

# Sakyadhita

International Association of Buddhist Women

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## WOMEN PRACTICING BUDDHISM by Ahna Fender

A few of the words that arose repeatedly in response to the first "Women in Buddhism" conference on the East Coast were "historic," "timely," and "revolutionary."

The conference, which ran from April 7-10, 2005, brought together more than 2,000 women and men to explore the exciting innovations, complexities, and challenges inherent in women's practice of Buddhism.

Over the course of the event, a spirit of engagement permeated the campus of Smith College, in Northampton, Massachusetts, where the conference was held. One thing that seemed to link the various panelists and participants together at this event was a perceived need for engagement, awareness and open dialogue during this time of global discord.

In response to the injustices and suffering witnessed around the world, many participants expressed a desire to be agents for change, whether that meant speaking out publicly, embodying freedom and diversity through art, or practicing mindfulness in daily life.

Participants in the conference were both lay and ordained. They ranged in age from infants to college students to septuagenarians, and beyond. They came from all over the United States, including Washington, West Virginia, California, Idaho, Hawaii, New York and many other states. Some participants also traveled from afar, flying in from Jamaica, Canada, England, and other international locations.

The conference focused on issues of practice, exploring women's particular experiences of Buddhism as it spreads to North America and takes shape within new contexts. Workshops and panels at the conference covered diverse topics, including "Engaged Buddhism," "Buddhism and Creativity," "Women Changing Buddhism: Feminist Perspectives," "Race, Ethnicity, and Class," "Buddhism and Sexuality," and "American Women Buddhist Teachers."

Given the wide array of issues and ideas that surfaced during "Women Practicing Buddhism," the scope of this article will

cover only a sampling of the subjects discussed over the course of the three-day event. The two salient topics that this article will aim to address are Buddhism and creativity, and ties between Buddhism and feminism.

## **Buddhism and Creativity**

The conference commenced with a reading by the poet Jane Hirshfield. As an artist and meditator in the Zen tradition, Hirshfield's opening set the stage for an exploration of the relationship between Buddhism and creativity that was to continue throughout the conference. As Hirshfield put it, "Both practices are complementary to each other. They are both about attention." Both mindfulness practice and art require a radical willingness to be present to whatever arises. In Hirshfield's words, "The poem asks: what is the nature of the moment?" Creativity depends on letting go, on giving oneself over to the process as it unfolds, moment by moment. Mindfulness practice requires a similar commitment to stay with exactly what is happening in the present moment. Both practices aim to attain a certain freedom, as Hirshfield expressed, and both require the practitioner to be open to the process of change and transformation as it occurs.

Meredith Monk, an innovative artist and vocalist, also performed during the conference. Monk's work challenges the boundaries of traditional art forms and conveys a deep sense of freedom through its bold experimentation.

During the "Buddhism and Creativity" panel, on which she participated with fellow artist Jane Hirshfield, Monk spoke of the need for each of us to express our own truth. Part of this practice, both in Buddhism and creativity, is about learning to be with uncertainty and groundlessness. "Every piece that I work on brings up new questions," said Monk. "Art is a lot about being in the unknown."

Hirshfield expressed a similar sentiment about the process of creating: "I don't practice art to record what I know. I practice to find out what I don't know." The quest to tell the truth often opens one to the fundamental reality of one's own groundlessness. Monk spoke of the questions and doubt that arise during this process as hidden blessings because they provide space for transformation to occur. Hirshfield quoted Dogen in saying "The doubt itself is the way."

The Tara Dancers, led by Prema Desara and Anahata Iradah, provided another example of the transformation that can come from opening ourselves to the creative process, and experimenting with traditional forms. For the conference, Prema and Anahata took a group of women from the area, most of whom were untrained dancers, and taught them the traditional Tibetan dance "Praise of the 21 Taras." Each woman learned to embody, through movement, a different aspect of the goddess. The resulting performance was a compelling union of Buddhism and the creative spirit.

Sometimes risks and experiments undertaken in the creative process are not well-received by critics and audiences. Conference panelists spoke of the Buddhist value of equa-

nimity as a helpful tool in bringing humor to these situations. As Meredith Monk put it, in speaking of the experience of receiving bad reviews, "It's a little piece of paper. And sometimes people wrap their food in it."

## **Buddhism and Feminism**

In opening her talk at the conference, writer and feminist thinker bell hooks quoted Rita Gross in saying "Western Buddhists are standing at the confluence of two of the world's most powerful liberation movements: Buddhism and feminism."

hooks went on to express the working of these two movements in her own life, and their commonalities. In describing the interweaving of Buddhist practice and feminism as they arose on her path, she shared that "one journey was leading toward self-actualization, and one was leading away from a notion of self. Both paths promised an end to suffering."

hooks also spoke of Buddhism and feminism as complementary movements in their aim to liberate. In challenging institutional forms of patriarchal power and working to gain equality for women in our society, it is difficult not to fall into the trap of dualism. Dualism – our way of solidifying the other, and creating antagonistic relationships – is the short cut, according to hooks. To practice equanimity and love while simultaneously challenging the injustices we see, that is the true challenge—and it is our practice as Buddhists, and feminists.

hooks describes the Middle Way as a space of "radical openness." This kind of openness is critical in a movement like feminism, because from this open place we can "allow for the possibility of a person's transformation, even as [we] challenge them."

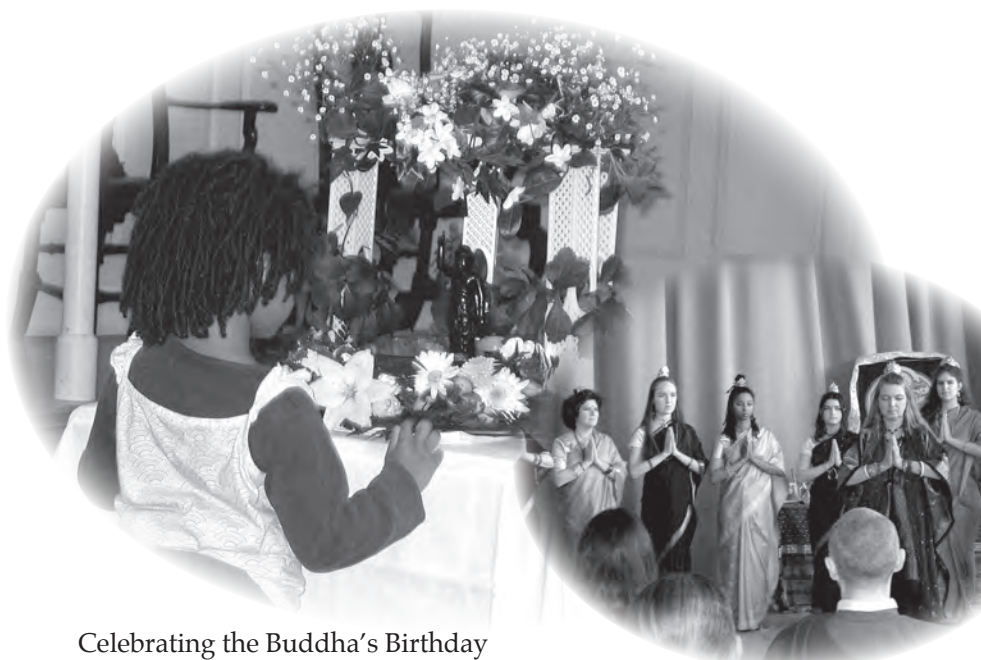
Helen Tworikov, founder of Tricycle magazine, also recognized ways in which Buddhism and feminism can support and draw from one another. Tworikov brought up an interesting link between the ideal qualities of a bodhisattva (as put forth in Shantideva's *The Way of the Bodhisattva*) and the traditional virtues of womanhood.

Qualities such as uncertainty, humility, and the tendency to put others before oneself have become, in our culture, qualities now associated with oppression, and viewed as obstacles to self-actualization.

When viewed from the angle of a Buddhist perspective, however, we see that these qualities can also be ideals. And they can be ideals not just for women, but for men. As Tworikov put it, "Perhaps these so-called 'feminine' qualities are the very strengths the world most needs to survive."

Tworikov described the type of feminism prevalent in 1960's counter-culture as women mostly seeking and equal share in a man's world. "There was a confusion between wanting the power and authority that men had with the qualities or attributes of maleness," she said.





Celebrating the Buddha's Birthday



bell hooks

The Tara Dancers

In this regard, Tworikov posited that the next step is for both women and men to re-envision what it means to be in power. The time is right for us now to learn how to incorporate more traditionally "feminine" characteristics into our models of power, suggested Tworikov. What would alternative leadership look like? Perhaps Buddhist thought can help to guide us toward such new models: What would it look like to place value on the kind of power that comes from presence of mind, from internal freedom, or the kind of power that advocates restraint?

Several discussions over the course of the conference touched on the need to re-envision power structures within the Buddhist tradition itself. Many participants seemed interested in the question of which forms to keep, and which to discard, as Buddhism continues to take root in the West. As Roshi Enkyo Pat O'Hara posed it: "How do we democratize the forms without losing the techniques that are particularly useful for letting go of ego?"

One issue that arose in response to this question was the importance of sharing power within our communities. Distributing power more equally within the Sangha seems a natural way to keep ourselves from falling into more traditional power dynamics and hierarchy.

Another issue that came up was the need to encourage and train more women teachers within our communities. Perhaps one of the strengths that women Buddhists can offer as teachers is an honest acceptance of not knowing, a willingness to leave room for the mystery. Participants expressed concern over the pressure that is put on men as teachers to be authorities, to be purveyors of the factual, to transmit intellectual history. This often leaves little room for

the "I don't know" mind to be an active part of the teaching.

For many communities, the first step toward a more balanced and egalitarian structure is recognizing the inequalities that exist. We need to be conscious of the fact that gender discrimination is a problem that affects us all. As Karma Lekshe Tsomo said, "If we care about human suffering, we must be aware of the contradictions between theory and practice that exist in the Buddhist world. Although the Buddha's teachings tell us that enlightenment has no gender, glaring gender inequalities still exist in all Buddhist societies. This is just one of the issues in the Buddhist closet that requires openness and honesty."

As women, we must take responsibility for instigating this change, openly addressing the inequalities that exist in our communities. In Tsomo's words, "We need to create solidarity to be able to speak out effectively against social injustices and to advocate on behalf of the millions of Buddhist women who have no voice, many of whom live under oppressive family or political structures."

For those who participated in the conference, it became clear that part of building a sense of solidarity is creating a space where we can come together, each from our own small communities, to work toward the larger changes we want to see in the world. The first "Women Practicing Buddhism" conference on the East Coast successfully created such a space. Over the course of the three days, participants were given the chance to gain a more expansive sense of community, to engage in an open exchange of ideas, and to gain new insights about what it means to be a woman practicing Buddhism in today's world.

## WOMEN AND BUDDHISM IN THE POLITICS OF PEACEMAKING

*by Karma Lekshe Tsomo*

World politics today is beset by numerous conflicts that affect women personally, economically, and politically. What power do women have to resolve these conflicts and create peace in an era when reason and compassion seem to have given way to power politics and brute force? Here I would like to address this question from a Buddhist perspective.

Buddhism provides substantial resources for creating sustainable peace. The Buddha taught innumerable methods for creating inner peace through the cultivation of the mind and the development of loving kindness, compassion, patience, and wisdom, and explained how these virtues can serve as the basis of a peaceful society. To create peace, he explained, we need to understand the roots of violence – greed, hatred, and ignorance – and extinguish these unwholesome tendencies in our own hearts. H.H. Dalai Lama continually points out that inner peace is essential for creating more harmonious families, communities, nations, and a more peaceful world. Peacemaking entails skillfully applying these nonviolent principles in conflict prevention and conflict transformation. Workshops that teach these principles and provide practical training in how to apply them in situations of conflict are being held around the world and are having a major impact in helping both perpetrators and victims understand the roots of violence and how to get rid of them.

The question that concerns us here is of women's roles in peacemaking efforts and how to expand them. For Buddhists, the aim is not to expand Buddhism or any other religious system, but to expand the principles of loving kindness, compassion, patience, and wisdom. No religion has a monopoly on these principles. The virtues of loving kindness and compassion are found in virtually all religious and humanistic traditions, and are therefore part of our common human heritage, to be freely taught and implemented at any time for the good of the world.

Several challenges exist regarding the cultivation and application of these peaceful principles in the Buddhist context. The major challenges are a lack of access to education and a lack of access to political power. These deficiencies affect women, minorities, and the poor disproportionately. For instance, what the recent film *Born into Brothels* does not tell us is that the majority of prostitutes in Mumbai (Bombay) are from Nepal, and although Nepal is a Buddhist kingdom, 75% of the women trafficked to India are Buddhists from poverty-stricken mountain areas like Helambu, where women are disenfranchised educationally, economically, and politically. A huge percentage of the women trafficked into sexual servitude in Southeast Asia are Buddhist tribal women who come from similarly disenfranchised backgrounds.

In recent history, Buddhists have died by the millions due to political upheavals and war: 3 million in Vietnam, 2

million in Cambodia, 1.2 million in Tibet, an estimated one million in Laos, 13 million Mongolians and untold millions more Buddhists during the so-called Cultural Revolution in China, unknown numbers in Buryatia and Kalmukia during the Stalinist regime, etc. At present Buddhists live either in situations of relative peace, as in Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, and Thailand; under totalitarian rule, as in Burma (Myanmar), China, Nepal, and Tibet; or under conditions of political transition and uncertainty, such as in Laos, Mongolia, Buryatia, Kalmukia, and Sri Lanka. Although individual Buddhists have engaged in violent conflict, either to prevent the rise of despotism or to challenge it, the Buddhist tradition in general is strongly biased toward the nonviolent resolution of conflicts. The debate about the effectiveness of peaceful resistance is ongoing, but most Buddhists strongly support nonviolence, especially in the face of overwhelming odds. One can legitimately argue that this makes Buddhist societies easy marks for potential conquest, but at the same time the disadvantages of violent resistance are numerous. Buddhists maintain that brutality is only exacerbated by reacting aggressively and that nonviolent solutions are more sensible for everyone concerned, serving to prevent brutalities and further violence.

Buddhists thus have many resources for peacemaking, but when we begin to investigate what roles Buddhist women play in the process, we find that they have virtually no opportunities to be involved. There are several reasons. First, most are currently living in conditions of relative peace, as I have just explained, and may feel that there is little urgency to develop peacemaking skills. Second, women have little or no power in policymaking in the countries where they live and therefore lack any real voice in creating or implementing nonviolent solutions. Third, women in many Buddhist societies are uneducated or undereducated and are therefore lack the skills and confidence to play significant roles in either policymaking or peacemaking. In particular, women in many Buddhist societies lack adequate opportunities and encouragement for religious education, the primary and appropriate resources for peacebuilding in their countries. In sum, although the vast majority of the world's 300 million Buddhist women are committed to peace and although the Buddhist tradition they espouse is a vast resource of theoretical and practical methods for nonviolent conflict resolution, these women are effectively disenfranchised in the politics of peacemaking.

The Buddha propounded an egalitarian social ethic, but in actual practice injustices exist in all Buddhist societies, like other societies. Although the Buddha explained that all human beings have equal potential to achieve liberation, glaring inequalities persist, especially gender inequalities. The root causes of these problems are systemic: first, families and institutions are prejudiced in favor of boys over girls in providing educational opportunities and, second, the social construction of gender effectively trains women to be subservient to men. In the areas of the Indian Himalayas and the Chittagong Hill Tracts where I work, the vast majority of



adult women are illiterate and if a family can only afford to send one child to school, they will always send the boy, not the girl. This effectively means that it is rare to find a woman who is educated to the extent that she can assume a political role, even if she had the opportunity. This is the reality for the majority of women in the developing world and very little progress is being made to improve educational and political opportunities for women.

For example, ten years ago the Indian parliament voted to reserve one-third of all positions on village councils for women. Even with government monitoring, the new regulation was largely ineffective. To give a concrete example, even though women won the elections in all the villages of the Himalayan region of Spiti, women were not only insufficiently trained and educated to fully assume the responsibilities of village governance, but they also ultimately deferred to their husbands' opinions in decision-making. In the next election, all of these women were voted out of office. The exercise was not entirely futile, of course, since it sent a message that women can play leadership roles in democratic societies, but it was not entirely successful either, since it sent a message that women are inadequately equipped for political leadership. A bill to reserve one-third of the seats in the Indian parliament has been stalled by men who fear their own elected positions may go to women.

My conclusion is this: If peace is only possible with justice, then peace is only possible with gender justice. Although Buddhism provides many resources for helping create sustainable peace on many levels, beginning from the personal level right up to the international, these resources will be optimally effective only when women are full participants in the political process. And women can only become full participants in the political process when they are sufficiently educated and trained, not only to vote, but also to hold political office, advocate for women's equitable participation in society, and become architects of new peacebuilding structures. Working for gender justice in Buddhist societies will pay dividends for peace efforts around the world.

For centuries, Buddhist women have been committed to creating peaceful societies and to developing the interpersonal communications skills needed to make this happen. If these women had equitable access to educational opportunities, they could quickly be trained to play roles as peacemakers and as trainers in the skills of conflict transformation. But you may have noticed that no Buddhist women have yet participated in the Women's Peacemaker program and, frankly, it may take time for individual Buddhist women to gain the skills and experience to do so. However, by learning to recognize their own potential and developing it, I am convinced that Buddhist women can help forge effective, innovative programs for preventing and transforming conflicts. Given education, training, and leadership opportunities, they will be able to demonstrate that women's peacemaking powers are considerable and

work to make full use of women's wisdom and compassion in building a more peaceful world.

One final conclusion I would like to draw concerns the responsibilities of the international community in all of this. At present there is virtually no support given to provide the tools women in developing countries need in order to make structural changes. I would like to challenge the ethnocentric bias of the whole system. Global funding priorities are still strongly biased in favor of the privileged. It is possible to get a half million dollars to hold a conference on women's human rights where the same highly educated English-speaking people talk to each other, but this means little to women who are illiterate in their own languages, not to mention English. It is possible to get \$30,000 to fund trendy video projects that are of great interest to privileged women in New York and San Francisco, but it is a struggle to get one nickel for food, education, or health care for underprivileged women who lack the skills to fill out sophisticated grant applications and follow up on them electronically. Women's needs for food, education and health care seem to be too basic to garner any support. But until these basic changes are made at the grassroots level, we cannot expect miracles on the international level. So I would like to end by challenging current funding priorities and inviting each one of you to help change the status quo.



## BREAKTHROUGHS AND CHALLENGES ON THE BHIKSUNI ORDINATION ISSUE

by Karma Lekshe Tsomo

In recent months, there have been some major breakthroughs in the ongoing struggle to achieve full ordination for women in the Tibetan tradition. First, a Committee of Western Nuns was established, comprised of senior Western bhiksunis practicing in the Tibetan tradition. Second, there seems to be a move afoot in Dharamsala to find a way to introduce the bhiksuni lineage. Third, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama has spoken out repeatedly in public gatherings again and again in support of full ordination for women. Although he has publicly declared his support for bhiksuni ordination consistently for many years, his continual calls for a solution seem to have stepped up in recent months.

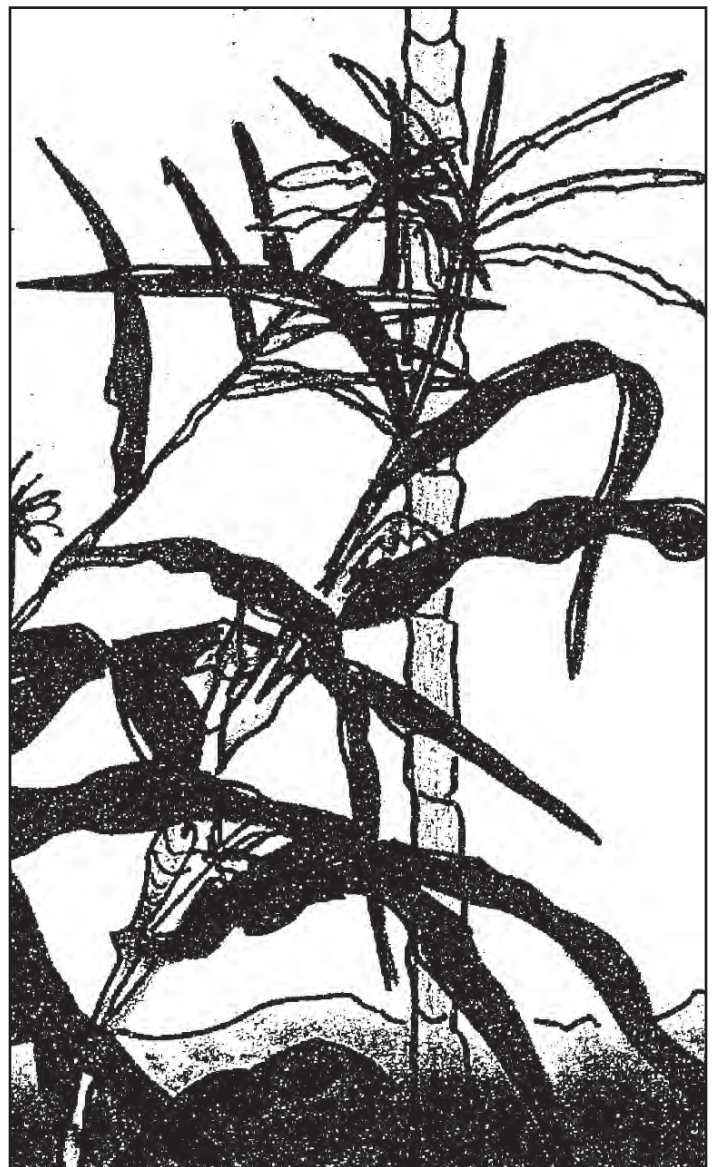
The Committee of Western Nuns includes the most senior Western nuns in Tibetan robes: Bhiksunis Tenzin Palmo, Pema Chodron, Karma Lekshe Tsomo, Thubten Chodron, and Jampa Tsedroen. Several are now in their 60s and have been bhiksunis for more than 20 years. They feel an increasing urgency to resolve the dilemma and open up opportunities for all nuns of the Tibetan tradition, including those who are not able to travel to foreign countries to receive full ordination. Ven. Bhiksuni Heng-ching Shih, a Vinaya scholar from National Taiwan University, is serving as an advisor to the Committee.

The Committee recognizes the unbroken continuity of the Dharmagupta bhiksuni lineage practiced in the Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese traditions. Most members feel that a dual ordination ceremony, performed by bhiksus and bhiksunis of various Vinaya traditions, would therefore be valid and desirable. Such an ordination would follow the pattern of ordinations that have helped restore the Bhiksuni Sangha in Sri Lanka. Another possibility is for qualified bhiksunis who are practicing in the Tibetan tradition to perform the bhiksuni ordination together with qualified Tibetan bhiksus. The question that arises is whether to follow the ordination procedure according to the Dharmagupta Vinaya or the Tibetan Mulasarvastivada Vinaya. The Ministry of Religious and Cultural Affairs of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile has sponsored research on this matter for over 20 years without reaching a conclusion, but it appears that a breakthrough is at hand.

At a recent Conference on Tibetan Buddhism, held on August 14-15, 2005, in Zurich, Switzerland, His Holiness reiterated his hearty support for the revival of the bhiksuni lineage. To underline his commitment, he made a donation of Swiss Fr.50,000 for research on the issue and suggested that Western nuns take the lead in exploring ways to resolve the issue, in consultation with Asian Buddhist leaders. The Committee of Western Nuns is a direct result of His Holiness' encouraging suggestion and generosity. His generous donation will fund translations of works prepared

by the Ministry of Religious and Cultural Affairs, to better understand the arguments of Tibetan Buddhist scholars, both favoring and opposing the institution of the Bhiksuni Sangha.

Buddhists around the world are following these recent developments with great interest. Because Buddhism is generally regarded as an egalitarian faith, with equal opportunities for spiritual development for women and men, it strikes many as odd or even hypocritical that women are barred from full ordination in some Buddhist traditions. The outcome of the Tibetan case will have implications for Buddhist women, not only in the Tibetan Buddhist diaspora – Bhutan, Nepal, Mongolia, the Indian Himalayas, and the Republics of Buryatia and Kalmykia – but also in Theravada countries such as Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand. A vote for bhiksuni ordination will be a vote for Buddhist women's religious rights and for gender equality everywhere.





## FULL ACCEPTANCE

by *Bhikkhu Sujato*

It was a time of deep magic. How could anyone ever forget it? The ground had been consecrated, chanted over in ancient Pali with all due solemnity and ceremony. For weeks I had prepared, sewing and dying robes, and learning the chanting. All these things aided the most important preparation, the readiness of the heart. Finally I awoke on the day itself and shaved my head freshly, so that I would be as bald as a new-born baby. It was the day of my higher ordination.

The ceremony had the dignified simplicity typical of the Thai forest tradition. My mother was present to offer my robes and other requisites. The ordination itself was held in the Uposatha Hall of my upajjhaya (preceptor), Than Chao Kuhn Maha Amon, a senior disciple of Ajahn Chah. A Sangha of more than ten bhikkhus gathered together in the center of the hall, presided over by the upajjhaya. Observers were permitted in the hall, but had to remain outside of arm's reach of the closely grouped monks.

The monks represented that most eminent spiritual community, the ordained heirs of the Buddha himself. More than that, they were my friends and peers, men with whom I shared a lifestyle, an understanding, and an aspiration incomprehensible to most. Surrounded by these men, I carefully repeated the words and phrases of the Pali exactly as had countless generations of bhikkhus before me. There was an interrogation, as the appointed delegates of the Sangha investigate whether the candidate is suitable or not. Then came the crucial part – the motion and three announcements. This is what we call a sanghakamma, a formal act of the Sangha, which can only be performed by a quorum of fully ordained bhikkhus or bhikkhunis. No single monastic can perform a sanghakamma. Although the upajjhaya is sometimes spoken of as performing an ordination, strictly speaking, the upajjhaya's role is as facilitator and mentor. The sanghakamma must be accomplished by the Sangha in complete consensus – if even one bhikkhu or bhikkhuni objects, the ordination is invalid.

The Pali word for ordination is upasampada. Etymologically, upasampada suggests “to come close, join together, enter into.” It is commonly used in the context of entering into an attainment of jhana or samadhi, where it refers to a coalescence or communion. It carries the nuance of finality or completion, and might even be used of a sacrificial victim. In the context of ordination, it suggests full acceptance. One is no longer on the fringes, in a twilight zone. There is a deep solemnity to this feeling of being totally embraced within such a sanctified community.

In the institutional structures of Buddhism, the monastic Sangha is the inner circle. It forms the core group of those who have totally dedicated their lives to the Dhamma. As well as the spiritual opportunities it gives, this worldly prestige has its dangers. Like any elite, the Sangha may easily

become corrupted and exclusivistic. One of the means to prevent this, which is embodied within the structure of the Dhamma-Vinaya, is the lack of discrimination. Membership in the Sangha is not dependent on caste, race, wealth, or any of the other irrelevant standards that an unjust society often uses to oppress its people. The Sangha is open to anyone with the necessary commitment and dedication. Except, of course, if you're a woman.

One of the hot topics in the Buddhist world today is the issue of women's ordination. We should all be familiar with the basic facts. The Buddha established a platform for the ordination of female bhikkhunis, in all essential ways similar to the male bhikkhus. The bhikkhunis thrived in India for many centuries and the order was established in Sri Lanka. According to records in the Chinese Tripitaka, the bhikkhuni lineage passed from Sri Lanka to China. While this might seem odd to us today, in fact, the historical links between Sri Lanka and China are well known, as shown, for example, by the existence of a Sri Lankan Vinaya commentary in Chinese. Subsequently, due to unknown reasons, the bhikkhuni tradition died out in Sri Lanka. It appears not to have been introduced to other countries such as Tibet and Thailand. But even today it flourishes in most of the countries whose primary Buddhist influence has come from China, such as Taiwan, Korea, and Vietnam.

Other countries have developed their own models for women's ordination. There are many sincere women who have chosen the ten-precept platform as a renunciate model and who find it beneficial. They should be supported, respected, and encouraged in their choice. It might be argued that monks are monks and nuns are nuns, and that most people are not even aware of the difference between a ten-precept nun and a bhikkhuni. But there is at least one group of people who are very aware of the difference – the bhikkhus. Upasampada is crucial to our sense of group identity, and we cannot help but see the ten-precept nuns as a distinct group. Moreover, only the bhikkhuni form can claim authority from the Vinaya itself. The ten-precept novice or samaneri status was clearly intended as a stepping-stone to full ordination, not as an alternative career choice. Only bhikkhunis can perform sanghakamma, and only bhikkhunis benefit from the complete and thorough training embodied in the Vinaya. The Buddha wanted female renunciates to live as bhikkhunis. It is no coincidence that, while women in all schools still await true equality, the opportunities and respect for nuns is invariably higher in those countries with a strong bhikkhuni tradition. The Vietnamese tradition even acknowledges a bhikkhuni in their traditional lineage of Sangha leaders.

In recent years women from Theravadin and Tibetan traditions have sought bhikkhuni ordination from the Chinese lineage in order to reinstate the bhikkhuni lineage as originally set up by the Buddha. This movement has been controversial, and, while gaining significant support from the Sangha and the public, has not received the blessing of the

majority of the male Sangha in the Theravadin and Tibetan traditions. But times are changing.

I am not very familiar with the Tibetan communities, so here I will speak only of the Theravadin response. Theravada monks tend to raise various “problems” with bhikkhunis. Indeed, a book was recently published in Thailand by a very prominent and relatively progressive monk under this very title, “Problems with Bhikkhunis.” These “problems” turn out to be questions of details of ordination lineages, how to adapt Vinaya rules to modern times, and so on. They are, without a single exception, trivialities of procedure and etiquette that have nothing to do with the essentials of spiritual life. No one has seriously questioned whether women are capable of living the holy life, whether they are capable of enlightenment, or whether they are capable of illuminating this world like the moon freed from the clouds.

In my opinion, this negative response has seriously skewed the debate. We spend our time arguing over the details and lose sight of the big picture. Of course, it is true we must look at the details, too. While some of the bhikkhus who oppose bhikkhuni ordination do so out of fear and attachment to power, others do so out of a genuine concern for Vinaya. The bhikkhus’ rules are difficult to keep, and the bhikkhunis’ are even more so. But if, instead of complaining about “problems with bhikkhunis” we were to celebrate the “opportunities of bhikkhunis,” we would see such things as mere management issues. I was recently privileged to attend the Global Buddhist Conference in Singapore and a Dhamma seminar in Kuala Lumpur that featured several outstanding bhikkhunis as teachers. In fact, good though the monk speakers were, I cannot deny that the nuns were overall more impressive in their Dhamma presentations. It is appalling to think what opportunities we all lose when women’s spirituality is denied.

We do not refuse to ordain a man because we think he might break some rules – although there are countless monks who flagrantly ignore the rules every day. There is probably not a single monk alive today who has not broken some Vinaya rules. The Buddha expected that the Sangha should keep the most important rules, such as celibacy, absolutely. But with the other rules, monks and nuns should try their best to keep them, and, in the event that a rule is broken, should carry out the appropriate penance. There is an assumed duty in the bhikkhus’ Vinaya that, when there is a sincere and dedicated applicant, the Sangha should ordain him, then take care of his training and education so that he can keep the rules as well as possible. The same should apply to the bhikkhunis. I believe that the Sangha is obliged to assist in performing upasampada for women, and is neglecting its duty if it does not. If those bhikkhus who are sincere and careful in their approach to Vinaya shy away from the “bhikkhuni problem” through fear of Vinaya violations, where else are the women to go but to those monks who are not sincere and careful in their Vinaya?

And how are we, as bhikkhus, to criticize the bhikkhunis for not keeping the rules, when we have neglected our duty of care and support?

When we take a closer look at some of the so-called problems, we see that they are not insurmountable; there is room to move. For example, the Vinaya says that a bhikkhu may admonish a bhikkhuni, but a bhikkhuni may not admonish a bhikkhu. This does not stand comparison with one of the fundamentals expressed in the Vinaya itself: “It is thus that there is growth in the Blessed One’s following, that is, with mutual admonishment and mutual rehabilitation.” Accordingly, there is apparently an allowance in at least one Vinaya recension for bhikkhunis to admonish bhikkhus, if it is in line with Dhamma. And it seems this exception was followed in ancient times, for there is a charming old tale of an arahant bhikkhuni at the time of Aśoka who repeatedly admonished a very senior but unenlightened bhikkhu. After following her advice he realized the Dhamma, and when he met the bhikkhuni later he thanked her, saying “Sister, it is all due to your effort.” Or to take another example, it is a serious offence for a bhikkhuni to travel without another bhikkhuni as companion. But at least one Vinaya – that of the Lokuttaravada school preserved in Sanskrit and discovered in Nepal – adds a crucial exemption: there is no offence if the bhikkhuni is without lust. These variations might be interpreted in various ways, but they clearly show that such issues were addressed in ancient communities of bhikkhunis practicing in India, and that a degree of flexibility in practice and interpretation was accepted.

But, as I keep saying, we should take care to avoid getting caught up in such skirmishes. We should keep our focus on the central meaning of upasampada and should support to the utmost any human being, regardless of race, status, or gender, who aspires to enter into such a communion. I have tried in my introduction to convey something of the emotional resonance of upasampada. Let us look a little more closely at the way the key features of the holy life are reflected in rules of speech that create a distinctive sense of community.

There are two central features of Buddhist monasticism, signifying the positive and negative sides of spiritual life. On the negative side, we aim to turn away from wrongdoing through following the restraints of our codes of conduct. On the positive side are the spiritual attainments for which the holy life is lived. In Pali, these two sides are sometimes referred to in a punning twin of words: apatti and samapatti. Apatti means disciplinary offence, while samapatti means attainment. So we can describe the Buddhist monastic path as undertaking an ethic of discipline in order to assist in spiritual attainment. These are matters that need to be discussed as a normal part of our monastic lives. From time to time, we need to talk about Vinaya offences, for example, if there is a monk whose bad behavior is harming the good name of Buddhism. And again, we sometimes must openly talk with each other about spiritual attainments –





experiences in meditation, etc. But it is often not appropriate to discuss such matters in public. So it is precisely these two topics and no others that a bhikkhu or bhikkhuni is forbidden under Vinaya to discuss with those not fully ordained. Even novices (samaneras and samaneris) are excluded. The Vinaya restrictions against discussing offences and attainments with those not fully ordained is clearly aimed at creating a degree of separation between the lay and monastic communities. These are in-house matters, and if they are to be discussed outside the Sangha this must be done indirectly, with discretion. If women are not permitted to become bhikkhunis, they will forever be excluded from open discussions of these core matters with their spiritual peers simply and solely because they are women.

I think this is a straightforward case of discrimination. It is, as some women have reminded us, a human rights issue. It has become embarrassing and will become an outright disgrace if Buddhism is publicly seen to contravene internationally accepted standards of gender equality. If the male Sangha is intransigent, the matter may end up in the courts. Again, we seem to be insisting on details while ignoring principles. It is one of the most basic principles of Vinaya that we do not do things that infringe upon the accepted norms of society. The Buddha frequently laid down rules, not because he thought the matter was important, but because of public complaints. The rule that a bhikkhuni should always bow to a bhikkhu was specifically justified by saying that this was the accepted standard in other religious communities. Now times have changed, yet we still insist on ancient norms of social propriety. In fact, things should really be the other way around. The Sangha should not have to be dragged kicking and screaming towards simple justice and fairness; we should be leading the way. We should be on the cutting edge of social reform, setting an example for the broader community to follow. It is only by acting in this way that the Sangha can maintain its moral authority and its relevance.

Perhaps the most serious Vinaya issue is the question of whether there can be any bhikkhunis at all. To understand this, we must appreciate the thinking of many Theravadin bhikkhus, who often believe that Mahayana monks and nuns are not really ordained; that is, they are not truly bhikkhus and bhikkhunis. Several reasons are given: Mahayana monks and nuns recite sanghakamma in a different language (although the Buddha said we should learn Dhamma in our own dialect); they do not keep Vinaya (although, in fact, the Mahayana Sangha keep the same major rules as the Theravada and simply interpret some minor rules differently); and they do not follow ordination procedure properly (although the crucial elements in upasampada are the “motion and three announcements” that constitute the sanghakamma; if minor details are changed this does not affect the validity of the ordination). Since, they say, Mahayana is not really Buddhism and since Mahayana monks and nuns are not really bhikkhus and bhikkhunis, it follows that the possibility to reintroduce the Theravadin bhikkhuni tradition does not exist. Accordingly, Thai monks recite in the introduction to their Patimokkha each fortnight that there is no need to teach the bhikkhunis “because they do not exist any more.”

This attitude towards purity and validity of ordination lineages at times verges on the mystical. I will take this seriously if I meet a single Theravadin bhikkhu who is able to prove beyond reasonable doubt that his ordination stems from an unbroken transmission reaching back to the Buddha. Of course, this cannot be done. All we can do is to do our best. We find a good community of well-practicing bhikkhus, follow the training, and perform the ceremony as well as possible. If it somehow happened that the ordination lineage had been, unbeknownst to us, broken long ago, what difference would it really make?

Leaving aside the historical question of the degree to which Mahayana teachings can be traced to the Buddha

himself, we should be clear that there is no Mahayana Vinaya. The bodhisattva precepts taken by Mahayana monastics are additional to and build on the foundation of the basic Vinaya, in exactly the same way that the Mahayana sutras build on the doctrines of the early Nikayas/Āgamas. The Chinese Mahayana Sangha follows the Vinaya of the Dharmaguptaka school, while the Tibetans follow the Mulasarvastivada. These Vinayas are astoundingly similar to the Theravada and obviously stem from an ancestral Vinaya that existed before the time of the schisms. The Vinayas themselves do not contain the words Mahayana, Theravada, and so on. From a Vinaya perspective there is no such thing as a Mahayana bhikkhu or a Theravada bhikkhuni. There are just bhikkhus and bhikkhunis, sons and daughters of the Sakyan sage. So while traditional Theravadins might see the introduction of the Chinese bhikkhuni lineage as a threat to the purity of their school, I see it as an opportunity to re-emphasize and re-establish the common basis of all the schools.

Who possessed the authority to lay down rules and procedures that would be accepted unanimously by all monks and nuns in all traditions, spreading over half the civilized world for 2,500 years? I only know one monk who could do that, one man who, through his unsurpassed compassion and wisdom, dared to prove that women were capable of the highest enlightenment. It is indeed recorded in the scriptures of at least three ancient schools that women, with their “two-fingered wisdom,” were incapable of enlightenment. However, it was not the Buddha who said this, but Mara the Evil One. To this insult the arahant bhikkhuni Soma scornfully replied:

What does womanhood matter at all  
When the mind is concentrated in samadhi  
When knowledge flows on steadily  
As one rightly sees into Dhamma?

One to whom it might occur  
“I am woman” or “I am man”  
Or “I am anything at all”  
Is fit for Mara to address!  
(Sutta Nipata 5.2)

*Bhikkhu Sujato is an Australian Buddhist monk. He currently resides at Santi Forest Monastery, a forest monastery in the tradition of Ajahn Chah, outside of Sydney, Australia. This article is reprinted by permission from the Malaysian publication Eastern Horizon 14 (August 2004).*



## DHAMMADHARINI: A NEW BUDDHIST VIHARA

Dhammadharini, a new Buddhist vihara for Buddhist women, is currently being founded in Northern California. Dhammadharini means “holder” or “upholder” of the Buddhadhamma and connotes a “flow” or “stream” of teachings and practice – in the feminine tense. Dhammadharini is a charitable religious non-profit organization in the making. The founders are dedicated to supporting and providing the basic requisites of Buddhist women dedicated to the cultivating and realizing the path. The aim is to share the fruits and benefits of our realization with the local community, the whole human family, and all forms of life.

To this end, Dhammadharini supports the opportunity for full monastic ordination for Buddhist women who are dedicated to practicing and teaching in the Theravada tradition. The organization is committed to supporting opportunities for women’s monastic practice, at any level of training in the precepts, according to each person’s capabilities.

In response to the many requests for a place for women’s residential monastic retreat in Northern California, Dhammadharini’s first step is to open vihara for bhikkhunis in the San Francisco Bay Area. A “vihara” is a monastic practice center that provides the basic requisites – lodging, alms food, medicine, and robes for female monastics. It is also a place of refuge for Buddhist women who are called deepen their practice in monastic retreat. The vihara will further provide opportunities for Buddhists in the Bay Area who wish to practice generosity through supporting the monastic Sangha in North America.

Founding abbess of the vihara is Ayya Tathaaloka, an American-born bhikkhuni with a background in Zen and Theravadin Buddhism. Ayya Tathaaloka began monastic life 16 years ago and received higher ordination in 1997 at an ecumenical ordination ceremony conducted by the late Bhante Ratanasara in Los Angeles. She and Ayya Sucinta Bhikkhuni began Dhammadharini Vihara’s first vassa (rains retreat) on August 21, 2005.

An blessing ceremony to open Dhammadharini Vihara was conducted by Ajahn Maha Prasert, the abbot of Wat Buddhanusorn, on the full moon of August 20. The vihara is located at just off the Mission entrance to the Niles Canyon Scenic Highway, at 37959 Essanay Place, Fremont, CA 94536.

Friends are welcome to join the residents for daily morning and evening chanting, meditation, Dhamma discussion, or the morning offering of alms. Meditation instruction and Buddhist counseling are available regularly by appointment. Personal monastic retreat opportunities are available for women, with prior arrangement and approval, on an ongoing basis, according to the vihara’s capacity.

For more information, contact Ayya Tathaaloka by phone (510) 791-2331 or email: tathaaloka@msn.com. To offer alms food to the monastic community or in other ways, contact Radhika at (510) 823-7725 or rkapur99@yahoo.com.



## BURMESE BUDDHIST NUN DETAINED FOR RELIGIOUS REASONS

A Buddhist nun was arrested on May 27 and has been detained for requesting the highest religious authorities in Burma to recognize her as a "bhikkhuni," according to sources from her relatives.

40-year old Daw Thisawati is the daughter of an ex-army officer Hla Win and his wife Mya Thein. Thisawati graduated from the then Rangoon Arts and Science University (RASU) with a Burmese Literature degree in 1984 and won several gold medals at artistic talent shows in the university.

Despite her successes, Thisawati turned her back on the world and joined the religious order in 1986, according to a famous actress. In 1988, she sat junior theological exams and came first in the whole country and in 1991 she sat senior exams and came first again. In 1993, she passed Damasariya exams with flying colours. She went on to study Buddhist theology in Sri Lanka and gained her Masters. In 2003, she continued to study for a Ph.D. in Philosophy and repeatedly applied for the status of a bhikkhuni in accordance with the religious rites. But the highest religious authorities in Burma, Sangha Mahanayaka rejected her applications, and she was conferred upon the status of bikuni in Sri Lanka, in accordance with the religious rites.

In January 2005, Thisawati returned to Burma and applied for the status again, citing the fact that a Buddhist nun is allowed to become a bikuni by Buddhist religious laws. She was arrested on May 27 by the Ministry for Religion with Acts 295 and 195a, for allegedly attempting to collapse and divide the Burmese Buddhist Sasana.

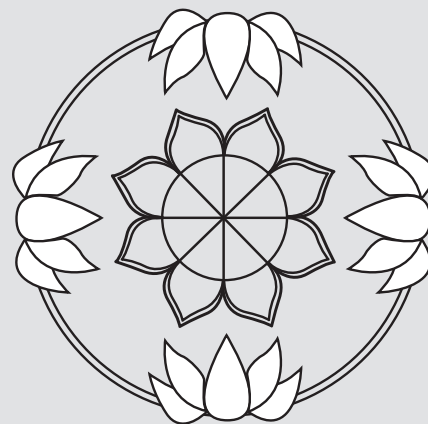
When DVB contacted an elderly abbot and a member of the Sangha Mahanayaka, he said that he hadn't heard about the arrest and that the case demands careful considerations, but he also said that Thisawati should not have been detained in the first place either.

*Reprinted from <http://english.dvb.no/news.php?id=5068>. Daw Thisawati was subsequently released.*



### The Meaning of the Sakyadhita Logo

The Sakyadhita logo is a combination of several important Buddhist symbols. The Dharma wheel in the center symbolizes the Buddhist teachings. The lotus is a symbol of purity and human potential, and is also associated with women. Taken together, the logo represents women's ability to purify their minds and realize their full human potential through the teachings of the Buddha.



## FUJINKAI: THE DEDICATED WOMEN OF THE DAIFUKUJI SOTO MISSION

by Mary Beth Jiko Nakade

In Hawaii, women have been strong supporters of Buddhist temples for the past century, ever since Japanese Buddhism took root in the islands. Not long after each temple was established, Buddhist women banded together into organized groups called Fujinkai ("women's associations") and began the work of supporting their ministers. In addition to taking care of their children and husbands, farms, and businesses, they attended services, cooked, cleaned, received religious and cultural education, raised funds, and enjoyed social events at their temples. Over the years, Fujinkai members have become temple leaders who serve with great energy and devotion. At the Daifukuji Soto Mission in Kona, Hawai'i, the women of Fujinkai are an indispensable part of temple life and operations.

First organized in 1915 by the founding minister of Daifukuji, the Daifukuji Fujinkai met monthly for services, but their activities were limited since many of the women were coffee farmers who worked alongside their husbands from the pre-dawn hours until dark. Over time, however, the women were able to learn such things as sewing, crafts, ethics, and music from the wives of the ministers. At first the minister appointed the officers of the Fujinkai, but since the late 1950s the officers have been elected by the members themselves.

Daifukuji Temple currently has 87 Fujinkai members and the officers of the group meet monthly. In addition to preparing delicious meals that are served on special occasions, Fujinkai members also visit members who are ill and make annual donations of handmade craft items such as baby blankets and bibs to the local hospitals and nursing homes. They spend countless hours preparing for the temple's annual building-fund bazaar and organize other smaller fund-raisers, such as sushi and manju sales, for their group. The funds earned are used to attend the annual United Hawai'i Soto Shu Women's Association Conference, where they meet with Fujinkai members from Soto temples throughout the State of Hawai'i. Recently the Fujinkai even organized a successful blood drive for the Blood Bank of Hawai'i, which was held in the temple's social hall.

Among the Fujinkai members are those who also serve as officers and directors on a temple board once dominated by men. These women freely express their views and opinions and volunteer to head major temple projects. They are valued for their wisdom and dedication and the temple would not operate efficiently without them. Because of the contributions made by these intelligent and hardworking women, Buddhist temples in Hawai'i have flourished for a hundred years and will continue to spread the Dharma and serve their communities in the years to come.

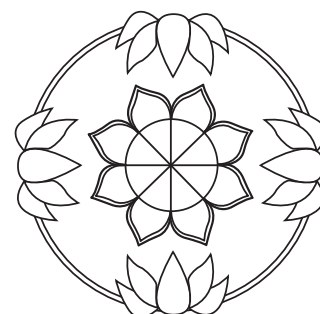
*Rev. Mary Beth Jiko Nakade is an ordained minister at Daifukuji Soto Mission. She may be contacted by phone at (808) 322-3524.*



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Ahna Fender Becky Paxton and Karma  
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Ahna Fender





## UNBENDING TRADITION: Is a Ban on Women Visiting Sacred Sites at Odds with Buddhism?

by Subhatra Bhumiprabhas and Aree Chaisatien

A few weeks ago in Chiang Mai [Thailand], chilli and salt were ceremoniously burned in a bid to remove Rabiabrat Pongpanit from the Senate. The ancient curse has shown no signs of ousting Rabiabrat, a member of the Senate Commission on Women, Youth, and Elderly Affairs, but it certainly kept alive the uproar over her criticism of a Lanna custom barring women from some temples' inner sanctums. The respective holies of holies at Chiang Mai's Wat Suthep, Wat Phra That Doi Tung in Chiang Rai, and Wat Phra That Hariphunchai in Lamphun are all off limits to women, according to the tradition, because they contain sacred relics, specifically bone fragments believed to be those of Lord Buddha.

"Such 'Buddhist and Brahmin traditions' gave men a chance to raise their stature in the strongly matriarchal society of the pre-Buddhist Lanna kingdom," Chiang Mai University lecturer Thanet Chareonmuang wrote in *Matichon Sudsubda* newspaper. "Although women play limited roles in religious activities, it doesn't mean they're discriminated against in other areas," he wrote.

But no one has been able to explain why women today, in a nation that has come to respect human rights, can't visit such sites and worship alongside men, says Krittiya Achavanichkul of Mahidol University's Institute for Population and Social Research. Krittiya recently helped organize a seminar at Thammasat University to address the validity of such practices. There, women's-rights activists spoke out against traditional beliefs they regard as less than equitable.

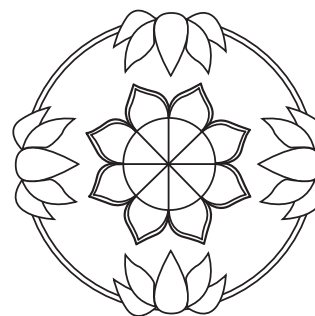
Barring women from holy sites also denies them spiritual wisdom and opportunities for mental growth, complained Shalardchai Ramitanondh of Chiang Mai University. The Buddha always made a point of challenging the Brahmins who dominated his native India, said Suwanna Sathanand of Chulalongkorn University's Philosophy Department. Most Brahmins in that era, for example, believed they had been born from the mouth of Brahma, the Creator, she said, but the Buddha argued that everyone was born of a human mother.

The Buddha's teachings were, of course, ultimately embraced across most of Asia, but it wasn't long before beliefs in the magical proprieties of certain places – and the kind of discrimination he stood against – were finding new believers. "[The Buddhist] sense of challenging authority has long been missing in Thai society, where Buddhism, as a religion of wisdom and reason, is believed to bloom fully," Suwanna lamented. "Let us not forget," Chiang Mai University's Somchai Preechasilpakul wrote in a weekly [magazine], "that traditions are relative to society in certain situations, and when society changes, traditions should also be dynamic."

Suwanna suggested that such customs — unquestioningly perpetuated simply because they've existed so long — are doomed to decay. They need genuine belief and respect to prosper. She acknowledged, though, that unchecked rationalism can be detrimental to both culture and community rights, since respecting appropriate traditions is essential to society's well-being.

Suwanna expressed hope that the issue of whether women can visit holy sites will be resolved with mutual respect and compassion, and that Buddhism will be the guiding force.

*This article is reprinted from The Nation (Bangkok), August 15, 2004.*



## NEW BOOKS ON BUDDHIST WOMEN

Paula Kane Robinson Arai. *Women Living Zen: Japanese Soto Buddhist Nuns*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

James C. Dobbins. *Letters of the Nuns Eshinni: Images of Pure Land Buddhism in Medieval Japan*.

Christina Feldman. *Woman Awake: Women Practicing Buddhism*. Berkeley: Rodmell Press, 2005.

Kurtis R. Schaeffer. *Himalayan Hermitess: The Life of a Tibetan Buddhist Nun*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Juo-hsueh Shih. *Controversies Over Buddhist Nuns*. London: Pali Text Society, 2000.

Sharon A. Suh. *Being Buddhist in a Christian World: Gender and Community in a Korean American Temple*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2004.

Karma Lekshe Tsomo, ed. *Bridging Worlds: Buddhist Women's Voices Across Generations*. Taipei: Yuan Chuan Press, 2004.

--- *Buddhist Women and Social Justice: Ideals, Challenges, and Achievements*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2004.

--- *Out of the Shadows: Socially Engaged Buddhist Women*. Delhi: Indian Books Centre. Forthcoming.

Serenity Young. *Courtesans and Tantric Consorts: Sexualities in Buddhist Narrative, Iconography, and Ritual*. RoutledgeCurzon, 2002.

## 9th SAKYADHITA INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON BUDDHIST WOMEN

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

June 17 to 21, 2006

### **"Buddhist Women in the Global Multicultural Community"**

The 9th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women will be held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from June 17 to 21, 2006. The conference will be followed by a temple tour from June 22 to 24. The conference is an opportunity to explore Malaysia, a multi-cultural, multi-religious country that is home to a variety of Buddhist traditions. Further conference information and the conference registration form are available on the Sakyadhita website: [www.sakyadhita.org](http://www.sakyadhita.org).

### **Tentative Conference Program**

#### **Saturday, June 17 Morning**

##### *Opening Ceremony*

#### **Saturday, June 17 Afternoon**

##### *Buddhist Women of Malaysia*

#### **Sunday, June 18 Morning**

##### *Buddhist Women Across Cultures:*

##### *New Roles and Opportunities*

"Bhiksunis as Leaders in Contemporary Taiwan"

Hong Xiang Shih

"Buddhism, Shamanism, and Women in Korean History"

Jeong Hee Kim

"Thai Buddhist Nuns and the Thai Buddhist Nuns' Institute"

Maechi Kritsana

"Buddhist Women of Bulgaria"

Ludmila Klasanova

"Transforming Differences into Strengths:

The Case of Buddhists in Singapore"

Tan Ai-Girl

#### **Sunday, June 18 Afternoon**

##### *Race, Class, and Gender in the Buddhist Diaspora*

"Some Problems of Diffusion Dharma"

Zorigma Budaeva

"Gender and Religious Identity Among Buddhist

Nuns in Thailand"

Lisa Battaglia

"What Does Buddhism have to do with Black Women?"

Zenju Earthlyn M. Manuel

#### **Monday, June 19 Morning**

##### *Images of Enlightenment*

"Depictions Of Women In Early Buddhist Sculpture"

Yojana Bhagat

"Contextualizing Quan Yin:

Buddhist

Philosophy and the Status of Women"

Adrienne Cochran

"Powerful Female Characters in the Jatakas"

Meena Talim

#### **Monday, June 19 Afternoon**

##### *Dharma and Crosscultural Communication*

"Teaching Meditation Across Cultures"

Hue Can

"Communicating Effectively in the Buddhist Community"

Pit Cheng Chan

"Buddhist Women in Canada: Identity and Influence"

Mavis Fenn

"Singing the Dharma: Practice Through Music"

Hyeseon Sunim

#### **Tuesday, June 20 Morning**

##### *Dialogue Across Cultures: Links and Common Ground*

"Gendered Practice: An Irigarayan and Personal

Exploration of Feminist Buddhist Practice"

Jean Byrn

"Dhammamata Hermitage: Women Inheritors of Bhikkhu

Buddhadasa's Dharma Teachings"

Tomomi Ito

"Ethics, Philosophy, and Ritual in Multicultural Nepal"

Nivedita Mishra

"Buddhist Women and Peacemaking in a Multicultural World"

Karma Lekshe Tsomo

#### **Tuesday, June 20 Afternoon**

##### *Bhiksuni Vinaya and Full Ordination for Women*

"Buddhism, Gender, and Social Change in

Contemporary Taiwan"

Yu-chen Li

"Visible and Invisible Obstacles of the Bhikkhuni

Movement in Thailand"

Kulavir Pipat



"Generation to Generation: Transmitting the Bhiksuni Lineage"  
Jampa Tsedroen

"Buddhist Monasticism in a Consumer Culture"  
Tenzin Palmo

### Wednesday, June 21 Morning

#### *Innovative Institutions: New Communities for Buddhist Women*

"Starting a Tibetan Learning Center for Nuns in South India"  
Tenzin Yangdon

"Buddhist Women at the Temple Wat Paknam in Bangkok"  
Amphai Tansomboon

"Ashram Mata Meditation Center for Women: Location for a Coming Bhikkhuni Sangha"  
Tipawan Tipayatuss

"Initial 6 Years of the First Buddhist College for Nuns And Laywomen in Thailand"

Srisalab Upamai, Yuphin Duangjun, and Monica Lindberg Falk

### Wednesday, June 21 Afternoon

#### *Translating the Dharma: Buddhism, Multiculturalism, and Language*

"The Name of the Nun: Towards the Use of Inclusive Language and True Equality in the Buddhist Community"  
Christie Yu-Ling Chang

"Translating the Dharma and Gender Discrimination: The Blame Should Be on Us"  
Shobha Rani Dash

"Loosing Ground in Gender Equality: The Nepalese Buddhist Experience of a Multicultural Society"  
Sumon K. Tuladhar

### WORKSHOPS

#### *(concurrently with discussion groups)*

Faith Adiele  
"Unlearning Racism/Classism/Sexism Through Narrative"

Peter Chen (with Isabela Chen)  
"The Heart in Buddhist Activism"

Margi Gregory  
"Peacemaker Circle Practice"

Margaret Krebs  
"Getting Organized: Buddhist Women and Organizational Development"

Malia Dominica Wong  
"You Don't Understand Me": Respectful Listening Skills

Yuk Suat Lee (with Barbara Yen and Low Mi Yen)  
"Enhancing Leadership Skills for Buddhist Women"

### ALLIES FOR SOCIAL CHANGE:

An International Buddhism and Peacebuilding Course for Women

The International Women's Partnership for Peace and Justice (IWP) organized a 10-day course for women from August 17 - 26, 2005, in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The theme of the course was "Allies for Social Change: Buddhism and Peacebuilding." The course brought together an international community of women to learn and share with one another. The focus was bringing a Buddhist framework to cultivating inner peace while engaging in social action in our communities and the world. The course covered:

- An introduction to Buddhist teachings
- Bringing a Buddhist and feminist analysis to contemporary social issues
- Buddhist feminist understandings of structural violence, power, privilege and social action
- Building peace within through daily mindfulness practice
- Women and spirituality
- Exposure trips to communities in northern Thailand integrating Buddhism and social action
- Daily meditation and yoga

The course was open to women of all ages, cultures, religions, and sexual preferences. Women who are engaged in social change and interested in doing so were especially welcomed. It was an opportunity for open sharing, learning, and challenging themselves in a supportive environment will do well in this workshop.

Women who participated in the course had an opportunity to meet and share ideas with women from diverse cultures and regions who have a common commitment to social change. At the forum, women from the global South and North interacted with mutual respect and understanding. The course allowed time and space for personal growth and reflection in a supportive environment, as well as increasing the participants knowledge and skills in working for social change. Greater exposure to local and international women's work and peace activism was of great benefit to all. Daily yoga, meditation, and mindfulness practice were incorporated as ways of developing inner peace. Living simply in peaceful surroundings of a rural Thai village, eating healthy, organic food, was nourishing for body and mind.

Additional events are planned in the coming year, including a Mindfulness Meditation Retreat for Activists (Feb. 9-13), Women's Writing Retreat (Feb. 16-19), International Retreat for Lesbian Activists (July 4-14), Women Allies for Social Change: Buddhism and Peacebuilding (July 24-Aug. 3), and Mindfulness Meditation Retreat for Activists (Sept. 7-11).

All events take place in a village about 40 minutes north of Chiangmai, Northern Thailand. For further information, see: [www.womenforpeaceandjustice.org](http://www.womenforpeaceandjustice.org) or contact Ginger Norwood at [ginger@womenforpeaceandjustice.org](mailto:ginger@womenforpeaceandjustice.org).

# *Sākyadhitā Membership*

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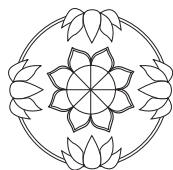
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