

Sakyadhita

International Association of Buddhist Women

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Newsline



The Daughters of the Buddha Meet for the First Time in Bodhgaya, 1987

HAPPY 20TH ANNIVERSARY SAKYADHITA!

Evelyn Diane Cowie

February 2007 marked the 20th anniversary of the 1st International Conference on Buddhist Nuns held in Bodhgaya, India in 1987. This landmark conference was organized by Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, Chatsumarn Kabil Singh (now Ven. Dhammananda), and the late Ven. Ayya Khema, with help from other nuns, monks, and laypeople. Towards the end of this conference, on February 16, 1987, Sakyadhita was born. It was incorporated as a nonprofit organization when Ven. Karuna Dharma filed its Articles of Incorporation on August 6, 1987, with the State of California.

Over the intervening years, Sakyadhita has hosted a series of international conferences: Bangkok, Thailand (1991); Colombo, Sri Lanka (1993); Ladakh, India (1995); Phnom Penh, Cambodia (1997); Lumbini, Nepal (2000); Taipei, Taiwan (2002); Seoul, Korea (2004); and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2006). Future international conferences are scheduled for Mongolia (2008) and Vietnam (2010). Regional Sakyadhita conferences have been held at: Santa Barbara (1988); Claremont Graduate University (1998); Cologne (2000); and Smith College (2006). The conferences have resulted in a body of published scholarship on Buddhism by Buddhist women: *Sakyadhita: Daughters of the Buddha* (1988); *Buddhism Through American Women's Eyes* (1995); *Sisters in Solitude: Two Traditions of Monastic Ethics for Women* (1996); *Buddhist Women Across Cultures: Realizations* (1999); *Innovative Buddhist Women: Swimming Against the Stream* (2000); *Buddhist Women and Social Justice: Ideals, Challenges, and Achievements* (2004); *Bridging Worlds: Buddhist Women's Voices across Generations* (2004); and *Out of the Shadows: Socially Engaged Buddhist Women* (2006). An anthology based on the Sakyadhita conference in Malaysia, *Buddhist Women in a Global Multicultural Community*, will appear soon.

Many other accomplishments, not as obvious but equally remarkable, are discussed in this issue by the founding women of Sakyadhita. To commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the historic nuns' conference and the founding of Sakyadhita, individuals who participated or attended the conference were invited to share their reflections on the conference, Sakyadhita, and the Buddhist women's movement with the readership. Their reflections form this special commemorative issue.

In twenty short years, through the dedication and hard work of its founders, members, donors, and volunteers, Sakyadhita has earned its recognition as the international voice of Buddhist women. Congratulations to all the ordained and lay women and men who have participated in and supported Sakyadhita and the Buddhist women's movement throughout the years! May Sakyadhita flourish for generations to come!

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Buddhism. Her interests include exploring the relationship between Buddhism and healing, right livelihood business, Dharma-inspired management of nonprofit organizations, and end-of-life decision making for Buddhists. Originally from Long Island, New York, she now lives in Maryland and enjoys working as a volunteer for Sakyadhita.

AUSPICIOUS BEGINNINGS: THE INCEPTION OF SAKYADHITA

Bhikṣuni Karma Lekshe Tsomo

Until 1987, most Buddhist women lived isolated lives in their own communities, without even meeting Buddhists of other traditions. The 300 million Buddhist women in the world constituted a significant silent majority. If the uncounted millions of Buddhist women in China and North Korea are added to that figure, this silent majority becomes even more significant. One big change in the last 20 years is that Buddhist women are no longer isolated. The electronic revolution has made organizing women much easier than before. Since 1987, Sakyadhita has put new technologies to work to ensure that Buddhist women can no longer be ignored.

The Genesis of the Conference

In 1986, I was admitted to the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics in Dharamsala, India, due to the kindness of H.H. the Dalai Lama. As a result, my own educational goals were furthered, but I realized that the majority of nuns in India did not enjoy the same opportunities I had. Nuns generally lacked the family support systems of laywomen and also lacked the monastic support systems afforded to monks. It was hard for me to reconcile the Buddha's egalitarian social philosophy with the stark contrast between the living conditions of monks and nuns that I saw all around me. Most nuns were living in poverty, without adequate nutrition, healthcare, education, or psychological support. Some were homeless, living in makeshift shelters built of packing boxes and discarded tin.

In the early 1980s, some friends and I began to discuss this sad situation. We had all noticed a vivid discrepancy between the living conditions, respect, and community support for monks and nuns. As I talked with women in Dharamsala and traveled to other countries, I found that the same discrepancy in living standards and opportunities prevailed in other Buddhist countries, too. From among the many letters I received from abroad, those from Ayya Khema in Sri Lanka and Dr. Chatsumarn Kabil Singh in Thailand seemed especially concerned. Discussions with people traveling through Dharamsala revealed that the gender imbalance was not limited to India, but existed in other Buddhist societies, too. Over tea one day in my mud hut in Dharamsala, an American nun named Kunchock and I discussed the idea of bringing Buddhist women together to discuss these problems. We thought that Bodhgaya, the legendary site of the Buddha's enlightenment and a popular place of pilgrimage, would be the ideal location. I wrote to Ayya Khema and Chatsumarn about the idea of a gathering and they asked me to organize it, since I was living in India.

When I began to organize, however, I was totally clueless. I had never attended a conference in my life, so I really had no idea what one was supposed to look like. In fact, I had zero interest in organizations. The only organization I had ever joined was the Malibu Surfing Association. Nevertheless, because of the urgency of the situation, I agreed to take on the task. On an ancient Brother



H. H. the Dalai Lama Inaugurates the 1st International Conference on Buddhist Nuns

typewriter, I began to laboriously type the addresses of people who might be interested onto index cards and arranged them alphabetically in a shoe box. These were the beginnings of the Sakyadhita mailing list that is still being used today. In Kotwali Bazaar in lower Dharamsala, I printed up invitations and began to send them out all over the world. The mail from India in those days took about a month in each direction and often got lost. As replies started to trickle in, we realized that people around the world were concerned about the situation of nuns and eager to discuss what could be done to help them. When I sent out the invitations, I thought that a few dozen people would turn up for an informal gathering where we could chat and compare our experiences. I never dreamed that over a thousand people would attend the opening ceremony.

From the very beginning, we decided on an inclusive approach for the gathering. We were clear that everyone should be invited to the conference, regardless of gender, social status, or religious affiliation. Ayya Khema was adamant that the main topic of discussion should be Buddhist nuns, since the situation of the nuns was so pathetic at the time. She was a courageous supporter of bhiksuni ordination and received full ordination herself in Los Angeles the following year. We agreed that this first gathering would be open to everyone, but focus on Buddhist nuns, and subsequent gatherings would address the many other concerns of Buddhist women.

One evening as I was meditating, I heard a distressed voice in the forest peal out in a deep Texan accent, "Help! Help me! I'm lost!" I grabbed a flashlight and went outside into the dark night to find the source of this urgent call for help. Floundering in the darkness was an American woman who had lost the path on the way back to her hotel. Although I was night blind, I somehow managed to guide her back to the Bhagsu Hotel, but thought nothing about it.

The next day, I met the woman again in Macleod Ganj. She told me her name was Elda Hartley and she was a filmmaker from Connecticut. When I told her about the conference we were planning, she said she would like to make a film about it. Then she asked, "How much money do you have for organizing the conference?" I answered sincerely that I didn't have a cent. "Well, where are you going to get the money?" she asked, to which I replied, "I honestly have no idea." Elda responded by offering to loan me \$5000 for the conference expenses. I had been struggling even to pay \$5 a month for rent at that time and such a huge amount of money was beyond comprehension. "But you



don't even know me!" I protested. "I know you," she said. "But what if we don't recoup our expenses?" I asked. "Then it will be a donation," she replied. After the conference, she produced a film called "In Search of a Holy Man" that told the story of the conference.¹

Exhilaration in Bodhgaya

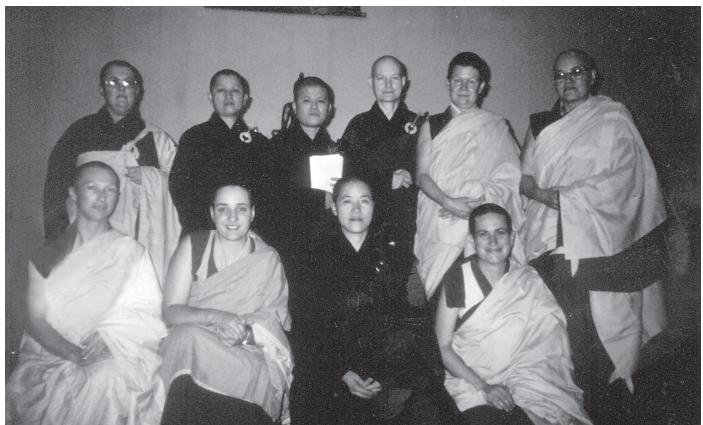
Months of flurried correspondence ensued, as registrations trickled in and we struggled to book accommodations and make other arrangements by post. The minute classes ended for winter break, I traveled to Bodhgaya in a third-class sleeper with four nuns from Tilokpur, about a month ahead of the opening date. Karma Dechen led the group and made sure we found seats and refreshments on the 48-hour marathon journey. Thousands of miles of wheat fields passed by the window, as we mindfully watched over all our kitchen equipment and conference supplies.

Arriving in Bodhgaya, we appealed to Bhante U Nyaneinda, abbot of the Burmese Vihar, to provide shelter for the participants. At that time, the idea of a Buddhist women's conference was quite radical. In some quarters, it was even perceived to be threatening. Covertly, by the hand of monk messengers, I received several anonymous notes: "Why are you doing this?" "Are you trying to compete with the monks?" "What is your motivation?" Apparently there were fears in some quarters that we had a strong "feminist agenda" that might harm Buddhism. Fortunately, without hesitation, full of wisdom and compassion, the abbot gave us the run of the monastery.

Straightaway, we set about painting banners and making jam. This was my first experience of working with volunteers and I was naive enough to be surprised when people failed to do what they agreed to do. In hindsight, I admit this was my first full realization that people have different gifts. When we needed someone to paint the banners, a woman told us she was an artist. We gave her the paints, brushes, fabric, and instructions on what to paint, and went off to tend to other tasks. When we returned a few hours later, we were astonished to see an abstract painting reminiscent of Chagall! Picking up the pieces, we hurried off to buy new fabric. We were crushed at the blow to our budget, but the conference must go on!

When the team of painters finished their work, we rounded up some fellows to help hang the banners all over town. We hardly had time to breathe a sigh of relief and grab a cup of tea before we discovered that some of the fellows had not hung the banners at all, but had made off with the fabric. Meanwhile, we noticed that some Tibetans were shaking their heads, visibly disturbed at the sight of the banners. When we asked why, they said that the nun's robe was on the wrong shoulder! By this time, it was too late and costly to paint them all again, so we figured they could step behind the banner and view the nun's robe in reverse from the other side.

One night during the preparations, I was suddenly awakened by a knocking on the door and turned on the flashlight to discover that it was 3 a.m. Opening the door, I saw a Gandhian figure holding a small cloth bundle and a nun dressed in white. As I wandered into the night to rustle up some accommodations for them, I realized that the figure was the highly esteemed monk Maha Ghosananda, patriarch of the Cambodian community in the United States. He had flown this American novice nun all the way from the New England Peace Pagoda in Leverett, Massachusetts, to attend the conference. Clearly, it is much more valuable to have monks as allies than as adversaries!



International Bhiksuni Gather for the Recitation of the Pratimoksa in Bodhgaya

Somehow we got the bright idea to offer a *sanghadana* (meal offering to the Sangha) for all the abbots in Bodhgaya, along with their entourages and the nuns attending the conference. On the first day, we wanted to offer lunch to the Sangha just before the opening ceremony. The Mahabodhi Society offered a large room as the dining hall and people happily made monetary offerings to buy the food. The next decision was what kind of food to serve. My first thought, of course, was Chinese vegetarian, so I went to the Chinese temple and requested the women there to cook for the *sanghadana*. The women, mostly from the Chinese community in Calcutta, were delighted to help and said they would organize all the shopping and preparations. As the big day approached, the excitement was palpable.

Wendy Barzetovic agreed to be in charge of catering and worked tirelessly with the Tilokpur nuns to beautify the hall. Together, they arranged the seating for monks and nuns in one hall and seating for laypeople in another. This was the first time many Theravada monks had ever taken a meal in the same room with nuns. Moreover, they were seated at tables of the same height as the nuns, an experience most of them had never had.

The Tibetan nuns and the Chinese laywomen labored tirelessly to prepare a sumptuous lunch with many courses, fit for royalty. The sun was beating down and I remember carrying a big case of chilled soft drinks on my back to provide some relief. White-clad Sri Lankan women served the dishes to the monastics flawlessly, in traditional style, with respectful curtsies all around. As the *piece de resistance*, Wendy and her catering team had prepared offerings for each monk and nun – toothbrushes, handkerchiefs, soap, toothpaste, and so on – and placed them artistically at the side of each person's place at the table. Later, we discovered that the security guards had pinched all the offerings they could carry!

As soon as the monastics finished their meal, we ushered His Holiness into a reception room and introduced some of the leading nuns and laywomen from various countries. Gracious as always, he gave each one his full attention and a genuine, warm smile. Soon, it was time to begin the opening ceremony, so the Tibetan nuns rushed out to usher him toward the conference tent with the triumphant sound of ritual trumpets (*gyaling*). As he approached the platform, Wendy shielded him with a parasol, traditionally reserved for royalty in India. We had arranged for Ayya Khema to lead the gathering in reciting the Three Refuges and Five Precepts, but at the last moment, she got cold feet and said it would not be appropriate for her to lead the chanting when senior monks were present. Quickly scurrying around on damage



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control, I invited the monks turn by turn, until finally the most senior monk emerged and agreed to take the mic.

The opening ceremony was a joyous occasion. The crowd of 1,500 people who gathered were delighted to hear His Holiness's words of encouragement to the assembled laywomen and nuns. He affirmed the value of the Buddhadharma in a fearful world and the role of mothers as symbols of loving kindness. He affirmed women's rights and said that "it is correct to struggle for one's rights." From a religious point of view, he said, it is necessary to have *bhiksunis* to qualify as a "central land."² He affirmed gender equality from a Mahayana perspective, enumerated female *bodhisattvas*, and recounted the accomplishments of *bhiksunis* at the time of the Buddha. He also said that, although it was reasonable to aspire for a male rebirth in a society where men were more highly valued than women, if women were more highly valued than men, the reverse would be true. He explained that the *bhiksuni* lineage was not established in Tibet, due to the difficulties of travel from India, but, "Speaking personally as a Tibetan Buddhist, if an authentic *bhiksuni* lineage like this could be established in the Tibetan tradition, this would truly be something to be welcomed."³ With typical humor, he even said that, "as if by the blessing of this conference," he did not catch cold on this trip to Bodhgaya!

The rest of the week passed like a dream. Every morning, we gathered for silent meditation in this consecrated space. Morning and afternoon, Buddhist scholars and practitioners from many different countries and religious backgrounds shared their experiences, insights, and struggles. Every evening, chants from the diverse Buddhist traditions were led by nuns around the Mahabodhi Temple, a sight that had rarely been seen before. Under a makeshift tent by the Kalachakra Pavillion, this colorful gathering of Dharma friends quickly discovered their common ground. One continually recurring theme was the need for better educational opportunities for women. The Tibetan nuns were so enthusiastic about the idea that they even wanted to add the word "education" to the name of the incipient Buddhist women's organization. We realized that we wanted to continue the conversation and, to do that, we needed an organization. Thus, on February 16, we held a meeting and decided to establish Sakyadhita, meaning "Daughters of the Buddha." Some people later questioned the name, saying that it sounded paternalistic. However, we noted that no one questions the term "sons of the Buddha" or considers it paternalistic.

On the final day of the conference, we arranged a day tour to Rajgir, where the Buddha is said to have taught the *Heart Sutra*, and Nalanda, site of the famous monastic university that flourished for over a thousand years. I stayed behind to clean up, settle accounts, and tie up loose ends. When the buses arrived back at the end of the day, everyone looked bedraggled and exhausted, reminiscent of Mahaprajapati after her march to Vaisali. When I asked how everything went, they said that the tour had been wonderful, but everyone was very hungry. As it turned out, there had been a communications glitch and the Thai temple had prepared lunch for only 60 people, instead of 120!

We had decided that it would be very auspicious to take the participants on pilgrimage to the Buddhist sacred sites. Because almost everyone was short on funds, I decided to organize the pilgrimage myself. In my benighted zeal to please, I arranged three types to suit different budgets: "luxury," moderate, and economy. Those of us on the economy pilgrimage slept on the floor in temples and ate in tea stalls along the way, while those who could afford it slept and ate in tourist hotels. It is still unclear how

I managed it, but the "luxury" pilgrimage was \$100, inclusive, for the week, whereas the economy pilgrimage cost \$50. I felt dazed when two people complained about the price!

In the midst of the conference, I suddenly got a telegram from my mother saying she was coming from Honolulu to India to visit me. The timing could not have been crazier. I was totally exhausted from a year of organizing the conference. How could I ride the conference momentum and begin organizing Sakyadhita while entertaining my Southern Baptist fundamentalist mother in the Himalayas? As it turned out, however, she was a dear and her luxury hotel became a haven for all the wonderful people who had worked so hard on the conference. Wendy became her fast friend and distracted her with lively conversation, while the rest of us slipped into her room by turns to take a warm shower. When we were fortunate enough to have an audience with His Holiness, my mother overcame her religious trepidations with valor. Palms pressed together at her heart in *anjali*, a gesture of respect, she smiled up at him angelically. His Holiness reassured her, saying, "Your daughter, very active nun!" and my mother quickly bobbed her head in agreement. Later, she let it be known to all and sundry that, "He was a very nice man."

After the conference was over and Sakyadhita was founded, once the pilgrimage tour ended successfully and my mother returned to Honolulu, I sat down to work out the conference accounts. To my amazement, I discovered that the conference income and expenses matched perfectly, with just enough left over to print up Sakyadhita brochures for distribution. It was a delightful moment to return Elda's \$5000 loan, with sincere appreciation and considerable relief.

Sakyadhita's Accomplishments

Just 20 years ago, the Buddhist women's movement began to give voice to women's concerns and deepest aspirations. Since then, the movement has been a catalyst for change in the lives of millions of women (and men) around the world. As women link up and exchange ideas, they discover their common ground as Buddhist practitioners, as well as their diversity. Being a Buddhist in Laos or Mongolia is very different from being a Buddhist in L.A. or Toronto. But being a women is an experience that unites women from vastly different cultures and backgrounds. At the Sakyadhita conferences, Buddhist women have developed solidarity and inspired each other to greater achievements in their practice and their work to alleviate human suffering.

After Sakyadhita was established at the conference in Bodhgaya in 1987, we set forth these objectives in our first brochure:

- to promote world peace;
- to create an international network of communications among Buddhist women;
- to work in harmony with all Buddhist traditions and their Sanghas;
- to conduct research into Vinaya texts of the different traditions;
- to provide guidance and assistance to Buddhist women aspiring to ordination; and
- to encourage and educate women as teachers of Buddhadharma.

When we revised our bylaws in 1999, we realized that we had already achieved many of our original goals. Consequently, we crafted additional goals:



- to promote the physical and spiritual welfare of the world's Buddhist women;
- to promote interfaith dialogue;
- to encourage the development of Buddhist culture and education;
- to conduct research and prepare publications on topics of interest to Buddhist women;
- to support the preservation of Buddhist sacred sites;
- to encourage compassionate social action for the benefit of humanity; and
- to work toward an international Bhikshuni Sangha.

Sadly, we haven't achieved world peace yet. We all still need more training in conflict resolution, nonviolent communications, and peacebuilding. Still, Sakyadhita deserves credit for establishing a truly diverse multi-national, multi-religious global network devoted to nonviolent social transformation. Encouraging Buddhist women to work for social justice is certainly a major contribution to peace in the world.

If there are 300 million Buddhist women in the world (and there may be many more, if Buddhist women in China and North Korea are counted), this represents a powerful force for good in the world. Buddhist women are already committed to peace, honesty, compassion, and positive human values. If all these women unite their efforts for compassionate social action, they can be a major force for global transformation.

Acknowledging that 99 percent of Buddhist women live in Asia, Sakyadhita has been very conscious to maintain a balance between Asian and Western influences. We have encouraged the active participation and leadership of all Buddhist women and have worked very hard to raise funds to enable women from developing countries to attend the Sakyadhita conferences – women who would otherwise never get a chance. To further this aim, we have held all our international conferences in Asia. Acknowledging that Western women's interests and priorities are often quite different from Asian Buddhist women's, we have also held three conferences in North America and have encouraged the development of Sakyadhita branches in Europe, North America, and other countries. This year, we have worked hard to develop a Branch and Chapter Guide that will help members set up new branches and chapters.

Inspired by the Sakyadhita conferences, women have founded monasteries, schools, women's shelters, orphanages, and clinics. Some have gone for higher education or intensive retreats. Others have applied Buddhist mindfulness and ethics to work for social justice. Major problems still exist in the world, however, and there is much more that Sakyadhita members can do to help. If women from Asia and the West combine their skills and knowledge, we can help tackle social problems like sex trafficking, poverty, HIV/AIDS, alcoholism, religious fundamentalism, economic exploitation, and militarism. As Sakyadhita grows, we can train more women to work in grassroots social action projects to uproot these scourges. Women who have been fortunate enough to receive a good education (Buddhist or secular) and those who have developed certain skills (in organizing or meditation, for example) can help others. Together, we can help the most disadvantaged sectors of society, starting with Buddhist women and children.

From the outset, Sakyadhita has been a coalition of women and men, lay and ordained, that welcomed people of different backgrounds and experience. Despite differences of language, ethnicity, religion, and resources, Sakyadhita is one of only a few

organizations in the world that unites diverse peoples on a level that transcends difference. Buddhist women have taken the lead in developing multi-cultural understanding and friendships. Globally, there is enormous interest in Buddhism and Buddhist women are becoming popular cultural ambassadors.

One of Sakyadhita's great successes has been making full ordination for Buddhist women an international issue. At the first conference in Bodhgaya, many people were under the impression that women had equal rights in Buddhism and were unaware that millions of Buddhist women lack access to full ordination. Sakyadhita brought the ordination issue out into the open.

The *bhiksuni* issue is complex, because it involves monastic law, philosophy, and the unwritten histories of Buddhist women's and ordination lineages. There is a steep learning curve, but rather than oversimplifying or distorting the issue, Sakyadhita members have dedicated years to research and education. This strategy has paid off. Inspired by Sakyadhita's advocacy, almost 500 nuns have now received full ordination in Sri Lanka. Nuns and laywomen in other countries are also courageously and skillfully working to achieve equal rights in their countries, too. What was merely a dream twenty years ago – an international conference to discuss the revival of the Bhiksuni Sangha throughout the Buddhist world – will become reality this year. H.H. the Dalai Lama will meet with Vinaya scholars from all Buddhist traditions at Hamburg University (Germany) in July.⁴ Because of Sakyadhita's years of research and networking, we expect that this conference will yield a positive outcome. Soon, we hope, we can honestly assert that women have equal opportunities in Buddhism.

At the first Sakyadhita conference, we did not dare speak about equal rights. The topic was too contentious and apt to lose support, rather than gain it. Even today, in the 21st century, I continue to receive messages warning me not to speak about women's rights, saying that this might offend the monks. Even a few weeks ago, I was advised not to use feminist language. Why is it is laudable to speak about human rights, but threatening to speak about women's rights? People accuse us of having a feminist agenda, though I have never heard of men being accused of having a masculine agenda. Even though detractors have questioned our motives, I sometimes wonder what would have happened without Sakyadhita. If we had not started organizing in 1987 and nuns were still illiterate and clothed in rags today, how embarrassing would that be? Gender equity not only advances the welfare of Buddhist women, but has many benefits for men and children, too.

One wonderful development has been that, even in countries like Thailand where full ordination is still not available for women, conditions for nuns have improved markedly. Now that the glaring disparity between conditions for monks and nuns has been publicly revealed, nuns have begun to receive greater respect, support, and opportunities. Nuns today are far more likely to receive invitations to attend ceremonies and give Dharma talks, and far more likely to establish independent monasteries and pursue higher education than 20 years ago. Nuns and laywomen alike are leading meditation centers, receiving Ph.D.s, and speaking at Buddhist conferences. Although the improved status of nuns does not represent full equality, it does reflect a greater awareness of women's capabilities and a higher regard for women as a whole.

The Future of Sakyadhita

Buddhist women can be very proud of their achievements



over the last twenty years. To be proud, in this context, is not to generate arrogance or to downplay other people's contributions. These sentiments are contrary to Buddhist ideals. But we can and should rejoice in all the wonderful things Buddhist women have accomplished during this short time. No single person or organization could possibly have done it alone. The changes are nothing short of miraculous and were accomplished due to the concerted efforts of numerous humble, generous, hard-working individuals, all working as volunteers. I believe that much of Buddhist women's success rests on their compassion, dedication, and commitment to Dharma principles.

Looking back at all these positive changes, we can take great joy in the achievements of others, rejoice in their merits, and then generate the altruistic intention to move forward. Rejoicing in the founding of meditation centers where women are welcome, we can help create many more centers. Rejoicing in the excellent new research and publications on Buddhist women, we can support more research and publications. Rejoicing in the emergence of many respected female teachers, we can encourage more such teachers. Rejoicing in the revival of the Bhiksuni Sangha in Sri Lanka, we can help revive it in other Buddhist countries.

In my experience, a great master is one who has overcome egotism and self-concern. The Buddhist teachings also downplay the self and advocate compassion for others instead. If we are wise, we can see the tremendous benefit that accrues from going beyond self-concern and replacing it with sincere concern for others. If Buddhist women continue to do so, there is no doubt in my mind that we can change the world.

Karma Lekshe Tsomo is an associate professor of Buddhism and World Religions at the University of San Diego. She gave up surfing when she became a nun in 1977. Since then, she has worked for peace and gender equity through Sakyadhita and Jamyang Foundation, an innovative education project for women in developing countries (www.jamyang.org).

NOTES

1. Hartley Film Foundation, 1989. The footage produced by the Meridian Trust is yet to be edited.
2. His Holiness mentioned two interpretations of the four categories of Buddhist disciples: *bhiksus, bhiksunis, sramaneras, and sramanerikas* or, alternatively, *bhiksus, bhiksunis, upasakas, and upasikas*. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, *Sakyadhita: Daughters of the Buddha* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1989), p. 41. In either interpretation, *bhiksunis* constitute one of the four pillars of a Buddhist society.
3. Ibid., p. 44.
4. For details on the conference and registration, see: www.congress-on-buddhist-women.org.

AN UMBRELLA FOR H.H. THE DALAI LAMA: IMPRESSIONS OF THE FIRST CONFERENCE ON BUDDHIST NUNS

Wendy Barzetovic

I was traveling to India via Bali, after spending seven months in Australia. During my time in Australia, I helped with the tour of the Tibetan Buddhist monk Geshe Sonam Rinchen, had the good fortune to meet H.H. the Panchen Lama when he visited Australia (his first and only foreign visit before his untimely death in 1989),



Wendy's Catering Skills Displayed at the Sanghadana

and got a great view of Haley's Comet.

In Bali, I looked around the shops and saw the most beautiful temple umbrella in saffron and gold-painted cloth. Around the inside, different colors of wool were woven, reminding me of woollen offerings Tibetans sometimes make for Tara. The umbrella was supported on a high, red wooden pole about 6' 6" high. Traditionally in Tibet, an umbrella was carried for H.H. the Dalai Lama as a sign of respect and to shade him from sun and rain. Since I would be traveling to India, I thought that it would be lovely to buy the umbrella and present it to him. On second thought, they might think I was mad!

I felt extremely happy carrying the umbrella on my journey and packed the top safely away in my bag. That was fortunate, since my journey took on a new dimension. After struggling into a bemo (motorcycle rickshaw), I headed for the bus station to catch a bus to Jakarta, where I had a connecting flight to Singapore and another flight to Bombay. Managing the 6' 6" pole and several bags wasn't the easiest of tasks, but I was helped into the bemo by the locals already seated inside. After alighting from the bemo just outside the bus station, I spotted a soup vendor on the roadside and ordered a bowl of soup for lunch, since I had about 20 minutes before the bus left. As I went to get some money to pay the soup vendor, I found that my passport bag was missing. "Oh, my God!" I said, suddenly realizing that I had just lost my money, passport, travelers checks, bus ticket, three airplane tickets, and a blue pendant surrounded in 18 ct gold that I had bought for my mother.

I stood in the street, working out in my head how to put all this right. To begin with, I didn't have any money to get back to the British Embassy in Denpasar. Just then, a guy tapped me on the shoulder saying "Bemo! Bemo!" – a constant mantra on the streets of Indonesia. I retorted, "No, I've lost my passport bag!" He kept insisting, pointing up the road where his bemo was parked and encouraging me to follow him. Since I had nothing better to do with my time, I left my bags in the street and followed him, thinking, 'Am I mad? Maybe all my bags will be gone when I come back.' When we got to his bemo, he pointed inside and there, on the floor of the bemo, was my passport bag. Inside, I found my bus ticket, three airplane tickets, and travelers' checks. Just the money and pendant were gone. The driver had found the bag in his vehicle at a different bus station and returned to find me. I gave the man a big hug, much to his surprise. Within five minutes I was sitting on the bus to Jakarta with my hands in prayer, thinking, "Wow....! Thank you!" It was surreal.

The reality of carrying around a 6' 6" pole came to the fore as I tried to embark on the Air India flight to Bombay. The stewardess



said, "You cannot bring this on here. It will get in people's way." In a lovely Indian accent, a fellow passenger asked, "What is it?" I told him it was a *mandir* umbrella. "Oh, very good. Why don't you ask people if they would mind putting it through their legs?" So I proceeded to ask four rows of people sitting behind me if they would mind. "What is it?" "*Mandir* umbrella," hummed around the plane approvingly. They all agreed and the stewardess was satisfied.

True reality hit when I had to get a taxi in Bombay. There was no way to get the pole into the taxi. We finally resolved the problem by opening the door of the taxi and keeping the window open, with the pole sticking outside. Finally, I could sit down, with my hand out of the window, holding onto the pole as we drove along. It worked! But I had to watch like a hawk in case we turned any sudden corners.

After a conversation about the umbrella, I was befriended in Bombay by two lovely lads. They were very helpful in ensuring that the *mandir* umbrella and I got safely to the train station. It was beginning to be the most fun I had ever had, traveling around India with a pole. In the train, the umbrella became a wonderful conversation piece.

I headed to Bodhgaya to attend teachings with H.H. The Dalai Lama. After arriving at the station, I took a cycle rickshaw along the dusty road into Bodhgaya. Holding the pole upright in the rickshaw, I started feeling a bit like a *saddhu* (renunciant), without the renunciation. I headed for the Burmese Vihara where I rented a room.

Soon I became involved in the Conference on Buddhist Nuns, when I met up with Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, who was a good friend and one of my favorite people in the world. I had not seen her for some time and she explained that the first-ever conference on Buddhist nuns would be taking place very soon. Laywomen like myself were also taking part. Karma Lekshe Tsomo was the mainstay and co-organizer of the conference, along with Ayya Khema and Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilingshi.

We had both lived in Dharamsala previously and she knew that I made good marmalade and jam, which I used to sell to tourists and at a shop in Macleod Ganj. She asked if I could teach the Tibetan nuns how to make marmalade. I said, "Of course, I can." We made arrangements for me to meet the four nuns from Tilokpur Nunnery whom I would work with. What she didn't mention at the time was that we had to make enough marmalade to feed 120 nuns for breakfast every day for a week!

I knew a few words of Tibetan and the nuns knew a few words of English. We had a great time working out quantities, shopping, and peeling lemons. The nuns were very down-to-earth and a real pleasure to work with. They took everything in stride. Some

Conference

Continued from page ONE column THREE

hai' was her reply. More than the constraints of the purse it was the prospect of an easy penny that encouraged them to come and beg before the foreigners.

'Bada babu Angrezwan paise theek devat hai' and so what's wrong in receiving? We had no answer.

On the main road leading to the various temple complexes — and there are many here constructed in keeping with the Chinese, Tibetan, Japanese, Thai and Singhalese traditions — Nepalis have spread out their wares. This is an assortment of caps, expensive rugs, prayer wheels, toys, silver ware, prayer beads, incense and incense burners.

The Local Press Reports News of the Unprecedented Conference

ing of Buddham sharanam gachhami, sangham sharanam gachhami, dhammam sharanam gachhami.

The Dalai Lama struck a responsive chord at the very outset by declaring that his main concern was world peace and that nuns of the various orders in various countries could ill afford to stand by, isolated in their own localities, and watch the world being split apart by frustration and tension, when they could very well contribute to the evolution of a saner society.

The declaration was no less than historic and revolutionary as it effectively broke the chains of Buddhist women

were outgoing, others shy. There was lots and lots of stirring and lots of smiles and laughter — beautiful heartfelt laughter. I can still see their smiles and hear their voices now.

Luckily, in India there are gigantic saucerpans that were ideal for cooking the quantities we needed. The more I worked with the nuns, the more I realized the extent of the task we had in front of us. We would be cooking for hundreds of participants of this historic 1st International Conference on Buddhist Nuns for an entire week. We also planned to offer a *Sanghadana* (monastic meal) to H.H. the Dalai Lama and all of the abbots, *bhikkhus*, *bhikkhunis*, and novice monks and nuns from all the monasteries in Bodhgaya.

Some of the nuns had already arrived and were involved in the preparations. There were maps to be drawn, accommodations to be found, a registration desk to be set up, and volunteers to be found. Everyone was thinking on their feet. At first, I felt a bit like a spare part, but I was happy to offer my help in whatever way I could. I felt very proud and honored to be part of this wonderful gathering. I mentioned that my mother had been in charge of banqueting at a hotel where she worked and that I knew a bit about it from her. Karma Lekshe Tsomo immediately put me in charge of catering!

I was led to a building that had been kindly offered for the purpose of dining. I was horrified. It was filthy! We couldn't invite H.H. the Dalai Lama to eat here. I mentioned this to Ven. Ayya Khema — a very strong, no-nonsense German nun who was one of the co-organizers of the conference and became a very good friend and inspiration in the following years. Her response was, "Get scrubbing!"

Walls and floors were scrubbed by hand, until eventually an acceptable transformation had taken place. I began to envision the building's potential. The seating was in place, but seedy. My mother would have had tablecloths, so I asked permission to get tablecloths made in monks' colors — achieved! Crockery and cutlery — organized! What about serviettes, flowers, pictures, and something for the walls? Everything appeared, as if by magic, as more and more nuns began to arrive. They brought bunting (fabric), pictures of the Buddha, flowers, gifts, and flags. The room was transformed into an oasis of fine dining. With lotus flowers welcoming guests at the entrance, it was stunning!

As it transpired, the inauguration speech was to be given by H.H. the Dalai Lama. For the first time in history, Tibetan nuns would welcome him by playing traditional trumpets (*gyaling*), flanked by hundreds of conference participants. I told Karma Lekshe Tsomo that I had brought a temple umbrella from Bali and maybe it could be used to welcome him. She sent word to His Holiness's Office, who approved the idea, and asked me to carry the umbrella. Wow!

I had only the scruffy casual clothes I'd been traveling in and that wouldn't do. I thought it would be a nice touch to wear a traditional Tibetan dress (*chuba*) and blouse. So off I went to the tailors to have them made up. I also decided to freshen up the 6' 6" pole of the umbrella and found some paint in a little shop in Bodhgaya. How do you say "red paint" in Hindi? "*Lal rang... Lal rang*."

Would I deliver invitations to the monasteries? Of course! They had to be hand-delivered, because some of the monasteries were located in the middle of rice fields dotting the countryside. I loved this task — a mission of worth — walking along the fields to find the monasteries, passing giggling children, men washing under water pipes, and birds flying and calling in the warm Indian sunshine.

The closer we got to the opening day, the busier we all became. I was working from dawn until 10 pm every day for the last



week, as were many of the Tibetan nuns, organizers, and other volunteers. There were banners to be hung and a stage to be set up. I remember seeing the sound engineer sorting out the sound system and microphones, while a videographer set up a camera for filming. Both Meridian Trust from England and Elda Hartley from the U.S. were there to film the conference. Everyone was very busy. It was amazing to see so many people involved in the enterprise. The interdependent nature of all things was constantly revealing itself.

Bodhgaya is a hub for Buddhist pilgrims from around the world, including some celebrities. While walking back to my room one evening, my companion suddenly said, "That's Richard Gere coming towards us." I asked, "Is it? Who's he?" and carried on walking. Until I saw him in a film a few years later, I had no idea who he was, but I found him quite handsome.

Finally, the big inauguration day came and it was time for the *sanghadana*. The kitchen was a hive of activity, buzzing with the excitement of hosting a *sanghadana* for H.H. the Dalai Lama. The nuns and I were so happy to be there; they were talking 13 to the dozen.

The four Tilokpur nuns cooked the food to perfection with a host of helpers. The kitchen was electric with an anticipation that was almost edible. Ten Sri Lankan laywomen clad in white saris served the lunch to the Sangha with elegant serenity. We were all hidden in the kitchen, with big beaming smiles on our faces, straining our necks to see and hear what was happening. The event was a huge success and, before it ended, the nuns and I rushed off to get ready to welcome His Holiness as he arrived for the opening ceremony.

The Tibetan nuns were dressed up in their best robes, while I wore my Tibetan dress. We were nervous and excited in equal measure. I remember that we had butterflies in our stomachs and were quite fidgety. Two of the nuns had their trumpets ready and I stood aside watchfully, with the well-traveled umbrella. The roles we would be performing were usually carried out by monks, which added to the excitement. We waited on the steps by the side of the stage for His Holiness's arrival. Indian photographers were snapping photographs left and right. One of them must have caught me unaware, for a photograph of me and the umbrella subsequently appeared in the Hindustan Times color supplement with a caption that read, "A nun awaits the arrival of the Dalai Lama." Don't believe everything you read in the newspapers!

I suddenly thought 'What do I do? Where should I stand?' But then, as His Holiness's car pulled up, the nuns started to play their trumpets and I intuitively walked down the steps to hold the umbrella over His Holiness as he got out of the car. He looked up at the umbrella and broke into the most beautiful smile – one that has always remained in my memory. I sheltered him until he reached the canopy of the stage. I felt so honored to be able to carry the umbrella for His Holiness. The nuns and I hugged and congratulated each other, with beaming smiles on our faces.

Once His Holiness arrived, everyone sat down to listen to his inaugural address, which began at 1 o'clock on February 11, 1987, and was attended by over 1,500 people. He was so deeply touched by the gathering of so many people for such an altruistic purpose. One could not help but see the tears welling up in his eyes. By this time, there were also tears in my eyes and the eyes of everyone around me. It was a wonderful, historic moment.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama was very supportive of the conference and voiced his wish that it become an annual event. His message portrayed women as having a great, responsible role in society, since it is women and mothers that exert the greatest influence on the lives of children, the future generation. If children

receive a sound upbringing and moral example in their formative years from their mothers, they tend to become balanced individuals who are able to work for the welfare of the community and contribute to the happiness of society, rather than becoming unhappy individuals who may create social problems.

His Holiness also said that, since a mother prefers to seek guidance from another woman who understands her particular needs, it is important to train women in counseling and teaching. He mentioned this as one area where a strong community of female monastics can be a great asset. His Holiness agreed with the proposal for women to have an equal opportunity to take *bhikkhuni* ordination. He stressed the benefits that would accrue from this, both in the Buddhist community and in society at large. The knowledge and qualities of virtuous Buddhist nuns can

positively influence people, as they become active in spreading practical moral teachings and helpful advice to the community at large. These nuns can become the vehicles of benefit to women, mothers, and children, who are our hope for the future.

He also urged the study of Dharma and said that detailed research on the Theravada traditions of Sri Lanka and Thailand should be carried out to determine how the Bhikkuni Sangha could be reintroduced in these countries. We all felt deeply inspired and that inspiration carried over into the six days of lectures, discussion groups, workshops, symposiums, group meditations, ceremonies, and chanting from all of the different Buddhist traditions.

The ceremonies and chants were held at the Mahabodhi Temple every evening at 5 pm. They drew large crowds of spectators, as Buddhists gained insight into other Buddhist traditions. Everyone worked harmoniously together, inspiring one another so much that new ideas were arising all of the time. Everyone gained a deep understanding of each others' cultures, needs, and resources.

The lectures covered a variety of topics and led to the many resolutions formulated at the end of the conference. Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women was founded on February 16, 1987, to assist Buddhist women around the world and to continue the projects and goals discussed at the conference. Training programs and committees for implementing the goals of Sakyadhita were set up and national representatives were appointed.

For some nuns, this was the first time they had ever met sisters from other monasteries and traditions. The discussions about how to improve things were rich. The conference became the catalyst for the Tibetan nuns to form a group of their own, called Arya

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON BUDDHIST NUNS

Wendy Barzetic writes:

Recently I had my first insight into what being a Buddhist nun really means when I volunteered to help with some of the many preparations leading up to the inauguration by HH the Dalai Lama of the first ever International Conference on Buddhist Nuns. One



Wendy Barzetic holds a ceremonial parasol for HH the Dalai Lama as he arrives at the Conference on Buddhist Nuns.

Welcoming H.H. the Dalai Lama in the British Press



Tara Welfare Committee. The great success of the conference led to the following resolutions by the newly formed Sakyadhita:

- To foster world peace for all sentient beings.
- To work in harmony with all Buddhist Sanghas, traditions, and communities.
- To promote harmonious understanding with other religious communities.
- To hold conferences and seminars on Buddhist women's issues.
- To establish communications among Buddhist women all over the world.
- To conduct research into women's roles in the Buddhadharma.
- To improve education (both general and Dharma) for Buddhist women.
- To encourage and improve Buddhist practice for nuns and laywomen.
- To educate and train women as teachers of Buddhadharma.
- To preserve the teachings and make them available throughout the world.
- To conduct research into the Vinaya of the different traditions.
- To establish an international Bhikkuni Sangha organization.
- To introduce the *sramanerika*, *siksamana*, and *bhikkuni* ordinations where they currently do not exist.
- To provide help and assistance to Buddhist nuns and those who wish to ordain.
- To establish committees to carry out the organization's goals.
- To set up bylaws and a constitution and register the organization.

The conference was followed by a week-long pilgrimage by bus to all the sacred sites related to the Buddha's birth, life, and death. This afforded us all the opportunity of getting to know each other really well. Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo organized the buses and accommodations en route to Rajgir, Nalanda, Sarnath, Lumbini, Kushinagar, and Sarvasti. It was an awesome experience sitting on Vultures' Peak, reciting the *Heart Sutra* and prayers, and reflecting that Lord Buddha had once sat there teaching. The same was true at the ruins of Nalanda University, reflecting on all the great works that occurred there.

The Jains we saw at Sarnath impressed me with their great concern for all sentient beings. They wore masks and gently swept the path before them, so as not to tread upon any living being. To know that Lord Buddha's mother had bathed in the pool at Lumbini before giving birth and to realize the uncertainty of the time of death while sitting next to the reclining Buddha image in Kushinagar were illuminating experiences. We all got goose bumps when a Sri Lankan nun went into trance and predicted that the Bhikkhuni Sangha would be re-established in India. I drank in the vision of Lord Buddha teaching for some 25 rainy seasons in Sarvasti. The pilgrimage was a spiritually fortifying experience. To be able to share this experience with such great and wonderful women and men was fantastic.

After the conference, I gave the umbrella to the Tilokpur nuns, so that they could welcome His Holiness if he visits their monastery. To take part in one of the most historically significant gatherings of Buddhist women in recent times was a great honor and wonderful learning experience. My thanks go out to all of those whose vision made this conference possible.

Wendy Barzetovic is a former Board Member of Sakyadhita and the founding national representative of Sakyadhita for England.

Removing restraints

SEVEN dusty miles from Gaya lies Bodhi Gaya where over 2,200 years ago, Buddha attained enlightenment—an event which to a great extent shaped the history of the world.

The place is scarcely striking though the site is thick with significance for the purely Buddhist ethos. The sense of serenity and solace is all pervading, in fact, startling and the majestic height of the massive Bodhi temple, artistically carved and resplendent, seems to lend direction to the destiny of Buddhism for all time to come.

For Buddhists Bodhi Gaya is not a strange place in a strange land. The uniting hand of religiosity speaks of an ideal bond where people irrespective of caste, creed, race mingle at one place

events lay in store. Two-year-old Osel Tserre who has been designated Lama of Kopan monastery in Nepal was here. But the added importance of the day suggested that there was much more to Bodhi Gaya than what met the eye. The first Buddhist conference in 20 years was being hosted at Bodhi Gaya. For Buddhists this is an epoch-making event. To the people who had not pursued the development of Buddhism, the events at Bodhi Gaya were of routine interest — a 'non-event' quipped one.

But at Bodhi Gaya the interest had risen to a fever pitch.

The main talking point that day was the conference not the Baby Lama which had hogged media coverage in the past few days with all the sincerity of a child.



A nun awaits the Dalai Lama's arrival

Photo: AVINIS PERTH

The main talking point that day was the conference not the Baby Lama which had hogged media coverage in the past few days with all the sincerity of a child.

Wendy Barzetovic Greets H.H. the Dalai Lama with the Fabled Umbrella

HISTORIC BEGINNINGS UNDER A TENT

Bhiksuni Jampa Tsedroen

When I remember the founding of Sakyadhita in 1987, the same pictures always come to my mind: a lonely, desert-like place with a table (the "registration desk"), a colorful banner, Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo with a group of Tibetan nuns, and a stage under a huge tent roof. I also remember a very special atmosphere, like being part of a very historic event.

The 1st Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Nuns was like a dream becoming reality. For five years, there was a vivid air mail correspondence between Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, living in India, and myself, living in Germany. We had met for the first time in 1980, when I was studying for three months at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala as a laywoman. After getting ordained as a novice nun (*sramanerika*) at Tibetan Center Hamburg in 1981, I became interested in full ordination. My teacher, the late Ven. Geshe Thubten Ngawang and his translator Stephen Batchelor suggested that I learn more about the possibilities of *bhiksuni* ordination from Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo. I had great respect for her and felt quite honored that she actually answered my letters, taking my questions very seriously.

After some time, Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo had the idea of having a conference and asked me how I felt about it. She was also in touch with other women, such as Dr. Chatsumarn Kabil Singh (now Bhikkhuni Dhammananda) in Thailand and the late Ayya Khema in Sri Lanka and Germany. I was in my 20s at that time and they were all older than I was. I only found out about the idea of founding Sakyadhita International at the end of the conference. The night before the topic was brought up in the larger audience, I remember a long discussion with Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, Ayya Khema, and others. They wanted me to join the board, but it took them quite a long time to convince me, because I was already on the Board of Tibetan Center Hamburg and very busy with my studies in Germany.

Reflecting about Sakyadhita and the Buddhist women's movement, I have always felt that without Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, Sakyadhita would not exist and would not have survived. For sure, such an organization depends on many people, causes, and conditions, but from my point of view, she has always been the motor and the gas. Sakyadhita is her lifework and nobody has devoted as much time to it as she has. Although not all of her goals have manifested yet and many things still need to be done, I think she can be proud of what has been achieved so far, especially with regard to the education of Buddhist nuns, the revival of the *bhikkhuni* ordination, and the Buddhist women's network that has been established. It is amazing to see the power of thoughts,



which precede all actions, and the great impact human thoughts can have on the lives and well-being of so many women.

Looking at our current needs and what still needs to be accomplished during the next twenty years, we have to ask ourselves: Where is the younger generation? Who will continue the work and what needs to be done? I think it would be very good to continue the Sakyadhita conferences, not only in countries where there is still some resistance to *bhikkhuni* ordination, but also in Western countries, where we hardly find any Western monastic communities. The reasons for this lack need to be explored. We need to discuss the future of Buddhism, the future of the monastic community in rapidly changing modern times, and the need for spirituality in a world that is becoming more and more secularized. We need to analyze the competence of Buddhist women, stressing our responsibility for the preservation and spread of the Buddhadharma. We need to discuss how we can learn from each other and optimize our potential to benefit society. Many Buddhist women have already gone for studies and training, while many others are still hoping for the opportunity. In some countries, we still need to work to raise the status of Buddhist women. At the same time, we need to intensify our work on a broader level, taking more responsibility to address not only the problems of Buddhist women, but also of human society more broadly.

Bhiksuni Jampa Tsedroen was born in Germany in 1959. She was trained and studied Buddhist philosophy at the Tibetan Center in Hamburg from 1980 to 1996, according to the traditional system, under the guidance of Geshe Thubten Ngawang. While teaching and translating part-time at the Tibetan Center, she joined the University of Hamburg as lecturer in 1996 and as a graduate student in 1997, receiving her M.A. degree in Tibetology and Buddhology in 2003. In 1981, Jampa Tsedroen was ordained as a sramanerika and, in 1985, she received the bhiksuni precepts at Miao Tong Monastery in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. Currently she teaches at the Tibetan Center Hamburg, while working on her Ph.D. in Tibetology and co-organizing the 1st International Congress on Buddhist Women's Role in the Sangha at the University of Hamburg. For more details, see: <http://www.jampatsedroen.de>.

SAKYADHITA: WHEN I THINK ABOUT IT TODAY...

Bhikkhuni Dhammadawati

Shashan dhaja dhammachariya agga mahagantha wachak pandita. Lord Buddha said, "Dhamma is a chariot, with *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis* as the two front wheels and *upasakas* and *upasikas* as the two rear wheels." This was not just an empty slogan; all these four groups were awarded with appropriate acknowledgement of their eminence, without any discrimination as to caste, ordination status, or sex. This assures us about the Buddha's principle of non-discrimination.

At the same time, all these four groups need to be capable, well-educated, and empowered. As I see it, this is what Sakyadhita has been doing. Ever since the first conference was held in Bodhgaya twenty years ago, Sakyadhita has been working to empower women from all strata of society, all over the world.

The first Sakyadhita conference in Bodhgaya was very powerful. Even today, the congregation of women all learning from each other is very memorable. The teachings of H.H. the Dalai Lama especially remain in my mind. He was very encouraging and inspired us to do more to help women in the world. Even better, women can work together to create a better world. Buddhists



Bhikkhuni Dhammadawati and Nuns of Dharmakirti Vihara Lead Evening Chanting

believe that if you educate a woman and provide her with proper opportunities, she can come up to par with any man in society. Thus, my mission is to educate more women and mobilize them to create a more equitable society in the world.

Inspired by the earlier Sakyadhita conferences, I proposed to host the 6th Sakyadhita Conference in Nepal in 2001. Despite our enthusiasm, interest, and dedication, we were not able to fulfill even the minimum requirements to provide service and comfort to the distinguished participants, due to our ignorance and limited knowledge about how to organize such a large and respected conference. However, this was a good opportunity for our young *bhikkhunis* and laypeople to get exposure to Buddhists from around the world. It gives me great satisfaction that Sakyadhita activities are growing year by year and more and more Buddhists are gathering together for learning and sharing Buddhism.

In my opinion, the major contributions of Sakyadhita are:

1. Assembling high-level Buddhist professionals and practitioners, ordained *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis*, and lay Buddhists and non-Buddhists, to learn from each other and share information about the Dhamma. This is very impressive.
2. Instead of focusing on a particular sect, Sakyadhita provides equal opportunity to all sects of Buddhism to participate and share. This has facilitated an exchange of learning and helped participants find common ground in terms of Buddhist philosophy.
3. Sakyadhita even invites participants who are not able to meet the costs of the conference and supports their participation, which is a great effort to create an egalitarian society.

Overall, Sakyadhita is contributing immensely to the empowerment, education, and liberation of Buddhist women. I send my best wishes and blessings for Sakyadhita to do even more for women in the world.

Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to share my thoughts and feelings on Sakyadhita.

Bhikkhuni Dhammadawati was born in a devout Buddhist family and ran away from home to become a nun when she was 13. At the age of 14, she traveled to Burma, where she studied for 13 years and obtained the advanced Dhammachariya degree. In 1964, she founded Dharmakirti Vihara in Kathmandu, where she has trained two generations of nuns and



laypeople in Theravada Buddhism. In 1988, she received full ordination at Hsi Lai Temple in Los Angeles, becoming the first bhikkhuni in modern Nepal.

COMING TOGETHER OF BUDDHIST WOMEN

Bhikkhuni Dhammananda (Dr. Chatsumarn Kabil Singh)

The turning point for me in becoming more committed to the work of Buddhist women happened in 1983 when I was invited to Harvard University to attend an international conference on Religion and Social Change. I was particularly requested to address the issue of the future of the Bhikkhuni Sangha in Thailand. I did not know the organizer, Dr. Diana Eck, but apparently when she was looking for someone to address this issue, all her connections suggested my name.

This eye-opening conference made me socially aware of my position as an academic and as someone who had the direct lineage from my mother who, later in life, chose to become a Buddhist monastic. I realized that it was not sufficient to sit in an ivory tower and do nothing to bring about change on the *bhikkhuni* issue when I had gathered so much knowledge about the issue while completing my Ph.D. dissertation on *bhikkhunis*.

I started to be more active, writing and connecting with other Buddhist women, both lay and ordained. In October 1984, I brought out NIBWA, the Newsletter on International Buddhist Women's Activities, which later became Yasodhara. This networking was exactly what we Buddhist women needed. We learned much about the movement and about women isolated here and there, all working for the good cause of spreading Buddhism. Also in 1984, Ayya Khema, a German nun ordained as a *dasasilmata* in the Sri Lankan tradition, started a training center on Parapaduwa Island for the nuns in southern part of Sri Lanka.

With this networking, Ayya Khema and Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo came up with the idea of getting us together by organizing the first international conference on Buddhist nuns. Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo was based in India at that time, so the ideal place seemed to be Bodhgaya, the land of enlightenment. The ideal time seemed to be after H.H. Dalai Lama's annual talk in Bodhgaya. The conference dates were set for February 11 to 14, 1987.

I remembered distinctively how we came together and helped out to make the conference possible. I brought some donations from Thailand, but the major work of preparing and organizing was in the hands of Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo. Ven. Jampa Tsedroen came early to help with registration and housing. We sat on an open platform right near the busy market of Bodhgaya. Ven. Jampa Tsedroen, Ven. Thupten Chodron, and many others were there to help get things ready. Monks and laymen gave the nuns and laywomen a helping hand with the conference preparations, even carrying tables and scrubbing the tables so they looked presentable.

Thousands of people attended the opening ceremony of the conference, which was graced by the presence of H.H. the Dalai Lama. Over 200 people from 26 different countries attended the daily conference sessions. The Somdech Maha Ghosananda of Cambodia brought a white-robed American nun to attend the conference. People like Kusuma Devendra and myself, who were still laywomen at the time of this conference, have now become ordained. The conference provided a fertile ground for Buddhist women like us to grow intellectually, psychologically, and spiritually.

Sakyadhita was an outcome of this first conference. The



Dr. Chatsumarn Kabil Singh (now Bhikkhuni Dhammananda) Presents a Talk

following years were difficult, because Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, a key organizer, suffered a serious snake-bite injury in 1989. Although the activities of Sakyadhita continued, there was a gap of four years before I could pick up the energy to organize the next Sakyadhita conference in Bangkok in 1991, hosted by Thammasat University. The co-founders and organizers decided that henceforth the conferences would focus on Buddhist women more broadly, not only on Buddhist nuns. The conference in Thailand in 1991 was the first conference held after Sakyadhita came into existence, but historically the Bangkok conference is known as the 2nd Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women.

At this conference, we saw the participation of many Korean *bhikkhunis*, led by the president of the Korean Bhikkhuni Association, Ven. Hye Chun Sunim. Many Thai *mae chees* participated in this conference for the first time – more than 30 of them. Three senior *bhikkhunis* – Ven. Hye Chun Sunim from Korea, Ven. Voramai Kabil Singh from Thailand, and Ven. Shig Hiu Wan from Taiwan – met for the first time at Songdhammakalyani Monastery. This was an inspiring occasion.

I was selected as president of Sakyadhita from 1991 to 1995. In 1993, we had yet another successful Sakyadhita conference in Sri Lanka, thanks to the able organizational skill of Ranjani de Silva. This conference paved the way for the movement toward *bhikkhuni* ordination in Sri Lanka. The 3rd Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women in Sri Lanka meant so much to me, but I did not fully realize it until later. Seven years later, early in 2001, I went back to Sri Lanka to reap the result of my good karma by receiving ordination as a *samaneri*, my first step toward full monastic life.

The celebration of 20 years of Sakyadhita is a celebration of my life and the lives of many other nuns and laywomen whose lives revolve around serving the *sasana* (the Buddha's teachings).

Bhikkhuni Dhammananda (Dr. Chatsumarn Kabil Singh), a former professor at Thammasat University, is currently the abbess of Songdhammakalyani Temple. She is also founder of Buddhasavika Foundation, which publishes Yasodhara: Newsletter on International Buddhist Women's Activities and supports short-term training projects for Buddhist women and the Home of Peace and Love, a shelter for underprivileged women and girls – all in Thailand. For more information, please see: www.thaibhikkhunis.org.



Sakyadhita

AYYA KHEMA'S GIFTS TO SAKYADHITA

Ranjani de Silva

Ayya Khema was born Ilse Kussel on August 25, 1923, to German-Jewish parents. She had to leave Germany as a 15-year-old girl because of the Nazi terror against anybody with a Jewish background. Her parents managed to send her to England, while they themselves fled and finally arrived in Shanghai. Two years later, in 1940, she managed to follow her parents to Shanghai. Her autobiography recalls many adventures in the Americas and Australia. She married, had children and grandchildren, worked at many professions, and finally settled into a life on a farm in Australia.

One day, the monk Phra Kuantipalo visited her farm. Listening to him, she very quickly decided that Buddhism was what she was looking for. Almost immediately, in 1979, she decided to become a nun. At the age of 56, she went to Sri Lanka. There she met Mahathero Nyanaponika, a famous scholar also of German-Jewish origin who had been living as a monk in Sri Lanka since 1935. At once, she felt very much at ease with him and asked him to ordain her. He advised her to go to see the Singhalese monk, Mahathero Narada, who agreed to ordain her as a Buddhist nun. She received the name Ayya Khema, but we all called her Sister Khema.

Ayya Khema soon became our meditation teacher and became very popular for her teachings and her Dhamma talks, especially among the English-speaking Buddhist women. She tried to help the ten-precept nuns (*dasasilmathas*) to improve their education and their status in society. In 1985, she established the Nuns Island at Parappuduwa with the help of her lay followers. The Nuns Island was located next to the Monks Island at Polgasduwa that was founded by the famous German monk-scholar Nyanatiloka.

With the opening of the Nuns Island, we had more opportunities to do retreats with Ayya Khema. In 1984, I attended my first ten-day retreat with her in Kandy, where she taught meditation to hundreds of women and men. It was she who enlightened so many of us about this path of meditation.

Ayya Khema invited a few of us to attend a conference on Buddhist nuns to be held in Bodhgaya in February 1987. She was one of the founders of the conference and also led our delegation from Sri Lanka. We had no idea what the conference would be, but we always followed her path. We were eager to join her on this trip with the idea of doing a special pilgrimage. To our surprise, in Bodhgaya we met many nuns and laywomen from many different traditions and nationalities. His Holiness the Dalai Lama inaugurated the conference and, under one tent for seven



Wendy Barzetovic, Sylvia Wetzel, and Sangye Khadro in Discussion with Buddhist Women from Around the World.

days in Bodhgaya, we participated in this first-ever international conference on Buddhist nuns.

After listening to many speakers who shared their experiences, I was moved for many reasons. Almost each speaker referred to Sri Lankan nuns and how they received the lineage of *bhikkhuni* ordination from Theri Sangamitta, the daughter of King Asoka of India in the 3rd century BCE. The speakers also mentioned that the Bhikkhuni Sangha flourished in Sri Lanka up to the 11th century. It was heartbreaking to realize that, despite this rich heritage, our *dasasilmathas* in Sri Lanka were living in very poor conditions and were not receiving the necessities of life. As Buddhist women, we felt ashamed that we had not taken an interest in them. At the conference, we became awakened.

As the conference closed, we were all convinced that we needed to continue to work for a better future for nuns and for Buddhist women in general. We drafted a constitution that described the aims and objectives of a new international Buddhist women's organization and Friedgard Lottermoser proposed the name Sakyadhita, meaning "daughters of the Buddha." I recall Ayya Khema saying "Ranjani, you can go back home and do some work to help the nuns." With those words, she inspired me to start training nuns to do hospital work in Sri Lanka. Ayya Khema also took what was a bold step at the time by receiving *bhikkhuni* ordination at Hsi Lai Temple in Los Angeles in 1988, serving as a model for other nuns in the Sri Lankan tradition.

The next conference was held at Bangkok, Thailand, in 1991. There I met Ayya Khema for the last time. Kusuma Devendra (now Bhikkhuni Kusuma) and I issued an invitation to hold the 3rd Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women in Sri Lanka. Ayya Khema encouraged me in this endeavor and gave me her moral support. We felt very sad that Ayya Khema could not attend Colombo Conference due to poor health.

In 1992, we founded a national branch of Sakyadhita in Sri Lanka. The Sakyadhita Conference in Colombo in 1993 was an opportunity for nuns and laywomen from all parts of Sri Lanka to gather together, along with *bhikkhus*, *bhikkhunis*, Buddhist nuns and laypeople from 26 countries. This gathering was a great inspiration to our *dasasilmathas*. Many of our nuns told us that this was the first time they heard the word *bhikkhuni* mentioned and saw that the Bhikkhuni Sangha existed in the world. The impact of the conference was so great and the nuns gained so much confidence that we started working right away to support, educate, and empower them. Since that time, we have all worked continuously to help the nuns become what they are today.

After the Sakyadhita Conference in Colombo, we faced many challenges, but I was fortunate to have Kusuma Devendra working with me. We organized training courses for nuns and classes in Pali, Buddhism, and English. My only resource at that time was my friend Kusuma, who later became one of the first ten nuns to receive *bhikkhuni* ordination in Sarnath in 1996. Since that time, hundreds of nuns have received *bhikkhuni* ordination in Sri Lanka and Bhikkhuni Kusuma has continued to teach Buddhism around the world.

In 2000, we opened the Sakyadhita Training and Meditation Center on the outskirts of Colombo, where there are currently 12 *bhikkhunis* and *samaneris* in residence. In recent years, we have conducted numerous training courses in social development, counseling, leadership, health education, and first aid for nuns from ten districts. Young nuns receive monastic training and education, in addition to English and computer classes. Sri Lankan nuns have become agents of change in society and provide many services for the benefit of humankind.



Over the years, Ayya Khema sent me many cards and letters. Her last card arrived in November 1997, after she had passed away on November 2. In that card she said, "Ranjanji, may you walk in sunshine for helping the nuns." These were Ayya Khema's last words to me and, in accordance with her wishes, I will continue to help the nuns as long as I live.

As a founding member of Sakyadhita, having attended all nine Sakyadhita conferences, and having helped Sri Lankan nuns receive higher ordination, I remember Ayya Khema with gratitude on the 20th anniversary of Sakyadhita. May she attain *nibbana*!

Ranjanji de Silva is a founding member of Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women and served as president from 1995 to 2002. Since 1987, she has been active in promoting the cause of Buddhist women and helping restore the lineage of full ordination for nuns in Sri Lanka. In 2000, she founded the Sakyadhita Training and Meditation Center for the training and education of nuns, on the outskirts of Colombo. See: www.sakyadhita-srilanka.org.

SAKYADHITA: AN APPRECIATION

Bhiksuni Tenzin Palmo

Actually it seems an oversight to have invited me to comment on the First Sakyadhita Conference, for the simple fact that I was not there! When I received the invitation to participate in the International Conference on Buddhist Nuns at Bodhgaya in 1987, I was in the midst of a three-year retreat in a cave in the Himalayan region of Lahaul. In fact, since that region is snowbound from November until May, I didn't learn about the conference until the event was long over. I have always felt some sense of regret not to have been present at the birth of such an auspicious movement, but so it was.

Twenty years ago, the subject of Buddhist nuns was simply not on most people's agenda, even with people of the Buddhist faith. In the early 1990s, when I first began traveling to raise awareness of the plight of nuns in the Tibetan tradition, many people confessed that up to that point they had not given a thought to the nuns, since all one heard about were monks.

Today, that is no longer true. Everywhere, Buddhist nuns are finding their place and gradually gaining more confidence to raise their status, that is, the right to equal opportunities for Dharma studies and practice and the chance to realize their own intellectual and spiritual potentials. Nunneries are being founded with educational programs and are attracting more young women from cultivated backgrounds. More and more, the *bhiksuni* (higher ordination) question is being broached and discussed throughout the Buddhist world, even in those lands where the *bhiksuni* lineage had previously died out or never existed.

Much of the credit for this movement to improve the status of nuns must be attributed to the Sakyadhita organization. From the year of its inception, there has been a constant focus at its bi-annual meetings on the situation of the nuns and how to remedy the problems they face as women in patriarchal societies.

Personally, one of the most moving aspects of the Sakyadhita conferences is the meeting between nuns of the different schools, cultures, and countries. Despite the varieties of robes and language, they quickly establish a sisterly bond, recognizing the unity of Dharma beneath the outer variations. In addition, it has become understood that all nuns will be treated with equal respect, overlooking levels of ordination. As a result, many nuns from countries where nuns traditionally gained little attention

now find themselves esteemed and viewed with devotion, often for the first time. At Sakyadhita, all nuns represent the Jewel of the Sangha.

Laywomen also have a wonderful time at the Sakyadhita conferences. Laywomen of different schools, cultures, and countries meet with other women of like mind and learn about the Dharma from women's points of view – frequently a new experience! There is an atmosphere of friendship and kinship, exploring topics of mutual interest to Buddhist women without rancor, but with inspiration and honesty.

Through the years, Sakyadhita has grown in membership and influence, which now reaches to all Buddhist countries and beyond. It remains probably the only international organization for all Buddhist women. Finally, Buddhist women are finding their voices within the usually all-male choir. Our hope is that the future will bring fuller female participation with an increasing share in decision-making in the realm of the Dharma as is already happening in the rest of the world.

Bhiksuni Tenzin Palmo is the founder of Dongyu Gatsul Ling Nunnery in northern India and is working to re-establish the Togdenma (yogini) tradition of the Drukpa Kagyu lineage. She is the author of *Reflections On A Mountain Lake: Teachings on Practical Buddhism* and her story is documented in the book *A Cave in the Snow*. For more information, see www.gatsal.org or dgl.nunnery@yahoo.com to contact Dongyu Gatsul Ling Nunnery, Village Lower Mutt, P.O. Padhiarkar via Taragarh, Distt. Kangra, H.P. 176081, India.

VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE BUDDHIST WOMEN

Sylvia Wetzel

Time runs fast. Twenty years ago, I had the great fortune to attend the 1st International Conference on Buddhist Nuns in Bodhgaya, India. This year, we will host another conference on Buddhist nuns in Hamburg, Germany, with some seventy scholars from Asia and the West. And, again, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who strongly supports the full ordination of women in the Buddhist traditions, will attend.

In 1987, I was a nun in the Tibetan tradition. I lived as a nun for two years, from the summer of 1985 to the summer of 1987. I am not a nun anymore, but I cherish the experience of living a celibate life and focusing all my life energy on the Dharma in this way. During that time, I noticed that living as a red-robed "flag" for Tibetan Buddhism was not bringing out my best qualities. Instead, I developed a certain rigidity, with a strong ambition and expectation to be perfect. Giving back the robes and returning to lay life in 1987 was the right step for me.

I am happy to see that the nuns' issue is being discussed widely in the Buddhist world, and that many strong and dedicated women have chosen the path of ordained life. As I see it from Europe, the 1987 conference had the strongest impact on Asian women, many of whom have subsequently became fully ordained in the Tibetan and Theravada traditions. At present, there are almost 500 fully ordained nuns in Sri Lanka and several hundred in the Tibetan tradition, including Western nuns, with more being ordained every year. This is a wonderful result.

As a teacher of Buddhism in Europe since 1986, I take great joy in seeing more and more Asian and Western nuns being trained as teachers. This has always been a crucial issue for Sakyadhita. I had the fortune to attend several international conferences of



Nuns Chant in Chinese behind Ayya Khema, Karma Lekshe Tsomo and Maha Ghosananda.

Western Buddhist teachers with H. H. the Dalai Lama, in 1993 and 1996 in Dharamsala (India) and Spirit Rock (California) in 2000. In Western countries, the face of Buddhism has changed greatly in the last 20 years. There are more Western teachers, more lay teachers, and more women teachers every year. This was especially visible at the international conference of Western Buddhist teachers at Spirit Rock in 2000, where more than two-thirds of the 200 participating teachers were laypeople and almost half were women. But still, for many students in Asia and the West, the archetypal Buddhist teacher is male and, very often, a monk.

Sakyadhita has achieved a great deal in 20 years and many tasks still lie ahead. Sakyadhita is the leading Buddhist association helping establish full ordination in all Buddhist traditions and inspiring the training of nuns as teachers. It is not only an association for Buddhist nuns, but for all Buddhist women. We carefully chose this name at the founding conference in Bodhgaya in 1987.

I see three additional broad issues becoming crucial in the coming years: (1) deepening the ongoing networking among Buddhist women teachers; (2) discussing teaching content and methods; and (3) making known the life stories of women practitioners and teachers of all traditions and times, in books, on CDs, and maybe in films. To work on the first two issues, I imagine an international conference of women teachers being held, maybe in five years' time, at the 25th Sakyadhita Anniversary in 2012. Regional conferences and local meetings, in all five continents, before that date for sharing experiences in teaching and publishing would be very helpful. Some discussion of all three issues can also be done on the internet. For that, a Women of Wisdom (WOW) internet exchange, such as a WOW-yahoo-group of women teachers, would be useful. We could share ideas and experiences and, in this way, get more detailed information about common interests.

Work on the third point is equally important. Some stories of women practitioners and teachers have been published in books, but many more wonderful stories are still hidden in scholarly texts or have been transmitted orally and never written down at all. To make these women visible and their fascinating life stories available for a wider public – of women and men, practitioners and teachers – in various media – in books, films, and CDs – is a challenging task that Sakyadhita can further inspire and support. For example, Wendy Egyoku Nagao Roshi of the Zen Centre of Los Angeles has written an invocation to the female lineage masters

of early Buddhism, general Mahayana, and Zen, which is recited in English regularly in her center. We adapted the invocation in 2002 to include Tibetan *yoginis* and women teachers, and recite it in German at the beginning of our Green Tara practice. One of my students has collected life stories of some of these female lineage masters and tells and interprets them in meditation courses. Now she has written a book (to be published in 2008) with engaging stories of women practitioners from early Buddhism, Mahayana, and Vajrayana, extracted from more scholarly works. Since they are well told, one can enjoy reading them alone or reading aloud in a group during courses and meetings. Such stories make us conscious of the many wonderful women of our mostly hidden and unknown female lineage. All women need female role models. Good male teachers are wonderful and precious, but they can never provide the same inspiration as a female role model. I consider this issue important for strengthening the confidence of women on the Buddhist path. It will also help Buddhists, both women and men, to broaden their perspectives about the impact of gender roles on the path and to reflect those perspectives when teaching Buddhism, whether in Asia or the West.

Sylvia Wetzel was born in 1949 and holds a university degree in Politics and Russian Language. She has studied and practiced Buddhism since 1977, mainly in the Tibetan Gelug Tradition (Lama Thubten Yeshe), with strong influences from Theravada, Rinzai Zen, and the Tibetan Nyingma tradition. She has taught Buddhist philosophy and meditation widely since 1986, mainly in German-speaking countries and in Spain. She was a founding member of Sakyadhita in 1987 and the Network of Western Buddhist Teachers (Dharamsala) in 1993, and served on the Board of Directors of the German Buddhist Union for fifteen years. An important focus of her teaching at Buddhist retreats, weekends, and public talks is reflecting on Western culture, Christianity, and gender roles. She has written several books and many study materials for her courses (mostly in German, but some in Spanish and English, too). See, www.sylvia-wetzel.de, www.tara-libre.org.

REFLECTIONS ON WOMEN IN THE DHARMA DURING THE LAST TWENTY YEARS

Bhiksuni Thubten Chodron

February 2007 celebrates the 20th anniversary of the 1st International Conference on Buddhist Nuns, which was held in Bodhgaya, India. I remember that conference well – the huge tent with dust blowing through it, the excitement prior to H. H. the Dalai Lama's opening talk, the hard work of the organizers – Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, Ven. Ayya Khema, and Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh – as they negotiated constantly changing schedules and circumstances. At the conclusion of the conference, Sakyadhita was founded as a way for international Buddhist nuns and Buddhist women to stay in contact.

We had no idea then of what would blossom from this event, that over the next 20 years, conferences about and for Buddhist nuns and women would be held every two or three years, each time in a different country. Holding the conferences in a different country each time was very skillful, for it allowed us to learn about each others' traditions and practices first-hand. The general public in each country witnessed the presence and practice of a large group of Buddhist nuns and women; they saw the harmony, sharing, and open and honest exchanges among us, even when differences of opinion existed.

The organizers made an effort to sponsor nuns from poorer



K.P.W. Gnanawathie, Pema Chodron, Tesso Kondo, Ren Hua, and Sylvia Wetzel

countries, so that they could attend the international conferences. This has had many wonderful effects. For example, the Thai *mae chees* and Tibetan *sramanerikas* were able to witness the functioning of Bhikshuni Sanghas in Korea and Taiwan. This broadened their knowledge of the Vinaya and increased their self-confidence, as they saw what communities of educated nuns could do and the benefits they could bring to society.

We didn't know twenty years ago that books would be produced as a result of almost each conference. These books enable women who were not present at the conferences to learn about the gatherings and the points of discussion, and to feel connected to their sisters internationally. The publication of the papers in these books was a vehicle to communicate the experience and perspectives of many new voices. It also provided information for scholars.

The conference in 1987 also marked what was probably the first *bhikshuni posadha* in India in over a millennium. *Posadha* is the twice-monthly confession and restoration of vows and is one of the essential practices that establishes a Sangha as existing in an area. Buddhist texts describe a central country as one with fully ordained women and men, as well as female and male Buddhist lay followers. A place is admired if it is a central country, because all four categories of the Buddha's disciples exist and practice there. While the other three groups exist in India, the *bhikshuni* community ceased centuries ago. But due to this conference and the *bhikshuni posadha* ceremony, the Bhikshuni Sangha once again exists in India, thus making it a central country. Those of us who participated felt a strong link to our Dharma sisters who have performed this essential ceremony as a harmonious community for over 25 centuries.

Through Buddhist nuns and women working together internationally, much has been accomplished to improve living conditions for nuns in poorer countries, to increase general education and Dharma education for women, to re-establish full ordination for women in Sri Lanka, and to promote steps to introduce it into the Tibetan community. These good works and others will undoubtedly continue in the future, thereby benefitting Buddhist nuns and laywomen and, by extension, the existence of Dharma in the world and peace in human society.

Bhiksuni Thubten Chodron is an American Buddhist Nun in the Tibetan tradition. She studied with Ven. Lama Yeshe and Ven. Zopa Rinpoche in Nepal and received *sramanerika* ordination in 1977 and *bhikkhuni* ordination in Taiwan in 1986. She is founder of Sravasti Abbey, a monastery in the USA and author of several books, including: *Open*

Heart, Clear Mind; Buddhism for Beginners; Working with Anger; How to Free Your Mind: Tara the Liberator; and Cultivating a Compassionate Heart: The Yoga Method of Chenrezig. For more information, please see, www.thubtencchodon.org.

IN MEMORY OF AYYA KHEMA IN SRI LANKA Bhikkhuni Kusuma

It was a curious turn of fate that I received a letter from Ilsa Ledermann, way back in the 1970s. She said that she wanted to visit Sri Lanka, but did not know anyone there. She had asked someone in Thailand and that person had given her my address! I do not know the person who referred her to me, but I am eternally grateful to her. It was a turning point in my life.

I wrote back that my doors are open for anyone in the Dhamma and told her please come whenever possible. A few days later, a foreigner arrived at my house dressed in white. I remember her black hair and powerful personality. Within minutes, we were talking like long-lost friends. It was Ilsa Ledermann. She used my house as her mailing address and came daily to collect her mail, but she stayed in Colombo with others who understood her worth. A few weeks later, she was ordained as a ten-precept nun (*dasasilmata*) at Vajirarama in Colombo under the tutelage of Ven. Narada Mahathero.

I remember a small incident just before the day she was ordained. She was our distinguished guest and family friend. She was in a bit of trouble and wanted an immediate solution. She had sent a sum of money to her son in Germany and invited him to come to Sri Lanka to witness her ordination. But she had been unable to contact him since then and was unsure whether the money had arrived or whether her son was coming to Sri Lanka.

Overseas communication in Sri Lanka was not so efficient in those days! Luckily, I had an influential friend at the General Post Office. So I contacted him and he was able to make a person-to-person call. It happened that her son had left his workplace and residence. Her son had received the money, but was unable to witness her ordination ceremony.

Two days later, Ilsa Ledermann became the world-famous Ayya Khema. She received the ten precepts before a gathering of hundreds of devotees, shedding tears of joy. The ordination was the talk of the town and pictures were displayed in the local newspapers. She remained in Colombo with wealthy women who offered her every comfort. Occasionally, she gave Dhamma talks in and around Colombo, and I had the privilege of translating for her into Sinhala, the local language. So I was with her throughout her stay in Sri Lanka. Although I was a Buddhist scholar myself, I was amazed at her knowledge and her perfect rendering of the Theravada (Pali) Dhamma. I traveled with her for thousands of miles all around Sri Lanka.

Ayya Khema helped some poor nuns at Madiwela Kotte, with the help of Ms. Nanayakkara, who was a keen supporter. A two-storey teaching center was constructed and I was asked to take care of the library. At that time, I was teaching at the University of Sri Jayawardeneprura, so I managed to get the help of one of the library assistants. But a very unfortunate incident occurred. The nuns objected to the use of the seal to stamp the books. Somehow they misunderstood and thought that Ayya Kehma would have proprietary rights over the books. Although I did not understand their objections, I had to give up the library project. Later, Ayya Khema became disappointed with the committee and abandoned the project with the building half-finished. It nearly broke my heart.



Sakyadhita

Ayya Khema's next project was the Nuns' Island at Parappuduwa. She took me around and around the island by boat and asked, "Don't you think that it will be a lovely Nuns' Island?" I smiled. How could I imagine the future? We made many visits while the construction was in progress. Ayya Khema confessed, "Kusuma, it cost me three times the typical building cost, since every grain of sand had to be carried across by boat."

Very soon, to the amazement of everyone, a beautiful, delightful, massive center emerged. The center was complete with meditation halls, dining halls, residences, libraries, a shrine room, and all facilities. The opening ceremony was performed in unimaginable splendor. Poor me, I was awestruck. The perfection of every detail was incredible. Large numbers of people arrived when Ayya Khema took up residence and many meditation retreats were held, with the participation of locals and foreigners. Ayya Khema had a special *kuti* (cottage) with a huge rock enclosed, so she could meditate atop the rock. "Kusuma," she said, "If I can't get enlightened here, then there is no possibility elsewhere." And so the days passed....

During this time, Sri Lanka came under the grip of a monstrous terrorist uprising, both in the south and the north. People were killed by the hundreds. It was too dangerous to live on the island, despite the protection of the German monks on Polgasduwa, the adjoining island. Anybody could gain access to the island by boat. Ven. Piyaratna, chief incumbent of the Monks' Island and Mr. de Silva, the chief lay supporter, who were very powerful personalities, both passed away, to the utter disappointment of Ayya Khema and all of us.

Ayya Khema left Sri Lanka amidst the turmoil. Even today, after 25 years, the terrorist war in the north is not resolved. It is a miracle that Sri Lanka has survived as well as it has.

In 1987, Ayya Khema said, "Kusuma, you must attend the nuns' conference in Bodhgaya." By this time, I had been working with the Ministry of Buddha Sasana for about ten years, trying to register the nuns in Sri Lanka. For one year, I traveled around Sri Lanka collecting data for my research on nuns. During this time, the Sri Lanka government came to recognize my contributions toward the establishment of a special section in the Ministry to deal with nuns. I informed the government about this very important conference on nuns and the Ministry gave me the necessary financing to attend the conference. This I did, as the delegate from the Sri Lanka government.

At the nun's conference, I was elected to the Theravada Vinaya Research Committee, under the leadership of Prof. Friedgard Lottermoser, one of the greatest Buddhist and Pali scholars I have ever known. The next year, she sent me a ticket to visit her in Germany to conduct the research. I spent three months with her, as her guest. Everyday, she took me to her office, where she worked as the editor of a new Pali dictionary. There was no rest for us; it was Vinaya, Vinaya, Vinaya! For 3 months, we scrutinized the texts, commentaries, and subcommentaries in Sinhala, Pali, English, German, and Burmese. Dr. Lottermoser read about eight different languages with ease and was particularly good in Burmese. I brought our research materials to Sri Lanka and registered with the Pali and Buddhist University for a second doctoral degree. At the conference, it was Dr. Lottermoser who suggested the name "Sakyadhita" for the new international association of Buddhist women and she became one of its founding members. She became a dear friend to me for life. I had already known her in Sri Lanka, where she had been my guest many times. She now resides at Dhamma Giri in Igatpuri, India, the *vipassana* meditation center founded by U.S.N. Goenka.

Today, I must humbly confess that my success story, which culminated in becoming the first *bhikkuni* in Sri Lanka after a lapse of one thousand years, is due to Ayya Khema. For this reason, I founded the Ayya Khema Meditation Centre in Olaboduwa, Sri Lanka, in her memory. Everyday I pay respect before her photo in my shrine room with great devotion. Her name will be remembered for her pioneering efforts to establish the *bhikkuni* order in Sri Lanka and to establish many mediation centers around the world.

Sukhi hotu Sabbada! Nibbanam Paramam Sukham. May you be well everyday! *Nibbana* is the highest happiness.

Bhikkhuni Kusuma, M.A. Ph.D., is the founder of the Ayya Khema International Buddhist Mandir in Sri Lanka. The Mandir is currently under construction and, when completed, courses for women to study Pali suttas, Theravada Buddhism, Abhidhamma, Pali chanting, meditation, and English are planned. For more information, see: www.ayyakhemamandir.org.

A MOST SPECIAL TIME

Marcia Rose

The first conference in Bodhgaya 20 years ago was a most special, inspirational, and exhilarating time. It was an honor to happen to be in Bodhgaya at the first gathering of Sakyadhita – though we didn't have that name until sometime after the conference unfolded. It was a real joy to be able to help with preparations for the conference. At the moment, I particularly remember a small group of us, including Ven. Ayya Khema, spending the afternoon putting together groups of small gifts. These gifts would be offered to each of the attendees at the *sanghadana*, a lunch to be held the next day in honor of all the abbots of the many and various Buddhist monasteries in Bodhgaya. H.H. the Dalai Lama would be our special guest.

I also remember my dear friend Jesse, an Indian renunciant with whom I was sharing a room at the Burmese Vihara. When we asked her to give a public talk at the conference, she was very shy and reticent. She had never given a public talk before and wasn't formally a Buddhist, either. Instead, she was a multi-spiritual renunciant, a former Catholic nun from south India who was brought up as a Hindu and was also connected in very deep ways to the Buddhadharma. As it turned out, she offered a very fresh and beautiful talk from the purity of her heart.

Though I haven't really stayed very connected to the process of Sakyadhita over the years, the wonderful spirit of the women involved during the days of the first conference in Bodhgaya have stayed with me. That spirit has nurtured and inspired my interest and full-hearted commitment to my practice and study, and helped me generate confidence when invitations to teach began to come my way. The energy, commitment, and openheartedness that touched me so deeply in Bodhgaya twenty years ago continues to inform my practice, teaching, and my whole life as practice, to this day.

Women – Buddhist nuns and laywomen – are now offering the Buddha's teachings and practices more and more often in many places around the world. This is a wonderfully wholesome change that has occurred in recent years in the history of the Buddhadharma. Sakyadhita has certainly been an important force in making this happen.

Marcia Rose is the founding and guiding teacher of The Mountain

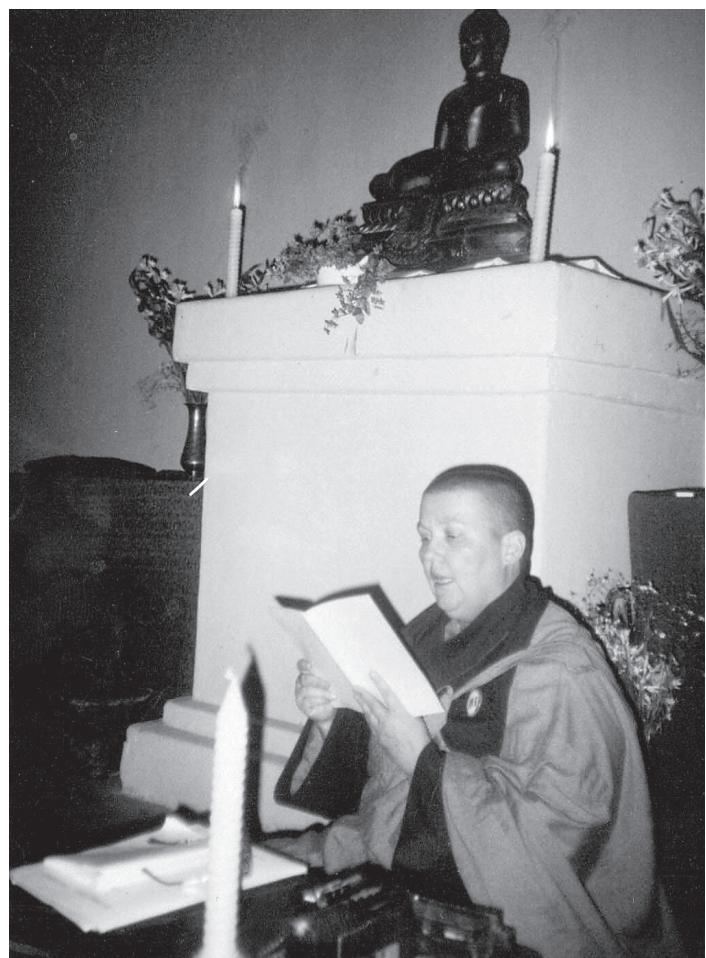


Hermitage (www.mountainhermitage.org). She has been studying and practicing Buddhist teachings and meditation since 1970, primarily in the Theravada-Vipassana (Path of the Elders) tradition. She was the resident teacher for staff at the Insight Meditation Society (IMS) from 1991-1995. She sometimes teaches at the annual three-month retreat at IMS and is a regular visiting teacher at the Forest Refuge, both located in Barre, Massachusetts. Marcia also teaches in other U.S. and international venues, and is dedicated to offering these ancient and timeless teachings in ways that make them accessible and authentic for contemporary culture.

DAUGHTERS OF THE BUDDHA

Bhiksuni Karuna Dharma

Back in 1986, I first learned that there was going to be an international conference on Buddhist women to be held in Bodhgaya. It was being planned by Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, who lived in India, Ven. Ayya Khema who lived in Sri Lanka, and Dr. Chatsumarn Kabil Singh of Thailand. I was already planning on going to the World Fellowship of Buddhists Conference to be held the same year in Nepal. Since I did not have enough money to attend both conferences, I had to make a decision. I thought that the conference on women was more important, so I got air tickets for myself and my 12-year-old daughter Elan. It was her first trip out of the United States. I explained to her what India was like, but you cannot prepare anyone, particularly a child, for her first trip to India.



Karuna Dharma leads the Recitation of the Bhikkhuni Pratimoksa

We flew into Calcutta and were met by a Chinese nun who lived there. We stayed at her temple that night and boarded a train the next morning for Gaya. We arrived in Gaya about 3 a.m. Our guide went looking for a taxi for us. She said it was too costly, so we would wait until morning for other transportation. Her explanation, "There are too many armed robbers around for us to go safely at night." At daybreak, she found several pony carts for us, so we started out in style on the pony carts. By the time we arrived several hours later, Elan was cranky. I told her that all she needed was some food and a good night's sleep. But she was constantly followed around by children begging from her. I obtained some coins and handed them to Elan, telling her to give them only to adults who needed help, not to the children for whom it was a game. That and a trip to visit the *bodhi* tree was all that she needed to lift her spirits. She was back in charge of her life again. We had chosen a "better accommodation" at a nearby hotel. We should have chosen the Burmese Temple instead.

The conference ran long hours and even met for sessions at night. One evening, I sent Elan back to the hotel and arrived hours later to find her sitting in the lobby. She told me that our room was full of rats. She had opened the door to the room to find them scattering everywhere. So for that week our closest neighbors were rats. Every morning we would wake to discover rat turds on top of our mosquito netting. Elan kept telling the manager that he needed a few cats around, but he ignored her.

The conference sessions were exhilarating. Two languages were used: English and Tibetan, because so many Tibetan nuns attended. A few Tibetan monks also attended, but they remained in the background, allowing the nuns to speak freely. His Holiness the Dalai Lama was also present and spoke to 1,500 people at the opening ceremony.

Twenty years later, one of the images that remains freshest in my mind is the hundreds of beggars who held out their bowls to be fed by Tibetan laywomen who gave them rice and dahl. It was very moving to see these Tibetan refugees feeding beggars. The beggars had come from miles around to Bodhgaya when they heard that the Dalai Lama would be there. They knew that they would be fed.

Another fresh image in my mind is the *bhikkhunis* who gathered to chant the *Pratimoksa Sutra* together for the first time. Monks and nuns are required to chant this text twice a month, but only if there are four or more *bhiksus* or *bhikkhunis* together. At that time, most of us did not live in a community of *bhikkhunis*, so we had not had the chance to do this. We searched for the *bhikkhuni* who had been ordained the longest to chant the *sutra*. Ven. I-Han from Foguangshan in Taiwan and I had both been ordained the same year, but we could not figure out who was ordained first. Ven. I-Han asked me to lead the ceremony, saying that my English was better, and I countered that she had more experience conducting the ceremony. Finally, I gave in and was assigned to lead the chanting. Since we needed to chant 348 rules and ask whether anyone had broken a rule, the ceremony took several hours. It was a wonderful sight to see *bhikkhunis* from around the world chanting the *Pratimoksa Sutra* together. This was probably the first time the *sutra* had been chanted by *bhikkhunis* in Bodhgaya for a thousand years and certainly the first time it was chanted in English. This was the only time I have had the opportunity to participate in a reading of the *Pratimoksa* and I am sure that is true of others, as well.

The conference sessions were quite stimulating and plenty of time was devoted to small group discussions after the talks. The Tibetan women became very animated during these meetings.



Sakyadhita

This was the first time most of them had come into contact with laywomen and nuns from different Buddhist traditions and it appeared to have quite an effect on them.

By the end of the conference, nobody wanted this to be the last time we met. We thought we should establish an organization. After much discussion, we came up with the title of Sakyadhita (Daughters of the Buddha). We decided to have a conference every two years. A small group of us met to discuss practical matters. The first few years Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo served as president, because Sakyadhita was primarily her brainchild, and I served as co-president, because I lived in the States. Since I had lots of experience registering organizations, I volunteered to get Sakyadhita incorporated and registered as a non-profit religious organization in California. Soon, Sakyadhita truly came into existence.

Karuna Dharma received a Ph.D. in English from the University of Michigan. She was one of the first American Buddhist women to receive full ordination and has been a pioneer in interreligious dialogue. She was a founding member of Sakyadhita: International Association of Buddhist Women and is currently director of the International Meditation Center in Los Angeles.

SAVE THE DATES!

The 10th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women will be held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, the first week of July, 2008.

Hope to see you there!

NEWSLINE

2nd Annual Buddhist Women's Conference in Chicago

Lise McLean

Over 200 people gathered on February 27, 2007, a blustery winter day in Chicago, for the second annual Buddhist Women's Conference sponsored by the Buddhist Council of the Midwest and DePaul University. Hosted at DePaul University, the informative and inspiring program opened with a keynote address by Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, who gave an illustrated talk about Sakyadhita and the lives of Buddhist women in Asia. The rest of the morning and the afternoon featured workshops, lunch, and a plenary panel of distinguished women Buddhist teachers. The conference closed with a vibrant performance by the Kokyo Taiko drummers from the Buddhist Temple of Chicago.

The recipients of the 2007 Women and Engaged Buddhism Award were Maekhao Chanthasomphone and Maekhaho Keo, founders of the Wat Silam Salalam Pokam School for girls in Laos; and Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo and the Jamyang Foundation for their educational work with girls and women in the Indian Himalayas, Laos, and the tribal areas of Bangladesh. The award included a monetary grant of USD 1,300 based on *dana* offered by conference participants. It will be used to furnish the Wat Sila Salalam Pokam School for Girls with desks, chairs, and books. As the conference website states: "By providing education and vocational training to girls and young women, Jamyang Foundation projects promote gender equality and also helps prevent sex trafficking and other forms of exploitation of women." (www.dharmawomen.org)

Echoing comments of other participants, Professor Nirmala Salgado of the Department of Religion at Augustana College was

enthusiastic about the conference, "It was great to have a forum where women were the focus and in which Buddhist monastics, lay practitioners, academics as well as those who just had an interest in learning more about Buddhism could come together and participate and share insights and experiences." To view photos from the conference, please go to: <http://share.shutterfly.com/action/welcome?sid=0BZtXLFqzasXSQ>.

Lise McLean is a social anthropologist with the Learning Sciences Research Institute at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She is associated with Liberation Park, a vehicle for Dhamma study, practice, and work in Norwalk, Wisconsin. Inspired by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, members are dedicated to a modern expression of Buddhist life that is true to the early teachings.

"Buddhism and Women"

The Network of Buddhist Organisations U.K.

Wendy Barzetovic

On Saturday, November 25, 2006, a meeting on the theme "Buddhism and Women" was organized by the Network of Buddhist Organisations, U.K., at the Birmingham Buddhist Centre in Moseley, Birmingham. One of the speakers, Beatrice (Jutta) Gassner, spoke about her aspirations to re-establish a chapter of Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women in the U.K. The meeting brought together members who had been on the U.K. Executive Committee at different periods of Sakyadhita's existence. Ms. Gassner's talk was followed by lively debate.

Munisha, a member of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO), gave a very open talk about the controversy within the FWBO regarding sexual misconduct within the organization. She raised the question of accuracy in the media, pointing out discrepancies between reports of the controversy that appeared in various publications.

Dr. Hiroko Kawanami, a lecturer in Buddhist Studies at Lancaster University, gave a talk about Buddhist nuns in Burma. She highlighted the fact that these nuns are not seeking equality with monks. She expressed the view that Burmese nuns are quite happy serving the monks, rather than aspiring to *bhikkhuni* ordination.

Fiona Nuttall of the Western Chan Fellowship (WCF) gave a most amusing and energetic (though somewhat unorthodox) talk about the place of women in contemporary Buddhism. She placed her observations against a background of western feminism. Her talk left her audience wondering where all of the good energy of the women in the feminist movement had gone. We surmised that many women had taken time out to see to the needs of their families, but watch this space!

A Right to a Life Free from Violence

Evelyn Diane Cowie

To mark its official observance of International Women's Day on March 8, 2007, the United Nations sponsored a panel discussion on "Ending Impunity for Violence against Women and Girls."¹¹ The *United Nation's Backgrounder*, written for International Women's Day 2007, outlined the problem: "All too often, perpetrators of violence against women and girls go unpunished. Such impunity – viewed by many as equally widespread, and equally unacceptable, as the violence – is a key element in perpetrating that violence and discrimination...But despite growing awareness of the magnitude



of the problem, its dimensions, forms, consequences and costs – to both the individual and society at large – the political will to end the culture of impunity, and to effectively prevent and address violence against women and girls, has not yet materialized.”²

Among other important topics, which largely focused on nations' obligations to protect the rights of women and girls, the *Backgrounder* highlighted the fact that the International Tribunals investigating the ethnic cleansings in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda have specifically “recognized sexual violence, including rape, as acts of torture and crimes against humanity.”³ Ironically, just as the U.N. was highlighting progress in one part of the globe, the Japanese Prime Minister sparked an international controversy with his comments on “comfort women,” underscoring the necessity of the U.N.’s decision to highlight the right of women and girls to a life free of violence.

Just days prior to the 2007 celebration of International Women’s Day, the Associated Press and other news outlets reported that on March 1, 2007, Japan’s Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, denied that Japan’s military forced Korean, Chinese, and other Asia women into sexual slavery as “comfort women” during World War II.⁴ This is apparently connected to a move by some nationalist Japanese lawmakers to overturn a 1993 apology to the victims by then-Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono – even though the 1993 apology was not an official apology of the Japanese Parliament, nor did the Japanese government establish an official compensation fund for the victims. A private fund expired in March.

Viewed as an attempt to shift responsibility away from the Japanese government for its role in the forced sexual slavery, Nariaki Nakayama, a member of the Japanese House of Representatives, was reported as commenting that, “Some say it is useful to compare the brothels to college cafeterias run by private companies, who recruit their own staff, procure foodstuffs, and set prices.”⁵

As Amnesty International noted in 2005, “comfort women” is a euphemism used to describe some 200,000 Korean, Chinese, Taiwanese, Filipina, Malaysian, East Timorses, Japanese, and Dutch girls and young women victimized by Japanese soldiers during World War II as they occupied parts of Asia.⁶ Many of these women were Buddhist. One former “comfort woman” described girls from age 14 to 17 being raped by forty to fifty soldiers a day.⁷ Amnesty International noted that “despite widespread prevalence of what was essentially institutionalized rape, the issue of ‘comfort women’ was ignored by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, set up after the war to prosecute Japan’s war criminals.”⁸

Prime Minister Shinto’s remarks created a international furor. In the United States, for example, efforts are underway to pass a Congressional Resolution demanding Japan make both “an unambiguous apology” and compensation to former “comfort women.”⁹ By the end of March, the Prime Minister backtracked somewhat and indicated that he stands by the 1993 apology.¹⁰

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe can be contacted at: Cabinet Secretariat, Cabinet Public Relations Office, 1-6-1 Nagata-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100 - 8968, Japan. Alternatively, the Cabinet’s website allows individuals to comment on “the administration of the Japanese government.” To comment, go to: <http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/forms/comment.html>.

NOTES

1. For information about International Women’s Day, see <http://www.un.org/events/women/iwd/2007/index.html>.
2. United Nations Department of Public Information, *Ending Impunity for Violence against Women and Girls*, United Nations

Backgrounder # DPI/2451 (March 2007), p. 1. <http://www.un.org/events/women/iwd/2007/pdf/background.pdf>.

3. Ibid., p. 3.

4. For more details, including Korean responses to the development, and to view the AP report see: http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20070301/ap_on_re_as/japan_sex_slaves. Reiji Yoshida, a writer

for The Japan Times Online, also discusses the situation in a March 11, 2007 article entitled: “Sex Slave History Erased from the Texts:

‘93 Apology Next?’ The article is available at <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20070311f1.html>.

5. Ibid.

6. Amnesty International, “Japan’s ‘Comfort Women’ Demand Public Apology,” The Wire (August 2005). <http://web.amnesty.org/web/wire.nsf/print/August2005Japan>

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid. See also: http://www.house.gov/list/press/ca15_honda/comfortwomentestimony.html.

10. See, ABC Online, “Japanese PM Renews ‘Comfort Women’ Apology, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200703/s1882113.htm>.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan
Edited by Barbara Ruch

This book is a monumental collection of studies on women and Buddhism in Japan that opens up a badly neglected area of Japanese cultural history and brings issues of Buddhism and Japanese women to the English-reading audience for the first time. This pioneering work is published by the Michigan Monograph Series in Japanese Studies at the Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan. Richly illustrated with 98 color plates and complete with a comprehensive glossary of *kanji*, it is essential reading for students and teachers of premodern Japanese history, culture, and religion. The book may be ordered by contacting: medievaljapan@columbia.edu.

Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan is edited by Professor Barbara Ruch, the founder and director of the Institute for Medieval Japanese Studies at Columbia University. This Institute promotes research on all aspects of premodern Japan, especially the Kamakura and Muromachi periods (1185-1600). Founded in 1968, the center encourages the study of all aspects of Japanese culture, sponsoring lectures, exhibits, and publications on the medieval period in Japanese history.

In 2003, the Institute hosted a lecture by Prof. Patricia Fister of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies in Kyoto, Japan, on “Celebrating Buddhist Art by Edo-Period Princess-Nuns.” In 2002, it screened the film “Enmyoin,” a documentary on the life of Ogawa Teijun, a 95-year-old abbess of a Shingon convent in Okayama, and her young successor Baba Seijun, who struggles to be accepted as abbess. For more information on the Institute, see www.columbia.edu/cu/ealac/imjs.

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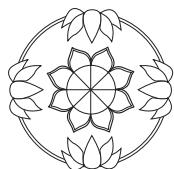
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