

# *Sākyadhita*

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
OF BUDDHIST WOMEN

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**Announcing.....!**

## **The 8<sup>th</sup> Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women**

**Seoul, Korea**

**June 27 to July 4, 2004**

Sakyadhita, the International Association of Buddhist Women, is pleased to announce that the 8th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women will be held in Seoul, Korea, from June 27 to July 4, 2004. Korea is renowned for its rich Buddhist history, hundreds of exquisite monasteries, and a vibrant community of women practitioners, both lay and ordained. The Sakyadhita Conference is an opportunity to learn more about this rich Buddhist tradition.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Sakyadhita Conference will incorporate panel discussions, small group discussions, cultural performances, meditations, and chanting from different Buddhist traditions. An optional tour of Korean monasteries will follow the conference.

In response to suggestions, the 8<sup>th</sup> Sakyadhita Conference in Korea will focus on Buddhist practice. We invite your ideas for the conference theme and subtopics. If you have suggestions to contribute to the conference planning, we welcome your ideas. If you would like to serve on the conference planning committee, please let us know how you would like to help. Thank you for sharing news of this event with others!

### **Nepalese Princess Bhrikuti Devi and her Contribution to Tibet**

by Min Bahadur Shakya

The Nepalese Princess Bhrikuti Devi is recognized as a luminary figure in the cultural history of Tibet because of the role she played in introducing Buddhist art, architecture, and religious faith. Her influence in the social and cultural history of Tibet is difficult to overestimate. The Chinese princess Wengchen is also recognized for the role she played in building numerous Buddhist temples, palaces, and monuments. Many famous Buddhist monuments in Tibet, such as the Jokhang, the Potala, and other temples, were built by Princess Bhrikuti. The Ramoche temples were constructed due to the efforts of the Chinese princess. Due to their cultural contributions, according to the Mani Ka bum, the two consorts of the Tibetan king, Srong btsan sGam po, were regarded as emanations of Tara. Bhrikuti Devi was regarded as the emanation of White Tara and the Chinese princess was regarded as an emanation of Green Tara.



Although there is no indisputable evidence that Princess Bhrikuti Devi married the Tibetan King Srong btsan sGam po, numerous legends and stories suggest that this must be true. Here I discuss some of the arguments concerning Princess Bhrikuti Devi and the possibility of her marriage to the Tibetan king.<sup>1</sup>

### Srong btsan sGam po's Military Strength

Some Nepali scholars refute the possibility of Bhrikuti's marriage to King Srong btsan sGam po. First, they believe that since the Tibetan king was a leader of a foreign tribe with a different cultural background, the Nepalese Kshatriya King would not have given him his daughter in marriage. Second, it is argued that the Kshatriya kings were very caste conscious and that marriage to a foreign tribal leader would have been below their caste status. Third, the route between Nepal and Tibet was extremely dangerous, plagued by hostile robbers as well as a severe climate. These factors contribute to the idea that such a union never happened.

However, there is also evidence to support the theory of a marriage relationship between the Nepalese princess Bhrikuti Devi and the Tibetan king, Srong btsan sGam po. At this time the king was in full power and his military strength at a zenith. The *Red Annals* describe Srong btsan sGam po as having captured all of Shanshun Province. His fame as a wise and sagacious king spread, and he is credited with widely extending and consolidating Tibet's territorial boundaries. When the Tibetan king requested the Nepalese princess as his consort in 633, it was clear that Srong btsan's military strength was no match for the Nepalese king, who therefore gave his daughter in marriage to the Tibetan king for the benefit of the country.

Srong btsan sGam po also sought a marriage with Princess Wengchen Konjo, daughter of the Tang emperor Tai Song. He was not the only one to see her hand. The king of Tu Yu Hun (eastern Tartars), Tho ki ki, who had captured the tribes of Chiang, Pailan, and Tang hSiang, also requested marriage with the Chinese princess. To prevent this union, Srong btsan sGam po sent troops to fight Tu Yu Hun and defeated him. The Chinese annals mention that in 634, the Chinese emperor concluded a treaty of friendship with Srong btsan sGam po, offering many gifts and lavish presents. Following these events, the Tibetan king requested the hand of the imperial princess in marriage. When his request was refused, the Tibetan king mustered some 200,000 troops and waged war against China for nearly eight years. Finally, the Chinese emperor acquiesced to the Tibetan king's demand and Princess Konjo was sent to Tibet in 641. From these accounts, it is clear that the marriage did not come about amiably.

### Diffusion of Buddhadharma

Although it is unknown whether her father, King Amshuvarma, was a Buddhist, Princess Bhrikuti Devi is described as an emanation of Tara. A guidebook to the power places of Kathmandu written by a Newar Buddhist monk in 1774 mentions that her father, King Od zer Go Cha, was an emanation of Manjughosa and that he had met Acarya Santikara, an emanation of Vajrasatta who had obtained the rainbow body. From a Buddhist practice perspective, therefore, it is not unlikely that King Od zer Go Cha, an emanation of Manjughosa, gave his daughter Bhrikuti Devi, an emanation of Tara, to the Tibetan king, an emanation of Arya Avalokiteshvara. In those days, the Lichchavi kings were highly liberal in their religious policies and practices, so it is very possible that Bhrikuti was a Buddhist, even if her father was a Saivite or Vaisnavite.

Princess Bhrikuti's father possessed a very sacred sandalwood image of Akshobhya Buddha and Arya Tara, as well as blessed images of Maitreya and Bodhibhadra. He presented these images to the Tibetan king as part of his daughter's dowry. When Princess Bhrikuti traveled to Tibet, she also took with her a host of artists and sculptors who were instrumental in building the Jokhang and Potala Palace in Lhasa. Tibetan sources, such as the *Mani bka i bum*,<sup>2</sup> *rGyal rabs gsal ba i melong*, and *rNam thar*,<sup>3</sup> substantiate the details of Princess Bhrikuti Devi's life.

### The Mani bka i bum

The second section of the manuscript *Mani bka i bum* is a biographical account of Srong btsan sGam po, relating his deeds to the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni.<sup>4</sup> In 16 chapters, it recounts the lineage, conception, and birth of Srong btsan sGam po, as well as his youth, consecration, introduction of civil law, collection of Buddhist images, his marriages to the Nepalese and Chinese princesses,<sup>5</sup> the building of temples,<sup>6</sup> the translation of Buddhist scriptures, the concealment of *gter-ma* (concealed texts), and other topics.

Descriptions of Srong btsan sGam po's marriage to the Nepalese princess Bhrikuti Devi in the *rGyal rabs gsal ba i melong* and the *rNam thar* are substantially the same. The *Mani bka i bum* gives three names for the king — Od zer Go cha, Ratna Deva, and Sala bri-ho — whereas the *rGyal rabs* gives the name Deba Lha. Otherwise, descriptions of the construction of the Jokhang Temple, Potala Palace, and other temples are credited to the Nepalese princess in all three sources. Bhrikuti Devi had already built the nine-storied palace called Sogpo Khar in Red Hill for herself before the Chinese princess began building the Ramoche temples.



## The Story in the *rGya bza bal bza i rnam thar*

Another important source of information is the biography of the Chinese and Nepalese princesses edited by Thinly Chodak.<sup>7</sup> This is a more recent work compiled on the basis of *Mani bka i bum*, *rGyal rabs gsi ba i me long*, *mKhas pai dga ston*, and others. According to this text, King Srong btsan sGam po ascended the throne at the age of 13. At the age of sixteen, he procured a sandalwood image of Avalokitesvara with eleven faces and prayed for the well-being of his subjects. As he did so, two rays of light issued forth from the heart of the image in the directions of Nepal and China. He had a vision of Lha geig Khri btsun (Bhrikuti), the daughter of Od zer Go cha, in Nepal, and Princess Wengchen Kongjo, the daughter of the Chinese emperor Tai Song — both 16 years of age.

The Tibetan emperor wanted these two princesses as his consorts and ordered his wise ministers, mGar and Thon mi Sam bho ta, to bring them to him. He gave the ministers precious jewels, along with 100 cavalymen, 100 gold coins, and a suit of golden armor studded with jewels. He also sent a box containing three letters. Thus, the Tibetan ministers mGar and Thon-mi appeared in the Kathmandu Valley requesting the hand of Nepalese Princess Bhrikuti Devi in marriage to the emperor. The Nepalese king Od zer Go cha hesitated at this request and asked three questions, concerning the moral conduct, temples, and mineral wealth of the Tibetan kingdom. The three letters sent by Srong btsan sGam po contained the answers to these questions. With mixed feelings of veneration and fear, the king consented to the marriage. Princess Bhrikuti Devi also hesitated at first to accept a husband from a distant land, but finally consented, on the condition that she could take the highly venerated images of Akshobhya Buddha, Maitreya, and the sandalwood Tara with her. The Nepalese king agreed to her wishes, instructing her to behave in accordance with the Dharma in the land of Tibet.

Princess Bhrikuti Devi left Nepal with loads of precious jewels carried by seven elephants and escorted by soldiers, followed by ministers and cavalymen. The procession was escorted by Tibetan soldiers up to the Tibetan/Nepalese border near sKyid grong Pass. Beyond this point, the route narrowed and the Nepalese soldiers and elephants returned home. The jewels were then carried by the Tibetan ministers. Princess Bhrikuti Devi rode on a white donkey (*dre -u dkar mo*), followed by 500 cavalymen. On the way, the princess placed the precious image of Arya Karunamaya Watibhadra in sKyid grong Valley. After reaching Lhasa, she offered three jeweled boxes filled with spices to Srong btsan sGam po. Following their marriage, the Red Palace on Red Hill was founded.

## The Controversy

Two schools of thought have arisen concerning Princess Bhrikuti Devi's marriage to Srong btsan sGam po. Some Tibetologists subscribe to the view that she never existed.<sup>8</sup> Other scholars and historians believe that she did.<sup>9</sup>

The Tang annals written by Thang chu (618-907) speak of the Chinese princess, a daughter of Emperor Tai Song, who was given in marriage to Srong btsan sGam po. He asks why if these were such important historical events, other inscriptions and historical documents omit any references to Bhrikuti. He concludes that Bhrikuti's existence was an attempt to introduce a mythical element into the historical accounts. He further states that a marriage between a princess from a family that took pride in its illustrious Kshatriya lineage was highly unlikely to enter into a marriage agreement with a ruler from unfamiliar territory beyond the Himalayas.

It is certain that Srong btsan sGam po expanded his territory in all directions and his military might was without match. Even the Chinese emperor succumbed to the demands of the Tibetan king. Given these facts, the Nepali king could not claim to surpass the Tibetan forces militarily. Although the *Mani bka i bum* account is replete with legends, the basic facts are historically true. The Princess Bhrikuti Devi was given in marriage out of fear of invasion from Tibetan forces. This is obvious from the following passage: Oh, my daughter Bhrikuti! If you did not go to the land of Tibet, the Tibetan king, an incarnation of a deity, might wage war against me and even kill me and destroy our country. It is certain that you will be snatched away by force, without my control.

The question remains as to why Bhrikuti is not mentioned in any inscriptions of the period. The period from 621 to 641 C. E. was a troubled one, and therefore largely undocumented. Even the available documents are confusing and mutilated; most of them are mere fragments. After the death of King Amshuvarma, the government was unsettled. The Lichhavi rulers acted as puppets of the Guptas, who were the de facto rulers. King Udaydeva was exiled to Tibet. In this period of disruption and strife, who would inscribe the marriage on stone tablets? In such a chaotic time, the marriage ceremony was probably not celebrated with pomp and splendor, and may not have been significant enough to inspire documentation. This would also explain the lack of any references to Princess Bhrikuti in the Tang annals.

The view that a marriage between a princess from an illustrious Kshatriya family and a barbarian king was impossible cannot be substantiated. In fact, it would have been wise for the Nepalese king to give his

daughter in marriage to the Tibetan king for the benefit of the country. Despite considerations of caste and religion, such a match would have been valuable for political reasons. The case of Chandra Gupta Maurya, an orthodox Brahman who married the daughter of the Greek king Sylucus, is similar.

To explain away the complications of caste, the historian Baburam Acarya proposed that Princess Bhrikuti Devi was the illegitimate daughter of Amshuvarma and a Newar Buddhist. Some scholars also question whether she was a Buddhist, though it is well known that the rulers during this period were highly liberal in their religious policies. For these reasons, it is quite likely that Princess Bhrikuti took priceless Buddhist images as her dowry to Tibet and propagated Buddhist culture through temple construction.

Among western scholars, Giuseppe Tucci also raises doubts about Bhrikuti's existence. He bases his conclusion on several arguments: the dearth of documentation, the absence of Bhrikuti's name in the available records, the variant names for her father in the Tibetan sources, the assertion that Bal-po in the Toun-Houng documents does not refer to Nepal, the fact that Amshuvarma was not a Buddhist, and the similar manner in which the Nepalese and Chinese princesses were courted. He writes that, although the Chinese court at that time was favorably inclined toward Buddhism, the inscriptions of Amshuvarma reflect a purely Hindu and especially Saivite atmosphere. Inscriptions identify Amshuvarma's palace with Kailasa, and so far none of them contain any indication that he or his family were Buddhist. Tucci fails to mention the numerous Lichchai inscriptions that indicate the king's liberal religious policies. As John K. Locke, the celebrated author of *Buddhist Monasteries of Nepal*, confirms, Nobody in ancient days opposed Hinduism and Buddhism as modern (especially Western) writers do. The kings supported all religious sects within their kingdoms, donated money to their support, and saw to it that Dharma in all its forms prospered.<sup>10</sup>

The Tibetan sources unanimously agree in referring to Princess Bhrikuti as Lha geig Khri btsun. The similar manner in which the Nepalese and Chinese princesses were courted is not surprising. It was natural for a king like Srong btsan sGam po to flaunt his accomplishments — his position as a creator of laws, his mineral wealth, and the construction of Buddhist temples — to please his queens. In fact, the details of the two courtships are not identical. Professor Tucci based his article, *The Wives of Srong btsan sGam po*, on the *rGyal rabs gsal ba i Melong*, but neglected to mention a single passage from the *Mani bka i bum*, a much earlier document. As it happens, the story of the Chinese princess marriage contains many more legends and dubious references than the story of the Nepalese princess marriage. Tucci's preference for the Chinese account is mainly based on a

fragmentary Toun-Huang source. It should also be mentioned that, in Bhutan, the people take great pride in having two ancient temples erected by King Srong btsan sGam po under the inspiration of the Nepalese queen Bhrikuti Devi.<sup>11</sup>

Another veteran Tibetologist, David Snellgrove, does not rule out the possibility of Srong btsan sGam po's marriage, but suggests an Indian princess rather than a Nepalese one. In his view, an Indian princess was more likely than a Nepalese princess, since most renowned Buddhist teachers were from India, and Nepal was simply an important passageway to Tibet. He confirms that, although later accounts were highly mythologized, the basic facts are a matter of historical record. The well-documented close relationships between Nepal and Tibet would surely have been strengthened through the marriage of Princess Bhrikuti Devi and King Srong btsan sGam po.



#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on Min Bahadur Shakya, *The Life and Contribution of the Nepalese Princess Bhrikuti Devi to Tibetan History: From Tibetan Sources* (Kathmandu: Pilgrims Books, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> *rGyal po srong btsan sGam po i mani bka i bum stod cha tshong grigs bstungs*.

<sup>3</sup> *rGya bza bal bza i rnam thar*.

<sup>4</sup> Folio. 97-140a.

<sup>5</sup> Folio. 111a-132b.

<sup>6</sup> Folio. 132a-137b.

<sup>7</sup> Published in Lhasa by the Bod i jongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 1981.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Giuseppe Tucci, Turrell Wylie, Dilli Raman Regmi, and Jacques Bacot.

<sup>9</sup> For example, Zuhio Yamaguchi, Sylvian Levi, Baburam Acarya, Balchandra Sharma, Bhuvan Lal Pradhan, and Shankar Man Rajbansi.

<sup>10</sup> Personal correspondence to the author, dated March 3, 1988.

<sup>11</sup> *sKer chu lha khang* and *Byms pa i lha khang*.



## **BUDDHIST NUNS OF VIETNAM**

by Bhiksuni. Dien Van Hue

After a dormant period under the French colonial regime, a renaissance of Vietnamese Buddhism has been in full swing since 1963. In earlier times, nuns' activities were considered by some as not worth mentioning. The ordinations, studies, and practice of nuns were completely under the leadership of monks. In 1965, for the first time, Vietnamese nuns developed their own separate leadership team, and more and more nunneries appeared. Buddhist schools and universities for nuns also came into existence all over South Vietnam, especially in Hue, Nha Trang, and Ho Chi Minh City. There were many brilliant and famous nun masters, but their activities were limited to building temples, training disciples within their own pagodas, and managing Buddhist schools for nuns. Teaching Dharma was still primarily the monks' responsibility.

After 1975, under the new regime, Vietnamese Buddhist organizations were restructured. Nuns' leadership teams did not work anymore. Nevertheless, it is a special feature of Vietnamese Buddhism that, for better or for worse, the activities of monks and nuns depend almost entirely on their own individual masters. In recent years, many nunneries have again appeared and the number of nuns has increased dramatically. In Vietnam, it is said that the number of nuns is ten times the number of monks. Nuns can be seen everywhere. Whenever the National Buddhist Congregation opens Buddhist schools and universities, the student nuns are always in the majority. Nuns also score higher in the examinations. The cultural standard of nuns has also improved considerably compared to earlier times, when nuns only did domestic tasks within the pagodas.

These days nuns are interested in registering for courses at secular universities in Vietnam, as well as in foreign countries such as India, China, Australia, and France. Unfortunately, there are still too few nun teachers who take up the noble task of spreading the Buddha's teachings to the people. Most nuns devote themselves to studies or charitable activities, such as helping lepers, old people, the handicapped, or poor people in distant or isolated areas.

These social welfare activities manifest the benevolent and compassionate spirit of the bodhisattva practice. But, in my humble opinion, these activities are not enough. If we have not mastered our mind, our practice can easily decline while going about doing social work. Some may get involved in pleasure or fame, return to the mundane world, or become the subject of critical comments. Therefore, training the mind is most essential, or, as the Buddha said, "helping people to realize and manifest their own Buddha nature." For this reason, many nuns want to practice at Vietnamese Chan [Zen] nunneries.

### **Vien Chieu Chan Nunnery**

The name of our nunnery is Thien Vien Vien Chieu. "Thien Vien" means "Chan nunnery" and "Vien Chieu" means "the shining of perfect wisdom." Founded in 1974, this was the first nunnery belonging to Chan Master Thich Thanh Tu's sect in Vietnam. At the beginning, we were only 15 determined nuns. Because of the war, we had a very hard time then. We lacked food, clothes, medicines, and even shelter. We had to clear a portion of the jungle, almost with our bare hands, to build a place to live and practice. We were all from the city, so we did not know much about agriculture or hard manual labor. But we were young, with strong faith in the worthiness of the Buddha's teachings.

We struggled hard for 28 years to improve our nunnery. Day by day, more and more eager nuns and laywomen joined us. Now we grow our own rice and vegetables and sell the surplus. Today, there are 100 nuns in our community. The number of nuns who joined increased to roughly 800, so we had to open ten more nunneries.

We practice under the guidance of Zen Master Thich Thanh Tu, one of the most admired masters in the present day. He has revived the Zen spirit of the old days, harkening back to the Golden Age of the Tran Dynasty with Truc Lam, the Great Ascetic (the former King Tran Nhan Tong). Master Thich Thanh Tu was the first to open Chan monasteries and nunneries in Vietnam toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,

### **The Way of Practice**

The purpose of our practice is to truly manifest our own Buddha nature. How do we do that? Usually we are carried away by the mind's endless thinking. To master the mind, we need to free it from attachment to things and delusive ideas. There are several methods to do that. Our way of practice is influenced by the first six Chinese patriarchs, especially Bodhidharma's teaching on mastering the mind, which was given to the Patriarch Hui K'e, and Patriarch Hui Neng's teachings: to take no-thought as our object, no-object as our basis, and non-attachment as our fundamental principle. We turn inwards to watch our mind. When we see thoughts coming and going, we keep ourselves awake, to not become involved or carried away. Once we are no longer carried away, we live with a non-dualistic mind. That is to truly live up to our own Buddha nature.

### **Daily Life**

We get up at 3 am and meditate until 5 am. After breakfast, we work. Some go to the rice fields, some to the vegetables gardens and orchards, and some to the kitchen to work. As our nunnery becomes larger, we work in new directions: teaching at Buddhist schools,

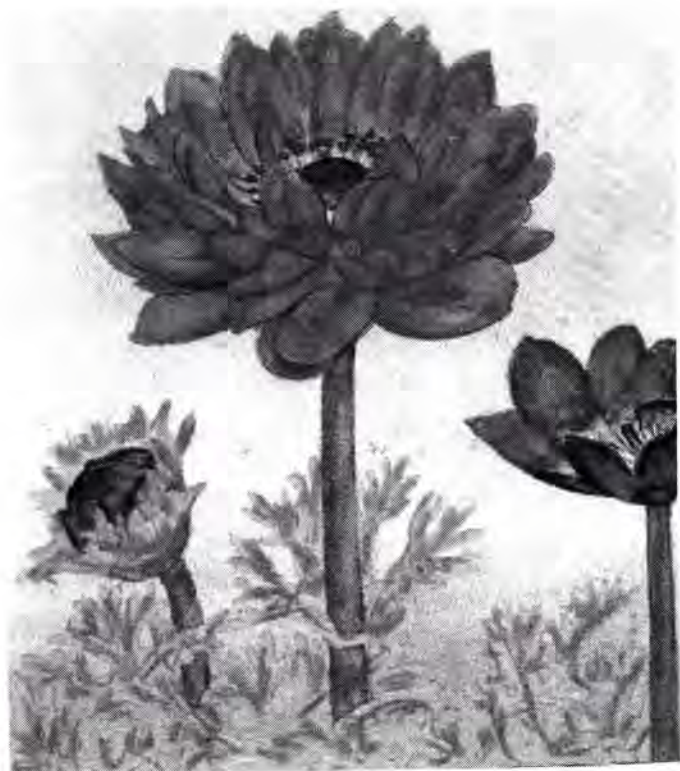


holding regular Dharma classes, receiving guests, writing books, training the neighborhood children, and so on. The morning chores end at 10 am and lunch is at 11 am. In the afternoon, we either study sutras and Chan histories, or sit for meditation from 2 to 4 pm. After that, we continue working until 5 pm, when we have a light dinner and relax. At 6 pm, we chant the *sutras*. The evening meditation session is from 7:30 to 8:30 pm, and at 9 pm we go to bed. By following this schedule, we practice letting go of preferences, expectations, and attachments. We avoid distractions by focusing on the present moment.

### Peaceful Progress

At present, violence has dramatically increased all over the world. People complain that modern life is full of stresses and strains. More and more people suffer from mental illnesses. How many can say that they have found peace and feel happy every day? We cannot be at peace if we have a troubled mind. If we can find peace in ourselves, then world peace will surely be restored. If we can focus on change within ourselves first, we will be better able to change the world.

The purpose of training our mind is to achieve this inner peace. We can contribute to world peace by sharing the Buddha's teachings. Anybody who makes an effort to practice these teachings will see the positive results. This helps people develop faith, which helps them continue making progress. As we practice and learn more the Buddha's teachings, we can be at peace with ourselves, our neighbors, and others in the world, thus contributing to world peace.



### Open Heart, Wagging Tail

by Carol Stevens

*A woman's weathered hand reaches out to touch a dog's silky back. The tenseness in her face softens as the dog leans in to enjoy the stroking. A smile follows, while the dog and a new friend relax together in an unconditional moment of mutual pleasure.*

All Buddhist traditions teach loving kindness and compassion. The contemporary practitioner can find countless ways to express these values, and I have found one way that brings joy threefold. It is the sharing of our dog's unconditional affection through a pet visitation program. The residents of our local assisted living facility simply beam when they see my dog and I coming through the lobbies and rooms. Many residents have poignant memories of a pet from long ago. Others simply enjoy the touch of silky fur. These openhearted, loving visits bring joy to the residents, pleasure for my dog, and the knowledge that I have relieved someone's suffering, even if just for a moment.

My dog, Tashi Delek, is a two-year-old Tibetan Mastiff with loving eyes and a heart of gold. After she completed obedience training, we were evaluated by the local Humane Society and assigned a facility to visit. Our visits are some of the loveliest times we have experienced together. My dog's dam and siblings are a part of the Australian pet visitation program, and I knew that was what I wanted to participate, too.

Pet visitation is a simple coming together of animals and people. All across the country, residents and patients in care homes, hospitals, and other healthcare facilities are warming to the touch of a friendly dog, cat, bunny, or bird. The animals are part of volunteer owner/pet teams that enjoy sharing their time, compassion, and loving kindness with others.

People have known the comfort value of pets ever since the first dog and human got together, but only in the past few decades have the medical benefits of associating with animals been documented and visits encouraged. No longer are the strict "No Pets Allowed" policies enforced at all healthcare facilities. Instead, happy tails go wagging down long hallways on missions of love.

We know that dogs and cats and bunnies don't care about age, infirmity, physical defects, or appearance. They are curious and affectionate, without needing anything in return. The lucky people who receive a caring pet's attention are often shown to be more responsive, optimistic, communicative, and compassionate. They can forget about their own pain and problems when a friendly nose pushes into their hand. Physical touch is a connection that can work wonders. Touch is therapeutic.

tic for both humans and animals. Cranky or depressed people often modify their behavior when pets visit. They speak softly, stroke the pet, and feel happy.

The pets and the owners reap rewards, too. The human-animal bond between them is deepened and strengthened, along with the satisfaction that comes from bringing comfort to others. Hopefully, the pure intentions of pet visitation also accumulate good karma. I cannot think of a more pleasant or satisfying way to spend a morning than visiting our senior citizen friends with Tashi.

Many purebred show dogs are part of visitation and pet therapy programs. Zeus is a beautiful prize-winning saluki who visits care home residents in our neighborhood. His owner laughs as he recounts Zeus's attraction to people in wheelchairs as he strolls through public places. Strangers may be surprised when Zeus trots over to say hello, but they are usually delighted by his good manners and friendly greeting.

Many show dogs participate in pet visitation and pet therapy programs across the country. During the recent AKC dog show at Madison Square Garden, the commentators often spoke about the many champion dogs at the show who are certified in visitation and therapy programs. A dog doesn't have to be purebred to participate, though. Hundreds of loving, well-trained mixed-breed dogs share their love just as successfully.

Pet therapy is sometimes called Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT). This is a different program than pet visitation, though it's easy to confuse the two. Pet visitation, sometimes called Animal Assisted Activities (AAA), is simply friendly visiting, whereas in Animal Assisted Therapy the animal participates in a specified treatment program and a certified physical therapist is required to be present.

Many kinds of pets can do pet visitation, but whatever kind of animal it may be, a pet first needs to be tested and evaluated by a responsible organization before going calling. It is not a good idea to just drop in at a hospital or care home with a pet in tow. First, the facility must want to have a pet visitation program. Second, trained volunteer owners and their pets must be identified and evaluated. Across the country, a variety of organizations do these evaluations, making certain that health, aptitude, and temperament standards are met. Dogs are often required to earn the American Kennel Club's Canine Good Citizen certificate in basic obedience training.

For more detailed information on Animal Assisted Activities and Animal Assisted Therapy, contact the following organizations on the web:

- The Delta Society: [www.deltasociety.org](http://www.deltasociety.org)
- Therapy Dogs International, Inc.:  
[www.tdi-dog.org](http://www.tdi-dog.org)

- The American Kennel Club: [www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org)

Doing Pet Visitation rounds with Tashi has helped me develop more respect and compassion for all sentient beings. In the dark eyes of my canine companion, I see the patience and acceptance that can also bring me peace and wisdom.

*Carol Stevens is a professional photographer and writer. She lives in Kaneohe, Hawai'i, and is the secretary of Sakyadhita International.*



## Buddhist Female Mendicants in the *Therigatha*

by Urmila Srivastava

Pali literature contains three sections, or *pitakas* ("baskets"): Sutta, Vinaya, and Abhidhamma. The Sutta *pitaka* is divided into five *nikayas*: Digha Nikaya, Majjhima Nikaya, Anguttara Nikaya, Smyukta Nikaya, and Khuddaka Nikaya. The Khuddaka Nikaya consists of 15 books, one of which is the *Therigatha*, or stories of female Buddhist mendicants. The *Therigatha* is a collection of 522 stories, 73 of which contain the words of female mendicants.

A special feature of Buddhism is that it gives equal opportunities to women and men. According to Buddhist philosophy, status is not determined on the basis of birth, but on the basis of one's deeds. The Buddha had unlimited sympathy for women. He offered women the same opportunity to attain an ideal life as he offered men. In some other religions, women are considered to be the cause of worldly bondage and hold a subordinate place in society. The Buddha, by contrast, taught self-restraint and an ideal way of life to women and men equally.

Many women of different ages belonging to different family backgrounds entered the Sangha and performed their religious duties under the guidance of the Buddha. Despite some initial hesitation, the Buddha permitted women to become mendicants. His former wife Yasodhara entered the Sangha along with thousands of women, who did their best for the welfare of society. Besides helping popularize Buddhism, these female mendicants had a major impact on Indian society. Indian women have drawn inspiration from Buddhism's egalitarian ideals and applied them to transform every aspect of their lives.

The female disciples of the Buddha expressed their personal experiences of life in melodious language in the *Therigatha*. Moral truth, depth of feelings, and firm resolution are the special attributes of these beautiful songs. The verses contain music as well as profound philosophy. The *Therigatha* verses lack the emotions of disappointment, bitterness, and sorrow which are prevalent in other lyrical literature. Instead, the verses of the female mendicants express encouragement, symbolic of their victory over the hindrances of human life. The moral values they extol evoke a sense of true inner happiness.

The female Buddhist mendicants associated the body with the sorrowful and mundane. They made sincere efforts to overcome the sensual desires of their hearts. They sensed the fleeting nature of physical beauty and recognized the bad smells and ailments of the body. This understanding of the body enabled them to become free from all worldly attachments and overcome all afflictions. The words of their songs are hopeful and enthusi-



astic about eternal happiness and the peace of liberation.

The female mendicants achieved their spiritual vitality by following the teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha, who had himself experienced the joys of a life of renunciation. The female mendicants included princesses of the royal families of Kosala and Magadha, the daughters of courtiers, and maidens from brahmin and merchant families, as well as Subha the carpenter's daughter, Chapa the bird hunter's daughter, and Ambapali the prostitute. Regardless of family background, all were given the opportunity to become outstanding models of the renunciant life.

Patacara was the daughter of a wealthy businessman of Sravasti who eloped with her servant. Her parents and in-laws were all ruined by her elopement and she could not feel at peace anywhere. Later, Patacara encountered the Buddha and his teachings. She attained peace of mind by purifying herself of all desires. In her own words, "I am full of virtue and strictly abide by the self-discipline taught by the Buddha. I am not lazy. I am calm and polite."<sup>1</sup>



Kisagotami of Sravasti became distraught when her young child died. In the midst of her sorrow, she happened to meet the Buddha. To console her, the Buddha asked her to bring some mustard seeds from a house where no death had occurred. Kisagotami roamed everywhere in search of such mustard seeds, but was completely unsuccessful in finding a house where no one had died. As a consequence, she understood the purpose of the Buddha's instructions, and became a Buddhist mendicant. She said, "One becomes aware of sorrows and the means to overcome them, as well as the path of renunciation enjoined by the pious and wise. I have overcome all my miseries. I have performed all my duties and become free of all worldly compulsions."<sup>2</sup> In this way, Kisagotami's sorrow was washed away by her contact with the Buddha.

The verses of the *Therigatha* narrate the typical miseries of women and how to become free from them by following the teachings of Lord Buddha. Mukta, the daughter of a poor brahmin of Kosala, was married to a very poor hunchback. With the permission of her husband, she became a Buddhist mendicant. In time, she attained liberation through practicing self-control and self-purification. She joyfully sang, "I have attained liberation – complete liberation – from the worldly compulsions of birth and death."<sup>3</sup>

Renowned among the female mendicants was Subha, the daughter of a prestigious brahmin family. Subha was extremely attractive, and was given the name Subha because of her beauty and lovely figure. She became a mendicant after hearing the teachings of the Buddha. One day when she went to a mango grove in Jivaka to practice meditation, a morally degenerate young man blocked her way. He was charmed by her beauty and, blinded with passion, tried to seduce her with many enticements. As a mendicant, she remembered the harmful consequences of sensuality. Subha thought the villain was blinded by the attraction of her beautiful eyes, so she plucked out one eye and handed it to him saying, "Take this eye which is the root cause of all your evil intentions towards me." The young man was horrified by this act and his desire evaporated instantly. He fell down on the floor in front of Subha and begged her forgiveness. On her way back, Subha met the Buddha. Her eyesight was restored when she saw the rays of piety and purity radiating from his body. Buddha delivered a special discourse to enable her to attain higher realizations. Subha developed her spiritual wisdom in a very short period and felt greatly obliged to Buddha.<sup>4</sup>

Ambapali was born under a mango tree in the royal garden of Vaisali and was very beautiful during her youth. Many bachelors of Vaisali vied with each other, desiring to marry her. To avoid violence among them,

Ambapali was ordered to live as a wife to all her suitors. The Buddha once stayed in the garden where Ambapali lived, when visiting Vaisali during the last days of his life. After paying her respects at the feet of the Buddha, Ambapali received his teachings and entered the order of the mendicants. Aware the changes in her body due to old age, Ambapali became convinced of the truth of the Buddha's teachings. She attained an intimate knowledge of the impermanence of everything in this world.

The Buddha's intention was to liberate beings from the sorrows and miseries of the world. As described in Buddhist religious literature one who sees these sorrows and miseries transforms them into eternal happiness in due time. The experience of liberation can be achieved during one lifetime. With determination, the mendicants of the *Therigatha* struggled to overcome the base instincts of sensuality and eventually sang songs of ultimate peace and the joy of liberation: "I am the virtuous owner of the highest spiritual welfare. I am perfectly pure, perfectly calm!"

*Dr. Urmila Srivastava is the director of Arya Kanya Degree College in Allahabad, India, where she teaches Pali and Sanskrit.*

#### NOTES:

<sup>1</sup>. *Therigatha*, No. 47.

<sup>2</sup>. *Therigatha*, No. 63.

<sup>3</sup>. *Therigatha*, No. 11.

<sup>4</sup>. *Therigatha*, No. 71.





## **“New Directions” Workshop at Columbia University**

by Sukdham Sunim

On February 15, 2003, the Institute for Medieval Japanese Studies at Columbia University in New York hosted a full-day workshop, “New Directions and Strategies for Research on the History of Korean Buddhist Nuns.” Ten professors and ten graduate students from Korea and the United States attended the workshop to share experiences and discuss the obstacles they have faced in doing research on Buddhist women and nuns, a seriously neglected field within Buddhism. The informal workshop was jointly sponsored by the Center for the Study of Women, Buddhism and Cultural History (Kyoto, Japan); the Center for Research on Korean Buddhist Nuns; and the Center for Korean Research at Columbia University.

Professor Barbara Ruch, director of the Institute for Medieval Japanese Studies, pointed out that scholars have wholly neglected the study of Buddhist nuns and women. The few scholars who are currently working on the history of nuns in the different Buddhist traditions have encountered similar difficulties with the lack of source materials. They have also encountered similar themes in documenting the many hindrances that Buddhist nuns and laywomen have faced.

Professor Ruch introduced the Center for the Study of Women, Buddhism and Cultural History, which is an integral part of the Institute for Medieval Japanese Studies in Kyoto. The Center is located in a convent where daughters of the imperial family once lived independently from monks. In spite of their significance in Japanese Buddhist history, these nuns have been ignored by modern male scholars of Buddhism. Valuable source materials about them vanished after 1868, when the Meiji Restoration forced the separation of Buddhism from the imperial family. After this time, empresses and princesses were forbidden to become Buddhist nuns.

Professor Ruch explained that this workshop was held to give greater visibility to the new Center for Research on Korean Buddhist Nuns (CRKBN), and to give full support and encouragement for research on Buddhist nuns of Korea and other traditions. Scholars doing research on nuns and laywomen in Buddhism in Japan and Korea (and perhaps in China and Taiwan as well) face similar struggles. The relationship between Korean and Japanese nuns in early Buddhist history is an especially urgent topic to be studied.

Venerable Bongak, director of the CRKBN and a professor at Joong-Ang Sangha University in Korea, discussed her motivation and the difficulties she encountered with the Korean Buddhist Sangha when she founded the CRKBN in Seoul, Korea, in 1999. The center has not yet been recognized even as a subsidiary organization of Joong-Ang Sangha University, an

institution for higher education for monks and nuns in Korea. Venerable Bongak described her astonishment when she first learned that there is almost no historical documentation of Korean nuns, even though the order of Korean nuns was founded 1,500 years ago. Currently, she and her staff are working to bring nuns’ issues to the attention of the Korean public through interviews with newspapers and magazines. Their hope is to persuade Joong-Ang Sangha University to give official recognition to the CRKBN.

Korean Buddhist nuns have clearly been treated unequally in Buddhist institutions and in Buddhist history, but their future is bright because of the equal educational opportunities that monks and nuns now receive. Modern Korean Buddhist nuns are very active. They have worked very hard and contribute to Korean society in many ways. Venerable Bongak spoke about CRKBN’s recent activities and future plans. She also presented the plans for the 8<sup>th</sup> Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women, to be held in Seoul in 2004.

Chun-Fang Yu, a professor at Rutgers University, discussed recent studies on Taiwanese Buddhist nuns. Professors Robert E. Buswell (UCLA), Paul Groner (University of Virginia), and Ryuichi Abe (Columbia University) suggested information sharing and communications links to facilitate research on Korean Buddhist women.

This newsletter has been created by Paula Heim, Milton Pang, and Karma Lekshe Tsomo. Illustrations by Gloria Staackman.

## **HIV/AIDS Education in the Himalayas**

The incidence of HIV/AIDS in India has reached epidemic proportions. In 2002, four million people in India were found to be infected with HIV/AIDS and the numbers are growing rapidly. It is estimated that 80% of the truck drivers are HIV-positive. Residents in remote regions of the Himalayas are especially vulnerable to infections, due to a lack of information about the virus. The region has only been open to foreign visitors since 1991. With a increased influx of people moving in and out of the region, and minimal healthcare available, the indigenous peoples are at high risk for newly introduced communicable diseases. This summer, a group of Jamyang Foundation volunteers will address the inadequacy of knowledge about HIV/AIDS available in the Himalayan border region by providing education on AIDS and other health-related issues to villagers in the Spiti Valley.



## **Project Setting**

The Spiti Valley is a remote high-altitude desert region located in Himachal Pradesh, northern India, about three-days journey from Delhi. Spiti is mountainous, with small villages located in narrow snow-covered valleys at heights of 12,000-18,000 feet. The villages of Spiti, with a population of 20,000 people, are linked by a meager network of unpaved roads. As a result, basic human services, such as health and education, are rudimentary and often lacking altogether. Health care education is even more rare. Although HIV/AIDS is rampant and quickly spreading in India, few people in Spiti have even heard of the disease. This project aims to address this serious and dangerous threat.

Traditional values are still strong in the Himalayan region, which has been home to a unique Buddhist culture for over 1000 years. Loving kindness and care for the young, old, and infirm has been the core of women's spiritual practice over the centuries. Rarely, however, have women emerged as community leaders, due to a lack of educational opportunities. With the Tibetan border now sealed and access to their cultural heartland denied, the threat of cultural extinction in Spiti looms large. Social and economic changes seriously endanger traditional values. It is now more urgent than ever that women be granted equal social and educational opportunities.

## **Community-based Learning**

The Jamyang Foundation HIV/AIDS Education Project in August 2003 will use a variety of methods to encourage health awareness among the people in Spiti. First, using a video projector, powered by a solar panel, the project staff will screen videos on HIV/AIDS and other topics onto a large screen outdoors in 22 villages in the region. Next, the project will facilitate dialogues between healthcare professionals, Jamyang Foundation students, community organizers, and the villagers to answer questions and clarify the information provided in the videos. In addition, it will provide publications, resources, and local contacts for obtaining further healthcare information. Finally, it will train local staff members to conduct follow-up programs and to provide health education programs for the villagers in neighboring areas.

Information about HIV/AIDS is so prevalent in western countries that people are often unaware that, in the absence of education, many people in the world today are still unaware of the current global AIDS crisis and many have never even heard of AIDS. The need that will be addressed by this project is to design health education programs that are culturally relevant, engaging, sustainable, and self-perpetuating.

## **Project Objectives**

The goal of Jamyang Foundation and the students trained and educated through its programs is to serve the community. Currently they provide counseling, secular and religious education, and cultural literacy programs for the benefit of their local villages. The critical need now is to provide education in urgent health problems threatening the area. These programs would inform the residents of the villages about the existence, causes, and communicability, and prevention of HIV/AIDS. In addition, the project will provide information and consultation about other urgent issues: substance abuse, domestic violence, and dental hygiene. The project will also provide resources for other health-related issues.

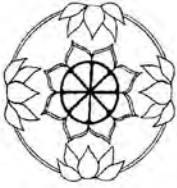
The short-term goal of the project is to create awareness of the dangers of HIV/AIDS and other health-related issues. The long-range goal is to provide resources for ongoing training and education projects and to train women to disseminate information and organize healthcare seminars for the benefits of the people of the region.

## **The Jamyang Foundation Programs**

The project will be staffed by students and advisors from Jamyang Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the status and quality of life for women and girls in developing countries. The basic aim of Jamyang Foundation is to provide education programs to help women develop as teachers, counselors, community volunteers, and spiritual guides to others. Emphasis is on enabling women to progress spiritually and intellectually, and helping them gain all the practical skills required for self-sufficiency.

Jamyang Foundation has established innovative study programs at eight locations in the Indian Himalayas, conducts educational outreach in eight other Himalayan locations, and has recently established a school for Marma tribal girls in Bangladesh. The students in these programs come from diverse ethnic backgrounds: Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal, Mongolia, and various regions of India. Some of the students walked out of Tibet to escape religious persecution in their homeland, arriving in India penniless and illiterate.

Students in the Jamyang Foundation programs have a rare opportunity to study philosophy, Tibetan, English, Hindi, history, healthcare, ethics, and a variety of vocational skills. These education and training programs enable women to initiate similar programs in various Himalayan localities. The programs empower indigenous women to help preserve their distinctive and endangered Buddhist cultures. Training in health care, environmental protection, weaving, knitting, subsistence agriculture, and marketing and administrative skills equip the students to contribute badly needed expertise to their communities.



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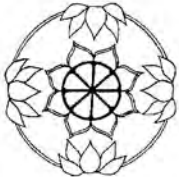
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