidence as well as our universal confidence. From these experiences, we are truly grateful.



NEW CENTER IN SRI LANKA

Sakyadhita Sri Lanka Training and Meditation Center was opened on May

26th, 2000. With its residential facilities capable of accommodating 20 trainees at one time the Center will conduct the Bhikkhuni training in health education, first aid, home nursing, nutrition, child care etc.

The nuns participating in the already completed inaugural program earlier undertook the Social Development Course conducted by the Sri Lanka Professional Social Workers Association. In addition, they were trained in Basic Skills, a course that prepared them to work in their local communities. They are now competent to serve as leaders in their villages where they are warmly accepted and wholeheartedly supported.

The three-year advanced training program for nuns specializing in social work, health and nutrition is now conducted in the newly inaugurated Center that is located in a peaceful, river-front environment, ten miles north of Colombo. Nuns and lay women are most welcome to join meditation classes and retreats conducted there.

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SISTERS IN ROBES

Sakyadhita Sri Lanka has produced a twenty-minute video documentary. The documentary, which begins with the recent history of the re-establishment of the Bhikkhuni Ordination in Sri Lanka, portrays the new roles the nuns now perform as Bhikkhunis. The documentary, scripted and narrated by Dr. Hema Goonatilake is available for US\$ 20. Contact Ranjani de Silva for further details.



SAKYADHITA PUBLICATIONS

Sakyadhita is pleased to announce two new books on Buddhist women!

Buddhist Women Across Cultures: Realizations

Based on the Sakyadhita conferences held in Colombo (Sri Lanka) and Ladakh (India). Available for \$21.95 from Snow Lion Publications, Ph: 800-950-0313

Innovative Buddhist Women: Swimming Against the Stream

Based on the Sakyadhita conferences held in Phnom Penh (Cambodia) and Claremont (California). Available from: Curzon Press, 15 The Quadrant Richmond, Surrey TW9 1BP, England, Ph: 020 8948 4660, Fax: 020 8332 6735
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NEW BOOK



Blossoms of the Dharma: Living as a Buddhist Nun Thubten Chodron (editor)

with a message by H. H. the Dalai Lama
and a foreword by Sylvia Boorstein.



A vibrant monastic tradition has existed since the time of the Buddha, over 2,500 years ago. As Buddhism is now one of the fastest growing faiths in America, people see Buddhist nuns in the grocery store, at the airport, in school, and their curiosity is piqued, "Who are these women? Why did they choose this life style? What do they do? Are they happy? What message do they have for society?" Blossoms of the Dharma: Living as a Buddhist Nun, answers these questions and more. The nuns describe their personal experience, explain the history of the nuns' order and the monastic discipline, and discuss the variety of lifestyles a nun may live. The contributors come from all the major Buddhist traditions and their essays are informative, yet personal, with the personalities and humor of the nuns shining through.

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This newsletter contains news, views, articles, transcribed talks, poems, photographs, and art items sent to the editors by people who want to elevate the status of women throughout the Buddhist Community.

Comment within is personal reflection only and does not necessarily represent the opinion of the Sanga as a whole.

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