

The Proceedings of the 16th Sakyadhita
International Conference on Buddhist Women

New Horizons in Buddhism

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The cover artwork 'The Seven Sisters' was created by local Aboriginal Artist Leanne Tobin to commemorate the 16th Sakyadhita International Conference

CONTENTS

PREFACE	vii
Keynote speech: Roshi Susan Murphy	1
Panel:	
“BUDDHISM IN AUSTRALIA”	
Digital Oral Histories of Buddhist Women in Australia <i>Anna Halafoff</i>	8
Life's Inspirations & Challenges as an Australian/Korean Bhikkhuni - 20 Years in Korea, 20 More Back in Australia <i>Ven. Chi Kwang Sunim</i>	12
Humanistic Buddhism in Australia <i>Ven. Miao You</i>	20
Working for Buddhism in Australia <i>Di Cousens</i>	24
New Horizons for Emerging Sanghas: Community Groups and Lay Women Dharma Teachers <i>Anna Markey with Suzanne Franzway</i>	28
Paper Session 1:	
“RISING TO THE CHALLENGE: HEALING AND TRANSFORMATION”	
What's in a Name? <i>Sarah Harding</i>	33
Silent No More! Critical Review of Sexual Exploitation in Buddhist Practice— A Monastic Perspective <i>Ven. Dr. Tenzin Dadon & Ven. Dr Karma Tashi Choedron</i>	36
Personal Reflections on Rigpa and the Aftershocks of the Fall of Sogyal Rinpoche <i>Damcho Dyson, Tahlia Newland, Jacki Wicks</i>	41
Buddhist Women and the Challenge of Modern Slavery <i>Emma Tomalin</i>	45
Ānanda and Dispelling the Suffering of Sentient Beings <i>Darcie Price-Wallace</i>	50
The Body as Third Term: Buddhist Women of Color Address Racism in America	55

Carol L. Winkelmann

Plenary Session:

“NEW HORIZONS IN BUDDHISM”

Wise Hope in Social Engagement <i>Joan Halifax</i>	62
Promise to Path: Environmental Buddhism as Community Resilience <i>Dekila Chungyalpa</i>	67
Healing Art: Seeing Women’s Heart of Wisdom and Compassion <i>Paula Arai</i>	72
The Serpent Gurrangatch and the Hunter Mirragan <i>Bhikkhu Sujato</i>	79

Paper Session 2:

“SPIRITUAL TRAINING: NURTURING WOMEN’S EDUCATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT”

Creating Buddhist Communities by Relying on the Six Harmonies <i>Bhikshuni Thubten Chodron</i>	87
New Horizons of Vietnam Buddhist Women <i>Bhikkhuni Thich Nu Nhu Nguyet</i>	90
The Sikkhamānā System –Necessary in this Day and Age? <i>Bhiksuni YuJeong</i>	94
Living a Monastic Life in Equality <i>Miao Fan Shih</i>	98
Shared Inquiry: A Buddhist Hermeneutics of Gender <i>Brianna K. Morseth</i>	102
Historic Geshema Degree for Tibetan Buddhist Nuns in Exile <i>Lhamo Tso & A.K. Joshi</i>	106

Paper Session 3:

“WOMEN PAVING THE WAY: FUTURE DIRECTIONS IN BUDDHIST THOUGHT AND PRACTICE”

Awakening at Home - Language and Practices for the 21 st Century Woman <i>Jacqueline Kramer</i>	112
A Study on the Education Method for Reconstructing - a Sense of Community	115

Yudeok Sunim

The Fourth Assembly: Upasikas, New Circles of Meditation and Women's Agency in Urban Buddhism in Sri Lanka 120

Darini Rajasingham Senanayake

Fragrance of Deep Realisations: Reflections on Social and Spiritual Empowerment of Drukpa Kagyu Nuns at Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery, Himachal Pradesh 123

Sourajit Ghosh

Problem of Nuns and Bhikkhuni in Theravāda in Vietnam 130

Tran Hong Lien & Nguyen Thi Hong Cuc

New Challenges of Buddhist Nuns (*Thila-shins*) in Myanmar 135

Panna Their

Maternal Subjectivity/The Buddhist 'Self': A Contradiction or an Invitation? 139

Nadine Levy

Roundtable Session:

“RESOLVING CONFLICTS: BUDDHIST APPROACHES TO PEACE AND RECONCILIATION”

Meheni: Term for Reconciliation among Buddhist Female Monastics in Sri Lanka? 144

Gihani De Silva

The Immense Promise of the Dharma in War-Torn Middle East - Applying Ancient Wisdom and Timely Methods to Create Lasting Peace 147

Lama Dvora

Transforming Tensions: Buddhist Principles and Practice 151

Karma Lekshe Tsomo

Controversies Over Reviving Theravāda Bhikkhunī Orders: A Case Study in the Difficulties of Globalization 157

Liz Wilson

Paper Session 4:

“FEMININE WISDOM IN THE PAST, PRESENT and FUTURE”

BODHI, the Bahujan Hitay Pune Project, and the Ongoing Work of Dr Ambedkar 162

Maxine Ross, Karunadeepa, Emilia Della Torre, Colin D. Butler

The Role of Won-Buddhist Women in North-South Korean Relations: Past, Present and Future - Sakyadhita Buddhist Women's Future Role in Korean Peninsula 165

Sangwon Hwang

Upasikas of Nepal in Theravada Buddhism: Their Practice, Contribution and Leadership 171

<i>Reena Tuladhar</i>	
Welcoming the Stranger: Cultivating Hospitality <i>Malia Dominica Wong, O.P., D.Min.</i>	175
Women of the Dakini's Heart <i>Pema Khandro</i>	179
Stepping Lightly into the Future <i>Sister Candasiri</i>	183
CONTRIBUTORS	186

Preface

We would like to Acknowledge the Gundungurra and Darug people who are the traditional custodians of the land where the Conference is being held. We would also like to pay our respects to Elders both past and present.

At our previous Sakyadhita International Buddhist Women's Conference held in Hong Kong in 2017, it was suggested that the next conference be held in a Western country so that Asian delegates could see how Buddhism can flourish and adapt away from its traditional homelands.

For this reason, we selected Australia as most suitable because although primarily a western country, it also contains large populations of ethnic Asians such as Vietnamese, Chinese, Koreans, Sri Lankans and others. These communities have brought their religious cultures to this land and the Buddhists have erected temples and continue along with their traditional customs and beliefs.

At the same time the Australian community at large has also discovered the Dharma and founded many centres and monasteries holding allegiance to the various Buddhist traditions in Asia. So this current 16th Sakyadhita conference, being held in the scenic Blue Mountains of Australia, is an historic occasion for us, since for the first time we are meeting in a country which contains both traditional and contemporary expressions of the Dharma.

Appropriately, the theme of the conference is **New Horizons in Buddhism:** as the Dharma adapts to the 21st century while maintaining its own integrity and meaningful traditions. In the talks that are presented there are many challenges faced and sensitive issues confronted. This is where the feminine voice needs to be heard and can contribute so much to a fresh understanding of the directions in which the Dharma is moving in this provocative century. Certainly the higher education of women, both monastic and lay, has added an important dimension to Buddhist dialogue and this is exemplified in **Sakyadhita** and its aims.

We look forward to another lively, joyful and inspiring conference where Buddhist women from around the world can come together and share their knowledge and experience.

Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo

President, Sakyadhita International

Keynote speech

Roshi Susan Murphy

I am humbled and deeply honoured by the invitation to offer the opening keynote address to such an important and luminous gathering of women! Twenty minutes is a very short time in which to address the obvious fact and impact of the silencing and marginalizing of women in the Buddhist tradition for the last several thousand years -- and its studied indifference towards the venerable enlightened women who actually managed against the odds to break past such formidable barriers to practice, teach and inspire others.

It is of course impossible to reconcile this act of deep injury to the lives of hundreds of generations of women, with the *actual* core insights of the Buddhist path itself – which is waking up into direct awareness of the undivided and indivisible nature of mind and reality. This we find to be the very source of the natural flow of un-self-conscious compassion that cannot help but respond to the cries of the world!

But it surely is possible to open a way to heal this historic split that has been forced, right at the heart of what it is to be fully human, and to begin to enable the full flourishing of women in the expression of Dharma, and the full flourishing of Dharma in the lives of women.

Right now, at such a dangerous moment in human and planetary history, it is vitally important to bring across into the world something that's been sorely missing for far too long.

I mean the expression of Dharma sourced in the embodied life experience of women -- at last bringing to light the particular gifts of wisdom that can flow out only from the awake *female* body-and-mind, to defend and care for the life of the Earth.

For at least the last two and a half thousand years of human history it has been vigorously held by all the great religions of what has been called the 'Axial Age', including not only Buddhism and the Judeo-Christian religions, but also the golden age of Greek philosophy -- - that mind and spirit is definitively male in character, while flesh and all that comes with humbling bodily life, is definitively, and regrettably, female.

It hardly needs stating that this unapologetic hostility towards bodily life demeans and harms women – in fact harms life itself. And it is plain that this patriarchal mind-set has been wielded for centuries as a weapon to exclude women from full religious participation and expression.

Perhaps what is now sharply coming into focus is that it is actually dangerous to miss out on the vital perspective of women's spiritual experience and insight, at this critical moment in the history not just of our human world, but of the Earth herself, in which the relentless pressure of human demands upon the planet has already reached catastrophic levels, sending more than a million species into extinction and threatening a further holocaust of extinctions that, unchecked, may well take us with it.

Let's start with the fact that any direct experience and understanding of the undivided nature of mind and reality that lies at the very heart of all genuine Buddhist practice and realization, *plainly* reveals that any gendered characterization of the human capacity to awaken is baseless.

To say otherwise has been to place an artificial obstacle in the path of Buddhist women to deliberately limit our full participation in practice from the earliest beginning.

When mind is deeply settled and radiantly open, the essential nature of our heart and mind cannot be found or said to be fundamentally 'male' or 'female'; in fact, a separate 'self' or

‘other’ cannot be found in any substantial or enduring form. Such direct experience – it’s called waking up - verifies the undivided and indivisible true nature of reality and mind.

This direct experience lies beyond the reach of explanatory words, and yet we must work to express and share the deeply caring wisdom of practice that flows from it. But whenever we try to return the direct experience to words, we find ourselves forced back towards a dualistic consciousness.

This is the relative mind that language transmits -- the capacity of our minds that is so useful in distinguishing what kind of mind-state and conduct shares the good, and how to avoid the mind-states and conduct that harm ourselves, together with the many beings.

But this dualistic consciousness is equally the one that splits what it is to be human into categories of greater and lesser value, according to gender. It is the mind that proliferates harmful value judgments that depend on and perpetuate the painful delusion of separateness.

The mind of ‘me in here, and you out there’ is a mind asleep to this undivided reality, in which it is possible only to gladly admit that ‘you are not other than myself’.

If the historic splitting of the category ‘human’ into valued ‘male’ and devalued ‘female’ is left unchecked at every point by failing to ask, ‘What does this mean, and how does it stand, in the light of the essential oneness of reality and consciousness?’ then we agree to perpetuate a delusory mind of separateness and institute it right at the heart of Buddhist doctrine and institutions.

Traditionally every sutra begins with ‘*Thus I have heard*’. The Buddha *spoke* his teachings – they were teachings formed within a directly transmitted oral tradition. He would probably find the vast and dazzling array of Buddhist sects and styles almost unrecognizable. What would he make of the great body of revered written sutras and commentaries that have stemmed from the historic moment of his life, and profound enlightenment?

This is a question worth asking, since wherever women are denied education and literacy, a formidable barrier is created to women’s full agency, influence and participation in the public sphere. By contrast, a tradition of teaching based in oral transmission cannot so easily rule out women’s access to spiritual practice and authority.

We find the barrier to women’s participation erected and fortified in the same way for most of the history of the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions, too, of course. The Axial Age produced astonishing revolutions and revelations in spiritual consciousness – but perhaps the *most* astonishing revelation of the age turned out to be the water-tight male assumption that women have no natural place in that consciousness at all!

We’re lucky to live at a time when women are no longer prepared to endure being a silenced and restricted majority, but are pushing back against the historic injustice of dismissal from the spiritual realm.

A patriarchal mind-set has of course been limiting not only for women. Any dogma that seeks to re-divide the essentially undivided mind and heart of awakening also does violence to the flourishing and full expression of Buddhist practice and wisdom for men.

Men too are forced to struggle with the hierarchical inequalities and oppression. Dogma so deeply mistrustful - and even openly hateful - towards half the human race, and so clearly based in unexamined anxiety, fear and ignorance, is punishing also for men. To divide the spiritual life of human beings along lines of gender you have to lean heavily on a studied ignorance towards the very realization that lies at the heart of Buddhism.

In this gathering, the details of how this mind-set injures the path of practice need little rehearsing: they have been thoroughly lived, by most of the people present here today.

But let me present just a little taste, from a 20th century Chinese Tripitaka ‘master’:

‘First we will discuss the five obstructions. The first is that women are not able to become the great Brahma lord because that position is accomplished through purity and the body of a woman has a great many impurities. Second, women cannot become Chakra. Upon reaching the heavens their bodies must become male because only the males can be lords of the heavens. Although Chakra has some desire remaining, that desire is quite light. Women on the other hand are extremely libidinous. ... Wise kings have hearts of great compassion and kindness. They teach people to maintain the Five Precepts and the Ten Good Deeds. Whenever women see something good occur to others they become jealous and this keeps them from having great compassion. Fifth, they cannot become Buddhas. Buddhas have ten thousand virtues, women have many evils. They are jealous and obstructive, and their hearts are about the size of a sesame seed...’

If this was a rare and isolated example of religious teaching about women we could laugh it off as the absurdity that it is. But no -- there’s plenty more where that came from. Centuries of it.

At the same time, seeing into and right through the assumptions that underlie power structures that have normalized injustice over such long stretches of time takes mental effort. It can be a long struggle to perceive and up-end ancient assumptions, and to draw the powerful into self-awareness. All around our world, we can see how much injustice is kept silently in place by realistic fear of a backlash that can be truly savage.

So it would be unwise to expect applause or gratitude from the powerful, when we begin to question or disturb the deeply established sense of innate male entitlement that has limited the religious life of women in Buddhism for so long.

We must instead skillfully invite and steadily draw men into willingly *sharing* the rich, productive space of waking up, recognizing that it is equally beneficial for them to heal this ancient split in consciousness. Meanwhile, we must take care also to discern our own hand in the process of tying ourselves up, or holding ourselves back.

There is a living oral tradition of vivid and immediate teacher-student engagement central to transmission of the teaching in Chan/Zen Buddhism, that by the 10th and 11th century in China became collected as encounter narratives called *kungans* (Ch.), *kongan* (Kr.), or *koans* (J.) meaning ‘public cases’, and taken up as a focus of meditation and realization, a way to come to intimately share the enlightened mind of the old teachers.

One such comes from the record of Shítóu Xīqiān, an 8th-century Chinese Chán Buddhist teacher, when a student asked Shitou, ‘How do I get free?’

Shitou answered with a question that never stops inviting our practice of inquiry and open response. “*Who has bound you?*” he asked.

I think everyone recognises that one. So then the work begins, to see just *how* (and how well) we are binding ourselves!

One useful move in the process of confronting gender inequality is to notice some of the unexpected advantages in being placed *outside* blind forms of privilege.

Outsiders to power actually enjoy a valuable perspective upon an oppressive situation (and the suffering of its victims) that can offer 20-20 clarity of vision denied to its perpetrators. It is

rather like possessing an extra ten to twenty IQ points of intelligence and depth of insight, relative to those wielding and enmeshed in institutional power!

Another easily overlooked gift is the sharing of insightful laughter at the obvious impostures of male-only power – and such shared laughter, free of ill-will, but sharp with clear seeing, creates a kind of community-forming intelligence and force for change, that's often been the special preserve of women.

Both can help in moving past the oppressive, outward facts of '*Who has bound you?*' to begin to catch sight of the more inward ways we can internalise, accept and accommodate our sense of being bound as natural.

It is possible even to offer a kind of spirited *welcome* to this kind of historic difficulty. The mind of 'Welcome', as we know from our practice, is exactly the strong, open ground on which to study our own minds and from which to respond -- for in offering 'Welcome', we place ourselves firmly at home, right where we are. We take the role of friendly host, not victimised guest, of the difficult situation.

Perhaps we glimpse another way that painful circumstances can radically open our minds, in another moment from the Chan/Zen records – this time, involving the wonderful 9th century master, Dongshan Liangjie.

Dongshan was down at the monastery creek quietly washing his bowls together with a young monk, when suddenly, the exquisite little frog sitting on a rock right in front of them was torn apart by two hungry birds who swept down at the same moment and then flew off in opposite directions.

The young monk cried out in anguish, 'Why does it come to this!'

Dongshan replied -- mysteriously and yet not mysteriously, when you let his words search you more deeply --- '*It is only for your benefit, Achariya*'.

Notice that he addresses this monk lost in anguish with the honorific title of Achariya, 'wise one'. Wisdom surely grows in accord with truly penetrating and realizing the vast, interconnected 'benefit' presented moment by moment by unfolding events – that does not leave out moments of terrible tearing and loss - and can transform into the realization of '*all beings, one body*'. Which is the very source of selfless compassion, at the very heart of reality.

What realization of compassion can possibly arise except through our own experience of suffering and that of others, and the truth it ultimately opens up – of one great shared body of being?

As Auntie Beryl Carmichael, a wise indigenous elder of the Nyampiia people in the Menindee Lakes/Broken Hill area of Australia once made clear, "Reality is connectedness."

"If you're not in connectedness," she said, "You're not *in* reality."

In that cry, '*Why does it come to this!*', we can hear the unreserved and unself-conscious complete sharing of the reality of suffering in another being. The young monk's chance for dawning wisdom born of his genuine grief in that very situation is also being acknowledged. Genuine grief has the power to become informing and transforming at the deepest level, for it is based in truth, and realized as love.

In another of these live and lively teacher-student encounters, also in 9th century China, we find an exceptionally clear awakened older woman – sadly her name remained unrecorded, as

was customary - living not far from the humble temple of the great and very old teacher, Zhaozhou.

Deeply enlightened though she was, when her beloved granddaughter suddenly died, she wept openly and loudly in front of her many followers.

They were shocked! 'A master like you, and you weep? Impermanence is just impermanence, why mourn like this?' they cried, anxiously demanding that she stop. As though a display of personal immunity from grief might tidy away the threat of all harm and suffering for everybody.

Instead, she scolded them soundly, saying, 'Of course I weep! These cries are for all beings. Listen, *listen!*'

Later, Zhaozhou heard about this. He simply asked, '*How can anyone lose by crying out?*' A great question to carry forward into our perilous time.

The cries of the world after all bring Guanyin/Avalokitesvara into being, ushering compassion into the world, manifesting the benefit of all beings.

Can we also detect some special qualities of the Dharma in its vivid female expressive power, here in this story? Can we perhaps find that in the old woman's presentation of the value of unself-conscious and unrestrained care for life – and its deep source in an open meeting with suffering and loss?

Surely, such expressive, clear response that stems not from despair but from an unquestioning care for life is especially valuable in meeting the peril we face in our world right now. Poised as we are on a cliff-edge of indecision, watching the unfolding of profound climate tragedy. Agonized as we are by awareness of the avalanche of suffering and extinctions now clearly underway. Resolved as we must be to use every means we can find to meet this huge challenge of our time.

How coincidental is it that it was the very young *female* voice of Greta Thunberg that struck such a penetrating, resounding note in calling to account the forces of 'predatory denialism' (as it is has begun to be called) of the huge, corporate forces of greed that are mindlessly devouring the life of the Earth.

Those very forces are awakening an impassioned youth-led rebellion with a high preponderance of female leaders, demanding action to ameliorate and transform the tragedy in which we are all now players.

Is it the fact that it is the female body that carries life, and intimate caring for life, into the world? Is this what lets us seem to know so innately, almost beyond words, that the precious Earth is *not other* than our own precious body-and-mind?

Throughout its history there has been a striking, natural ease of recognition between Buddhism and the various forms of indigenous spirituality, grounded in close accord with the terms of the Earth, that it has encountered as it spread eastwards – for example, Tibetan Bon, Chinese Dao, Japanese Shinto.

Where did the Buddha finally reconcile this human body-and-mind with boundless reality? It was in the resolute act of sitting down, on the earth, under a tree.

So let me conclude with a koan that spring to life on this very continent, Australia, on one of the many times I was accompanying the remarkable Aboriginal elder, Uncle Max Harrison, Dulumunmun, on a teaching walk into country, on the south coast of New South Wales.

A 'walk into country' is a walk with an Aboriginal Elder that gradually draws you past your habitual categories of mind into a more indigenous understanding of the utterly interwoven nature of human consciousness with all the life forms, and land formations, into a profound

form of belonging – inseparable - that has a tap-root tens of thousands of years deep in time and place.

This is what conditions the very Australian sense of the word, ‘country’. *Country* has human custodians, but no hard borders, no bosses, no post-code, and no map outside of the human heart and mind.

The other people present on that occasion were members of a movement called ‘ANTAAR’ - Australians for (recognition of) Native Title and Aboriginal Reconciliation - all keen to drink in a deeper sense of *country* while acknowledging the grievous historical harm imposed by a settler society upon the oldest continuous human culture on the earth.

But at a certain moment, Uncle Max stopped everyone in their tracks by suddenly saying, “You know, I don’t hold with this word ‘reconciliation’.” People were shocked into silence, hearts beating.

He asked, “How can you talk about reconciliation, when there has never been any *relationship* in the first place?”

A powerful truth was forming in the air. But then he took it so much further. He bent down and picked up a handful of earth and held it out to everyone.

“I just tell both mobs (both ‘white-fellas’ and ‘black-fellas’) – *reconcile with this.*”

The great work right now is reconciliation with the earth, before we are too late to notice we are not just living in a house on fire but knowingly setting that fire with our own hands.

The implication of this deep Dharma teaching from Uncle Max, Dulumunmun, is plain: in every contending situation, *both* mobs – whether black and white, or male and female, or rich and poor – will find themselves profoundly equal and fully reconciled with each other and with reality **only** when they truly enter and go all the way through a process, likely to be a hard one, of establishing genuine relationship and reconciliation with the Earth, herself.

This generous, life-giving Earth, that is so clearly demanding that we now wake up, study, know, and more closely watch our minds.

True reconciliation is the realization that each of us is inseparable from one great body, one benefit, of awake compassion and care. That in fundamental reality, there is no ‘self’ to be found that stands alone, and against some so-called ‘other’.

That the life of any awake human being is one, ongoing work of reconciliation with this mysterious ‘not-two’ nature of fundamental reality. And that we are here to dissolve the endless delusory sense of separation with which we injure and divide ourselves, and pit ourselves so dangerously against the living Earth.

Let us no longer permit the shameful waste of all we have to offer as women of the way. Let us freely develop and bring forth to the world our deeply natural female expression of the Dharma (that ultimately finds no male or female quality to be separated out).

One Dharma, that bends always towards shouldering a simply human custodial responsibility and care, for the numberless and deeply vulnerable beings of this world.

Panel

Buddhism in Australia

Monday 24th June, Morning

Digital Oral Histories of Buddhist Women in Australia

Anna Halafoff

Introduction

Women have played a significant role in the history of Buddhism in Australia, documented previously by Paul Croucher (1989), Enid Adam (2000), and Cristina Rocha and Michelle Barker (2011). This paper builds on this research, drawing on digital oral histories of Buddhist women and men in Australia, recorded more recently for the *Buddhist Life Stories of Australia* project in 2014–2015, and transcribed and analysed in 2016–2019.

Buddhist Life Stories of Australia

The Buddhist Life Stories of Australia (BLIA) project, initiated by Anna Halafoff and Edwin Ng at Deakin University in 2014, recorded 17 digital oral histories of Australian Buddhist community leaders. These included six women: Bhikkhuni Chi Kwang Sunim, an Australian Korean Bhikkhuni; Bhikkhuni Nirodha, an Australian Thai bhikkhuni; Venerable Yeshe Khadro, Venerable Margaret McAndrew, and Venerable Robina Courtin, all Australian Tibetan nuns; and Kathy Vichta, an Australian lay Tibetan Buddhist community leader (BLSA 2016).

The BLSA Project was developed in consultation with the Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils (FABC) and the Australian Sangha Association (ASA), the nationally representative lay and ordained Buddhist organisations. Members of the FABC and ASA highlighted the urgent need to document the oral histories of prominent Buddhists in Australia, given that many esteemed Buddhist leaders had recently passed away. They wanted to record the memories of those who could still recall the early history of Buddhism in Australia, before those stories could no longer be retrieved. They helped the researchers choose their interviewees, and to crowdfund for the project. \$10,000 was raised for the video recordings, which are all freely available to be viewed on Vimeo, and further funds were provided by the Alfred Deakin Institute to transcribe and analyse the data. Several publications are arising from the project.

One of the main themes raised in the BLSA digital oral histories was gender and Buddhism. This paper draws on the data from the six women's and four of the men's oral histories, namely Graeme Lyall and Michael Wells, both senior Australian lay Buddhist community leaders, and senior Australian Thai monks Ajahn Brahm, and Bhante Sujato. Two of the interviewees, Graeme Lyall and Venerable Margaret McAndrew are no longer with us, and the research team is very grateful to have had the chance to interview them before their passing.

Buddhist Women in Australia in the 19th and 20th Centuries

Paul Croucher (1989) mentions a statue of Kuan Yin, in the South Melbourne Temple/Joss House dating back to the mid-late 1800s Gold Rush in Victoria. Other depictions of Kuan Yin were found in Joss Houses in the Far North of Australia, where Australia's first Buddhists included Chinese gold miners, Japanese pearl fishers and prostitutes, and Sri Lankan sugar cane farmers. Relatively little is known about these early Australian Buddhists, and their interactions with one another, and with indigenous Australian and white settler communities. The Deakin research team is currently conducting research in the North, drawing on secondary sources that primarily focus on cultural diversity, and on early newspaper articles and photographic collections that feature religious places, people and festivals.

The next wave of Buddhists were the early theosophists, including American Emma Harding Britten and Russian Elise Pickett, Australia's first "White Buddhist" who founded the Melbourne Theosophical Society in the late 1800s. The number of Buddhists in Australia declined after the introduction of the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* – also known as the White Australia Policy - until large flows of migration from Asia resumed in the 1970s onwards after its demise.

During the time of the White Australia Policy, Buddhist Societies were formed in New South Wales and Victoria in Sydney and Melbourne in the early 1950s. Marie Byles (1900–1979) was a feminist, Buddhist, lawyer, pacifist, and conservationist who played a central role in Buddhism in New South Wales during this period. She travelled widely through Asia, collecting Buddhist texts and books, and also wrote several books on Buddhism herself. Byles also had a keen interest in meditation (Croucher 1989; Lyall 2014).

Sister Dhammadinna (1881–1968), a Buddhist nun and controversial figure visited Australia in the 1950s, teaching Dharma and granting refuge to members of the Buddhist Society of New South Wales (BSNSW). She reportedly had links to Russian royalty and US oil tycoons. The first Vesak Day celebration in Australia took place in 1953, in which both Dhammadinna and Byles played leading roles (Croucher 1989; Lyall 2014).

Dhammadinna made a strong impression on Russian Australian, Natasha Jackson (1902–1990), who became the President of the BSNSW and editor of its magazine *Metta* from the mid 1950s to the early 1970s. She was also an anti-war protestor and campaigner for Aboriginal land rights, but was much more interested in Buddhist philosophy than meditation and practice. The Buddhist Society of Victoria (BSV), was formed in 1953, and a national body, the Buddhist Federation of Australia (BFA) was founded in 1960. Another prominent Buddhist woman, Elizabeth Bell (1911–2007) joined the BSV in the early 1960s and became its President, and the Chairman of the BFA and editor of *Metta* in the 1970s. Bell also assisted with the organisation of the Dalai Lama's first visit to Australia (AWAP 2014).

Bell had strong links with the English Thai monk Phra Khantipalo, who arrived in Australia in the early 1970s and played a central role in establishing Buddhism in this country, including assisting many Buddhist communities from Asia. One of his early students in Australia, German born, Ilse Ledermann (1923–1997), became the highly-respected Buddhist nun and teacher Ayya Khema after she ordained in Sri Lanka in 1979 (Croucher 1989; Lyall 2014). Khema also played an important role in establishing Sakyadhita in 1987, with Karma Lekshe Tsomo and Chatsumarn Kabilsingh/Bhikkhuni Dhammananda (Sakyadhita n.d.).

Australian Venerable Chi Kwang Sunim, formerly Debbie Cain, a student of Khantipalo's and Ledermann's, who subsequently trained, lived and was ordained in Korea, also remains another prominent figure in Buddhism in Australia. She has held and/or continues to hold leadership positions in the BCNSW, the BCV, the FABC and the ASA. Sunim (2015) described how Lederman was the benefactor of the Wat Buddha Dhamma property near the Dharug National Park, where they all lived and where Khantipalo and Ledermann both led retreats.

Ayya Nirodha Bhikkhuni, was another of Khantipalo and Ledermann's students in the 1970s.

Born Elisabeth Gorski in Austria at the end of the Second World War, she emigrated to Australia at age 20. Gorski was also initially involved with the Insight Meditation Society in the Blue Mountains, following which she spent time in Buddhist centres in both the US, and in Burma. She purchased land in Bundanoon NSW, to establish a meditation centre in the mid 1980s, and later offered it to the well-known and respected Thai forest tradition teacher Ajahn Brahm (Nirodha 2015). Ajahn Vayama, another student of Khema's, was the first Abbess of Dhammasara Monastery for Thai Forest nuns established by Ajahn Brahm in Gidgegannup, Western Australia in 1998 (Brahm 2015). Nirodha moved to Dhammasara in 2001 and was the

first sramaneri, 10 precept nun in the Thai Forest tradition to be ordained in Australia in 2003 (Nirodha 2015). That same year the Bundanoon property became Santi Monastery for Thai Forest nuns and Bhante Sujato, Australian Buddhist scholar and digital activist, became its Abbott (Nirodha 2015; Sujato 2015).

Women also played an important role in establishing Tibetan Buddhism in Australia. Marie Obst was one of the first Australian pupils of Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, the first Tibetan Lamas to visit and teach in Australia in the 1970s. She was ordained by the Dalia Lama, becoming Yeshe Khadro in 1974, and is renowned for her work as Director of Karuna Hospice in Brisbane, which has been providing Buddhist informed palliative care since the mid-1990s (Khadro 2015). She and her friend Kathy Vichta, together with Kathy's husband Tom, and Khadro's former partner Nicholas Ribush donated land to the Lama's in Eudlo, Southern Queensland, which became Chenrezig Institute (CI), the first Tibetan Buddhist Centre in Australia. Ribush's mother, Beatrice Ribush (1913–2008) also became an important Buddhist woman in Australia, who helped establish Tara House in Melbourne and who worked together with Elizabeth Bell as the treasurer of the BSV (Croucher 1989; Khadro 2015; Vichta 2015; Ribush 2008; Wells 2015).

Australian Venerable Margaret McAndrew, also first met the Lamas in Nepal in the early 1970s, after attending a Kalachakra empowerment course led by the Dalai Lama in Bodhgaya. When she returned to Australia she lived at Tara House in Melbourne and then moved to CI in order to help establish its nun's community (McAndrew 2015). Australian Venerable Robina Courtin, another of the Lama's students, received significant media attention given her down-to-earth, direct and humorous manner, since the release of an award winning film about her *Chasing Buddha*. She has many students in and beyond Australia, and is one of Australia's most famous Buddhist teachers (Halafoff 2011; Courtin 2015).

Conclusions

The digital oral histories of the BLSA project reveal that many women helped bring Buddhism to and to plant it firmly in Australia. These women all had and/or have strong personalities, and many of them acted as benefactors, purchasing land to set up monasteries and centres and/or have held and continue to hold leadership positions in Australia's Buddhist Societies and Councils. Some also become highly respected Buddhist teachers internationally. This in turn led to gender equality being a central principle of Buddhism in Australia, particularly evident in the Australian Sangha Association's policies of gender parity and inclusion.

Many of these Australian Buddhist women leaders, and those of us who follow in their footsteps, were/are highly socially engaged, some were/are primarily focused on Buddhist philosophy, while others were/are more interested in meditation and ritual. Many of Australia's Buddhist women's stories, notably those from the far north of Australia and who have arrived in Australia from Asia since the 1970s, are still yet to be recorded and added to the BLSA project. We hope to be able to record more digital oral histories in the near future, and to also conduct more historical and quantitative research, to better understand how and why Buddhism continues to flourish and mature in this vast and spacious continent.

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Life's Inspirations & Challenges as an Australian/Korean Bhikkhuni - 20 Years in Korea, 20 More Back in Australia

Ven. Chi Kwang Sunim

Ripening of Karmic Affinities - *Buds of potential*

To understand what enabled me to stay on this path so long, it is best I first share some of the earlier stages in embarking on this Buddhist path, that lead to 20 years in Korea and living the life of a Kanhwa Seon (Koan Zen) practising Bhikkhuni and what does that mean anyway?

By the early 70's, Buddhism was beginning to sprout everywhere in Australian cities. Unlike the earlier Sri Lankan, Japanese and Chinese Buddhists who arrived over a century ago, to service needed labour in the country, little is recorded of their devotional practices, but Buddhism was there holding their communities together. More recently, the Vietnamese boat people and refugees from Cambodia, Laos and Sri Lanka arrived after fleeing the violence of war and broad devastation in their countries. What we saw in and around the major cities during this time were many small temples operating in houses, with monastic and small communities of ethnic Buddhist, engaging in cultural rituals and practices.

In the late 60's and 70's, Caucasian spiritual seekers discovered and were inspired by Buddhism of other cultures. They returned to Australia with their teachers who were eager to create centres. Tibetan Lamas, Vipassana lay teachers, Zen priest and western Theravada monks were well versed in language and could build bridges into their adopted cultures. Centres sprang up around the country as communities grew, which included my generation.

In late 1976, I was a Fine Art graduate and budding sculptor teaching art at Fremantle Tech, in WA when I chanced on a poster, with a catchy title like, 'A Buddhist reformed CIA agent, John Coleman offers a 10-day Vipassana meditation retreat'. I set off hoping to learn something about meditation. I hadn't heard the word Vipassana, so wasn't sure what to expect. John was an authorised student of U Ba Khin (1899-1971), who was encouraged by his Dhamma brother Goenka to teach. In the full hall, I was close to the front and beside people who didn't seem move. Like those around me I sat bolt upright yet totally absorbed in my embodiment of pain, till on the third day, the teacher's cry 'don't move' penetrated and dissolved this pain body into a body of light. John's grounding response to my experience of bliss was simply, 'Oh! Well, you won't need much sleep now', that was the extent of our conversation, but it was true! I returned to work, sculpture, family, friends and a loving partner, with apparently little attraction for any of it, which no doubt raised confusion and concern, but my light heartedness helped to put their minds to rest.

This rebirth, so to speak, set me hiking across country and north, to hippy communes near Lismore in NSW. Arriving at a very rustic retreat setting, set in a rainforest in The Channon. Buddhist teachers were often offering retreats there, so on arrival I could join a Zen retreat with the newly formed Sydney Zen group. No instructions were given other than to count the breath to 10 and when distracted come back to 1. Formality, posture and strong sitting, was it! Then a thundering shout rang through the concentrated hall, 'don't touch that fly' and both my hand and mind seemed frozen in time for days! The half-built hall was rustic with more light than walls, while huts sitting on slim stilts or tents were the choice of accommodation. Along with bucket showers, were pit toilets and a very outdoor kitchen, providing nourishing, wholesome 70's vege food. Even the deafening sound of cicadas, seemed conducive to meditation.

What followed was the one-month retreat I came for. The newly arrived English monk from Thailand, Bhikkhu Khantipalo with his trainee teacher, a middle-aged woman called Ilsa Lederman, who was freshly relieved of marriage. A decade later she inspired this very Sakyadhita movement as a founding member, then address as Ayya Khema, the foremost Theravada Bhikkhuni writer and teacher. I discovered she was very sharp, witty and deeply compassionate. Unlike the loud don'ts of my first two retreats, this was more relaxed. 'Sit how you want' and we all did. Equanimity and joy seemed to flower in its own time, and I felt so enriched by really taking in and reflecting on the Dharma. Such, that on the last night, when I found myself lost after a long walk, on a moonless, narrow rainforest track, I was quite calm about it. This even-mindedness and acute observation put my trust in the fireflies lighting the way and they kept me on track till sunrise helped me find my way back. I looked a bloody mess as leeches had had a feast, but mentally I was joyful.

From then on, I simply followed these noble teachers. After a short stay in a Thai temple in Sydney, Khantipalo and Khema (Ilsa), decided to settle on a large property surrounded by bush and rocky outcrops with caves, a few hours north of Sydney, in Wisemans Ferry. Khema's marital settlement offered the funds to buy the property, and so the second monastery in Australia was established and it was called Wat Buddha Dhamma.

Initially only a few of us moved on to the property, with a number of retreatants coming on weekends and soon others came in tents and caravans. During the two years I lived there, I sometimes attended Khema, or drove them to teach and offer retreats; I also cooked, worked on building the first Sala and kuties and we all shared in gardening, etc. A good schedule balanced our spiritual practices, teachings, work, meals (with nothing except tea after 12 PM) plus afternoon time for personal and community needs. We had guidelines, days of repentance, the taking of precepts and ceremonies. I worked hard to cultivate my practice and I found living in that environment was very supportive. Khema and Bhante (Khantipao) were both prolific, published writers. He was a creative and thoughtful person. Khema was very intelligent and sharp witted, but with a strong emotional personality. However, differences and clashes grew between them so I often found myself in the middle, trying to understand both sides, but as yet with little wisdom what could I do other than listen. Still, we founded lifelong friendship in those two years.

As other groups and teachers came to use the retreat facilities, I discovered Zen again and I went a number of times to sit in their small Zendo in Sydney and heard about their teacher Aitken Roshi, who I later sat with. Whilst transcribing a book for Bhante called *The Bag of Bones* I came across this verse:

One of the most deeply rooted deceptions in the mind is its tendency to identify the body as 'self'. Recognizing that this seductive but distorted view of reality can be a stubborn impediment to progress in the Dhamma, the Buddha taught his students some practices and reflections specifically designed to undercut this illusion.

Though I didn't like the chant on the 32 parts of the body and even less its reflections, there was something in this verse that made me think about ordaining. Till then, I had thought after I learn what I can, I would return to my *real life*. Now I was reflecting, 'would robes counteract this illusion?' and what is 'Illusion' really? Even though much of what I saw and experienced then did seem quite unreal!

As idyllic as the Wat seemed, it was very challenging. With no filtering or fees, other than a few of hours morning work, it attracted the homeless and people with problems. Psychiatric, aggressive, even abusive behaviours were presenting, and one young woman died from a drug overdose. Counselling was left to the teachers, who may in good heart have engaged with Dhamma, but were unable to counsel people with mental health or drugs issues.

Some people became inspired and confident enough to want to go to Thailand to ordain. It seemed a great option for men but less so for women. Some marriages folded with husbands taking up robes and the few women I saw go, returned unwell and disillusioned. I mentioned my thoughts to Bhante, and he produced a book he had received from Korea, called *Nine Mountains*. It was on a Korean Zen Master and on the way to practice Korean Seon (Zen). Bhante also said he had heard that the Bhikkhuni there were strong and disciplined and some western Nuns had been accepted in that temple. The book described a familiar compatible life-style, of gardening, long meditation retreats, eating home grown produce and living a monastic life guided by wise teacher. Soon after a visiting monk from Song Gwang Sa Temple answered all my questions. He suggested I contact a western Bhikkhuni if I wished to go, so I wrote that day and in six months had a visa. I sold my own family heirlooms for a ticket (with consent), though sad to leave the Wat and the growing community, but Bhante and Khema were very encouraging, like parents sending their kids off. Less so were my parents, but they weren't dismissive either.

Just to note, during my time in Korea I met with Ayya Khema a number of times, in conferences, on two visits to Australia, once in the States for the Bhikkhuni ordination, but also one time in Korea in the mid 80's. She asked if I helped her daughter's family adopt a little girl, it all went well. I heard from her again after Bhante Khantipalo disrobed and I attended her on her last retreat in Australia, where I learnt of her cancer. I was surprised to know she had it for over 10 years. But she consoled me in saying; 'she may not have lived so long, had she gone under the knife' Ayya's sharp wit!

The flower blooms in Korea

Little did I know on that the daylong trip to Songgwang Sa Monastery, after a sleepless night on a boat trip from Japan, I would stay in Korea twenty years. I arrived in 1979 and returned to Australia in 1998. On the way, I did meditate in Japan at a Rohatsu (Enlightenment Retreat), where an open window at my back allowed snow to settle on my shoulders and only the slap of the Keisaku (Zen stick) on my back stopped my teeth chattering for a few minutes. I think this clinched the choice of Korea.

For the first five years I trained under the reputable Seonsa (Zen Master) Kusan Sunim, at Songgwang Sa (SGS) a temple known for its founder Chinul (1158-1210), the great 13th century Korean National Patriarch, who reformed Buddhism and created the Samadhi and Wisdom community. There were about 100 - 120 monks in SGS, while others lived in positions of administration, as elders or hermits in compounds and hermitages in the surrounding mountains. For about 10 years 30 foreign monks and a few western nuns made SGS their home for varying lengths of time. I stayed there about 15 of my 20 years in Korea and have visited every 2 years since.

Those first two years were tough. Not only because of language, or lack of it, but the strong Confucian temple culture was challenging to most western monastics. I did adapt in time, with more respect and understanding, but without language or proper training in we easily

offended. Still Koreans were very forgiving and the congregation learnt to cohabitate with some coercing.

Early on training wasn't available to western nuns and perhaps we showed little interest. After all, 'we were there to be enlightened!' so we studied sutras with our Master Kusan and the resident Sutra teachers in SGS. Song Ill Sunim (Martin Batchelor) was a wonderful translator and very helpful friend to the nuns. Though a little gruff at times and no doubt for good reason, as we didn't even know how to wear our robes properly. Later when teachers offered specific teaching on various texts and I went to listen. There was a loose curriculum to cover, starting with the *Beginner's Mind* by Chinul, then I studied a lot on my own though mostly using English translations. I did learn to read and write Chinese, thought poorly, before going to finishing school at Unmun Sa. That did help.

Most western monastic would leave in the first few years, but by late 1984 a year after our teacher had passed away, all left, except a few Asian monks and me. As a western nun, I could live with other nuns, so it was this freedom that helped me choose to stay on in Korea and continue learning from this network of teachers. There were many good places of practice and I trusted what I needed to do.

After about 12 years as a nun, I decided to spend a year studying in Unmun Sa, the home of my Preceptor and nun teacher. I joined in the last year where students studied the *Flower Garland Sutra* and Yogacara with Myong Seong Sunim, whose kindness has never been forgotten. To learn to live harmoniously in such a large community (250 Samaneri) required the level of maturity I didn't have earlier. For about 11 or 12 years I was perched in a small, unadorned hermitage, 20 minutes' walk up a mountain above the main temple and looking over Mt. Chogyo. I was free coming and going like the wind in trees. This very simple open life shaped my character in some ways, and still does today.

These exemplars were my guides

Kusan Sunim, my spiritual master shone above all, such a powerful, understated, deep and joyful presence, which touched the core of whomever he met. People trusted, respected and followed him. The few words he did utter were always directed towards our inquiry (*hwadu*) and our introspection turning inward. He was uncomplicated and grounded and his instinctive ethics shone through his day, whether working in the fields, in his spiritual practices or in community or when teaching. He practiced Kanhwa Seon and used a *hwadu* (Ch. *huatou*), but lived the Bodhisattva ideal. Sadly, he left too early and we felt orphaned too young. Other teachers did collectively fill the void.

Myong Seong Sunim, my Bhikkhuni Master, is the most extraordinary Bhikkhuni or even woman I know. She has in her long life as a nun, contributed greatly to what the Bhikkhuni order in Korea has become today. Her talents and tools are like those carried in the 1,000 hands and 1,000 eyes of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, who is trained in innumerable skillful means. Not only has she excelled in creating the largest Bhikkhuni training college, and leading it for so long, thousands have been taught by her and on graduation many have gone on to develop and lead their own communities. She is also a brilliant scholar and Sutra teacher, Vinaya and ordination Master. She is a master in calligraphy and has overseen all that has been built in and around Unmun Sa in the last 50+ years. At 90+ she still oversees all construction work in the temple, teaching the teachers and along with her daily spiritual practices, is always open and

engaging with visitors. She has been a great inspiration and support in my life and to see her every 2 years still so well and strong, brings me great comfort.

Bo Seong Sunim and another inspiring master, Ilta Sunim, have guided me in Vinaya, helped keep in in robes and presided in my ordinations. Bo Seong Sunim, accompanied me to Hsi Lai Temple in '88 for a Bhikkhuni ordination. He wanted to study procedures and re-introduce lost formats back into the Korean ordinations. It was my second ordination, having been ill prepared and lacking language and understanding in the first. He encouraged me to go and do it. Though rising to be Master of SGS, Bo Seong Sunim remained an elder caring brother, without airs and graces, very approachable and observant.

Finally, I want to refer to new Dharma friendships which have grown since the days of Sakyadhita's early history. Karma Lekshe Tsomo has created and led these conferences not only for our benefit, but for the greater purpose of bringing nuns and their cultures heritage together to inform, inspire and to support one another grow.

And now here, in what must seem to many of you, as the land of plenty, due to us meeting again this time, not on a third world stage, but in a 5-star resort, have we lost our direction, or is this the only way now to gather an aging crowd?

Anyhow, as the Buddha said, 'Good spiritual friendships are the whole of the path' so I guess it's best to meet them wherever we can.

Transplanting the Korean Mountain Flower - *Struggles and challenges enhances the fragrance of mountain flowers*

In any culture it takes a long time to forge relationships. With my loving supportive Sangha in Korea, I came to understand their humour and all the subtleties that come with maturity that it isn't possible as foreign monastic in Korea to be an abbess, without a whole order behind her, but I was there long enough to understand and value the Buddhist culture. And long enough for chronic illness to choose my future. The thought of Australia was daunting, but then came the support and encouragement needed to leap.

Others well-earned generosity can come with the scales. When you have little to give back, you realise receiving comes with great responsibility.

In mid-1997, there was a request by Koreans living in Melbourne for me to purchase a property in their popular tourist location of Daylesford, spa county of Vic. By chance we had all visited a gift of the gods, a 108 acres of rolling hills with a lake, a river and a spring, with a large stone fortress-like house. I went to look with a Venerable sister and returned with a decision to purchase. Together with the great support of Venerable Myeong Seong Sunim, my nun family and brother monks in Songgwang Sa, we fortunately purchased the property with a little money to spare, just as the Asian financial crash took hold of the country in 1998. Many more pledges could not be honoured, and we didn't ask.

Initially I lived in a temporary dwelling while some necessary internal repairs were made on the Stone house, we then moved in and finished it off ourselves. Nearly always someone was there with me, but those inclined towards a monastic path returned to their former, or more established traditions. Supporters grew and Koreans came monthly and I also visited them in the city to teach. I offered regular retreats, classes and courses to those who showed interest. However, some people did complain that Chonghye Sa was a little too far. During that

first few years, a number of Korean monks visited with our supporters. Some creating small congregations in homes for a while, before moving on, then one who seemed popular and sincere, with his own means, visited. After sometime they suggested we sell and make one large centre nearer the city in order to benefit everyone. In theory it made sense, and the Kun Sunim (Senior monk) seemed responsible and mature, so after extensive discussion and reflection and with the majority of the committee (Koreans) in agreement, I reluctantly agreed (my one big mistake). The property they picked had spacious gardens with two large connecting houses (duplex), offering enough space for the growing Korean community, *'we'* others to be comfortable. It was also close to amenities and mountains, so the positives were many. It took some months to sell and everyone seemed very excited when finalising the new sale. After moving I began wondering; where are the Koreans and their Kun Sunim? I hadn't bother them during moving as I had enough help, then whilst settling in news came that their association had folded and the monk had returned to Korea! But, that no one wished to tell me, seemed odd, so I suspected the issue was big and possibly shameful! Someone discovered the *'monk'* was secretly married with a family in Korea and daughter in Melbourne.

In recalling earlier fractions in Korean circles in Sydney, patterns were emerging. Acknowledging that, I decided to turn reliance and trust inwards rather than in others or in other, while moving forward still with the dream of creating a Dharma retreat that would provide for monastic. Then another surprise, a letter from the local Shire (Council) *'no house of worship is allowed in this green belt'*. It came as a rejection of our application for a permit to use the property for our Buddhist gatherings. Looking back, I can see I responded too hastily by not reaching out to discuss the matter with the council, thus turning away from great potential with a festering wound. I then found something I liked, a small rustic mudbrick retreat-like hermitage. It was up a long windy road on a tall wooded mountain, in a small town called Kinglake. A beautiful quiet property nestled by a river with a waterfall. This time I quietly moved, just as two Korean nuns came and set up as small centre. So I helped them settle in and encouraged our friends to support the nuns too. They did well for a couple of years, till their donations and support from Korea ran out and then too they were disappointed with the lack of support, and with heavy hearts they returned to Korea.

The rundown place needed renovations (still does), but this time there were less expectations and time restraint. I turned to concentrating more on my Buddhist work. From here I drove off the mountain to teach and offer meditation retreats, here and there. I also worked with the local people who showed interest in Buddhism and meditation. But more so I came to know a richer broader Buddhist community who appreciated what I could offer to them, so began what has been long a friendship with the Buddhist Society of Victoria (BSV) where I still teach monthly. Still a small group of Koreans have found their way up the mountain and we continued their monthly *kido* (prayers). They loved the fruits of the vege garden and to cook beautiful Korean meals, then in the afternoon go walking in the forest. But there is a big migration movement, so I learnt to just welcome whoever came and wish them well when they left. Sadly, however, most to easily converted on Christianity on arriving from Korea, as the churches are powerful and aggressive proselytizers. There are other smaller Korean groups here - one from the Jungto Society group and a handful of the Pomnyun Sunim's supporters (who once gathered here) now meet in a house. I believe he travels worldwide, attracting local Buddhist supporters, by targeting small temples and gathering people in a houses to watch him weekly on a world-wide screen performing, *play psychologist*. Screen Dharma of course is a movement in itself, along with monk made psychologist, it's free and accessible.

Since this move, life has settled down and for the first six years our association grew. It continued good relations with various *umbrella* networks, including the Buddhist Council of Victoria (BCV) and the Australian Sangha Association (ASA). And I represented these organisations on the board of Multicultural Victoria over the years.

The BCV was growing and engaging more broadly, in connection with many cultural Buddhist societies, schools, local government, councils and interfaith initiatives. Temples were seeking building permits and visa application support for monks. Government grant and information dissemination and there a wide range social need to address, such as Chaplaincy programs for aging or in prisons. As a founding member of the ASA our objectives worked with many ongoing concerns and we did our best to address personal Sangha concerns brought to our attention, across cultures and states. We met yearly in one state or another, with an agenda to work on throughout the year. Chaplaincy has always been important topic as many Mahayana monastic become chaplains or spiritual care providers. The majority of active members have been Caucasian as many are connected to the State Buddhist Societies or Buddhist Councils in NSW, SA, VIC, QLD and WA, so these are important networks in supporting friendships and needs of Australian Buddhists Monastic. When I chaired the ASA in 2009, the four nuns from Dhammasara in Perth were ordained as the first Theravada Bhikkhuni in Australia. So many misinformed stories grew quickly both nationally and internationally, needing attention by correspondence and skillful means of communication. It was a very difficult year for Ajahn Brahm and the newly ordained Bhikkhuni. As Ajahn once said to me, *'though he lost some close friendships, he connected with more Buddhist women aspiring to fully ordain'*. This more lasting joyful and beneficial outcome from his action, with the support of the ASA, has resulted in the growth of Bhikkhuni ordinations and strengthened Bhikkhuni Orders throughout the world. This has greatly outshone and outweighed any individual or cultural views. I have addressed ordination in number of forums and conferences and growing more aware how ill-informed many Buddhist women are in regards to Buddhist nuns. The forms of Buddhism seem to have narrowed to techniques of mindfulness, meditation and psychology and we are still promoting lip-service (*prayer & mantras*) for personal gain to keep supporters coming. How long will this last? The fruits of these ordination inspire and bring confidence to move forward by educating and preparing women to lead in their future generations of inspiring leaders for the primary purpose, the primary point, to awaken women on this Noble path.

With ongoing problematic visa situation even for legitimate cases for immigration of monastic, the on/off successors in Canberra come with new governments creating new rules. ASA now has created a sub-committee to study and inform monastics on the updates and changes to these and other legal matters, and how to work within the Governing system, this is found on the ASA website <https://www.australiansangha.org/>.

During my time as Chair of the BCV in 2007, several important events happened. Buddhist temples in Victoria, celebrated Buddha's Birthday with '*Buddha 2550*' in the city's Town Hall, attracting over 10,000 people during the week long celebrations. A large exhibition of 1,000 pieces of cultural Buddhist iconography were put on display with Buddha relics from the Great Stupa in Bendigo and the cultural history in Australia. Temples created an impressive week of events and celebrations including a lantern parade. So successful, a sizable donation was offered to the BCV's 'Religious Education in School' program. The following year they received a larger three year grant from a Multicultural Victoria. Chaplaincy in prisons, hospitals and age-care facilities began receiving a bigger slice of Grant pie, by dialoguing for more equity

of *Not-For-Profit* Grants. Intra-Buddhist and Interfaith relations were growing and BCV offered yearly Cultural Tea Ceremonies or meals to other faith groups. Then, with the newly arrived Bhikkhuni Ven. Sucinta from Germany the first Theravada Centre for Nuns was established in Victoria called *Sanghamitarama*. As support grew through the BSV and the leadership of Ajahn Brahm and Ayya Upekkha, they moved to a large property where the Newbury Buddhist Monastery for Monks and Nuns was established. Now there are three Bhikkhuni and several monks from Bodhinyana focused on creating the monk temple.

Bushfires Kinglake Bushfire reflection -10 years on - working with Kinglake recovery. Visit Sakyadhita Australia's website: <https://www.sakyadhita.org/>

Humanistic Buddhism in Australia

Ven. Miao You

Evolution of Buddhism in Australia

- First Settlers - Chinese, Sinhalese, Japanese.
- Australians started to venture overseas to Asian countries - Thailand, Cambodia, India & Sri Lanka.
- Buddhist Groups were formed:
 - 1925 - The little Circle of the Dharma formed in Melbourne, Vic.
 - 1938 - The Buddhist Study Group formed by Leonard Bullen.
 - Women played an important role in the spread of Buddhism - Marie Byles, Natasha Jackson, Ven Dhammadina.
 - Formation of Meditation centres such as, Soto Zen Centre, Sydney.

Early History of Buddhism in Australia

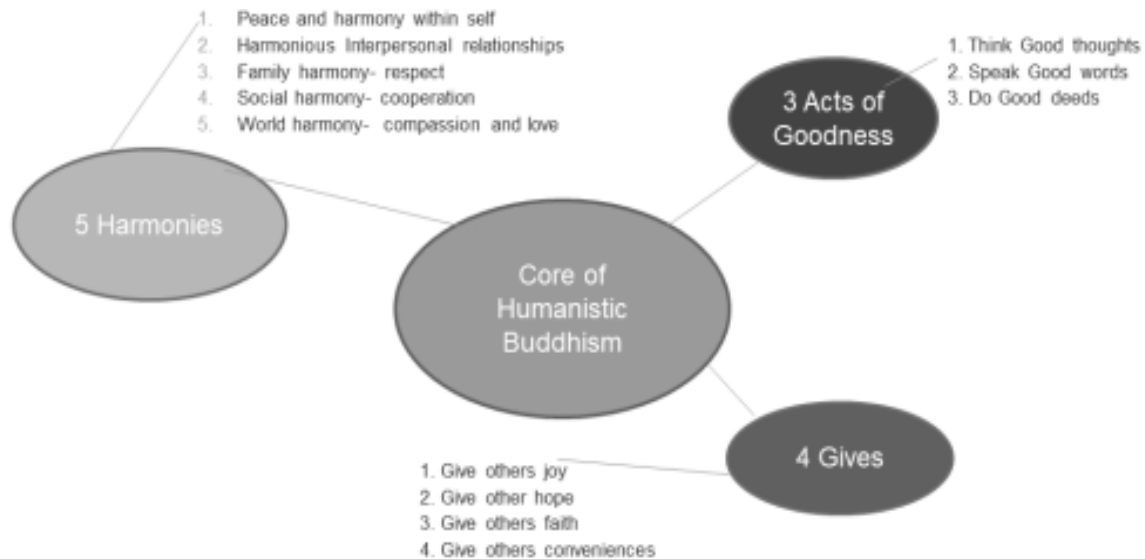
- 1978 Phra Khantipalo (English born) and Ayya Khema established Way Buddha Dharma;
- Many ethnic groups also established temples in Sydney and Melbourne;
- Chinese followed - Hwa Tsang Monastery and Fo Guang Shan monasteries;
- Followed by Tibetan - Vajrayana tradition is attractive to the Westerners;
- Asian Migration increased in 1970s and 1980s.
- Secular Buddhism evolved - meditation centres to meet the demands of Buddhists as psychologists, therapists using meditation techniques.
- Profile of Western Buddhists - Aussies (non-ethnic background), middle class, engaged in occupations of human services and education.

Humanistic Buddhism

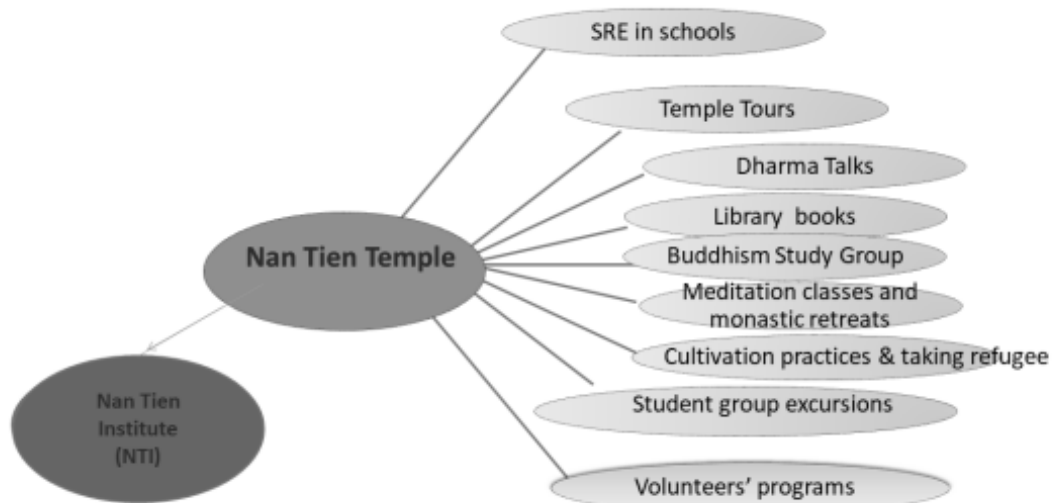
- Fo Guang Shan Nan Tien Temple established many branches throughout Australia (NSW, QLD and VIC);
- Objectives of FGS Nan Tien Temple through;
 - Cultural Activities (arts and literature)
 - Foster talents through education

- Charity programs
- Purify minds and hearts through practice;
- Bring humanistic values to everyday living and encourage others to practice and live Humanistic Buddhism;
- What is Humanistic Buddhism?

What is Humanistic Buddhism?



Educational Activities of Nan Tien Temple



Humanistic Buddhism

- Interfaith Dialogues: Respect and Magnanimity;
- Member of Multicultural New South Wales, Religious Leaders Forum
- Member of Australian Parliament of Religions
- Buddhism is more accessible to the general public
- Nan Tien Temple's educational programs:

- Open to school excursions (12,000 students visited each year)
- Meditation classes and retreats (approx 5000 per year)
- Training Special Religious Education (SRE) Teachers (accredited by Department of education, NSW)
- Mindfulness for School Teachers (accredited course)

Educational Achievements

- Ven. Master Hsing Yun's educational achievements: besides being a prolific writer, he established 5 institutes of higher learning and universities in the world:
- 1990 University of the West, Los Angeles
- 1996 Nanhua University, Taiwan
- 2000 Fo Guang University, Taiwan
- 2011 Nan Tien Institute (NTI), Wollongong, Institute of Higher Learning
- 2015 Guang Ming College, Manila

Women's Roles in Fo Guang Shan

- Equal opportunities for all;
- Opportunities to develop and nurture your own talents;
- Find the person for the job;
- My role at Fo Guang Shan Nan Tien Temple, is one of coordination and collaboration
- My involvement and the commitment to Venerable Master Hsing Yun
- Nan Tien Institute's site and Remediation Action Plan
- Site works and construction of the Nan Tien Institute
- The establishment of Nan Tien Institute as an Institution of higher learning
- Nan Tien Bridge and the continuing saga with the Authorities and approvals

The Vision & Mission of Nan Tien Institute

- To be the first Buddhist Institute of Higher Education or University in Australia;
- To raise awareness and status of Buddhism in Australia;
- To share Humanistic Buddhism and contemplative practice with the academic world;
- To foster holistic learning, allowing students to contribute to the advancement and integration of knowledge, culture and ethical understanding within their lives and lives of others.
- To enlighten and share joy, happiness and equanimity with others.

The Meanings Behind the Structure of NTI

- The four pillars of Humanistic Buddhism present in NTI:
 - ✓ Loving Kindness
 - ✓ Compassion

- ✓ Commitment
- ✓ Practice

- The welcoming aspect of the building
- The Multicultural aspect of the building
- The continuing aspect of the building

Significance of the Nan Tien Bridge: Symbolises:

- The connection between Eastern and Western Cultures;
- Traditional and Contemporary;
- Knowledge and Wisdom;
- Theory and Practice;
- Laity and Sangha

Buddhism in Australia

Be the pioneer in the exploration of a new era in the development of Buddhism in Australia.

Thank you for your attention
For more information, please visit
<https://www.nantien.edu.au/>

Working for Buddhism in Australia

Di Cousens

It is a great honour to be asked to speak here today and I am happy to welcome the Sakyadhita International Conference to Australia. I would like to thank the organisers for their dedication and initiative in achieving such a wonderful event.

In Australia today it would be reasonable to imagine that we have always been a diverse, multicultural and multifaith community, but that is not the case. I was born in the 1960s during the White Australia policy, which was a time of deliberate racial exclusion. Immigrants had to appear white or to demonstrate European ancestry. Aboriginal people were subject to a system no less brutal than apartheid in South Africa and were not counted as citizens until after a referendum in 1967. They were not free to go where they like or marry who they like and were subject to extraordinary controls. Even now our Aboriginal community is the most imprisoned population on the earth, and disadvantage - which is demonstrated by such things as life expectancy and maternal mortality - is still deeply embedded.

There was and remains a ruthlessness in Australian racism and those who think the brutality of the racist mindset disappeared decades ago have only to look at our recent treatment of refugees who come by boat which has violated every human rights principle.

The Australia that I was born into had no Buddhist temples that I was aware of, no monks, no teachings and no Buddhist community. It was not what you would call, 'a perfect human rebirth', because these things were missing. I was not aware that in the nineteenth century there had been Chinese immigrants and there were still Chinese people descended from that time living in Australia, because I didn't see them. I can only remember seeing one Chinese vegetable seller in the local market and the rest of the population was white European. There were no Aboriginal people in my neighbourhood.

As an 18 year old I left Australia and spent a year in South East Asia and India and this led to a very deep connection with the region and I found myself returning many times. In 1982 I met a Tibetan lama, Samdhong Rinpoche, while participating in an interfaith conference at the Christian ashram, Shantivanam, which was headed by Father Bede Griffiths, a Benedictine monk. Samdhong Rinpoche talked about emptiness and bodhicitta and he seemed to speak from a place of knowing that was not theoretical. I decided that I needed to understand Tibetan Buddhism and that it would be my path.

Returning to Australia in 1983 I discovered two Tibetan centres near to where I was living - Tara Institute and Geshe Loden's centre. They were both Gelugpa and it was then I took refuge for the first time. I attended teachings at both for three or four nights a week and became familiar with Shantideva's Bodhisattva's Way of Life and the teachings on emptiness in Nagarjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Root Verses on the Middle Way). I also attended teachings with Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche who had a centre in Hawthorn and who later married a school friend of mine, Felicity Taylor. A lot of time was spent considering the practice of the six perfections, or *paramitas*, during this year, which are, as you would know, generosity, patience, enthusiastic effort, discipline, meditation and wisdom. These are very profound topics and later I came to take a particular interest in the practice of generosity which has three parts, giving material aid, giving freedom from fear and giving the Dharma.

I returned to India in 1984 and studied classical South Indian singing, Carnatic Sangeetam, for three years while living in Tamil Nadu and regularly spent time with the Gelugpa lamas in the monasteries in Karnataka. I used to travel with a Finnish friend who dressed in orange saris. I wore many different coloured saris. Somehow we evaded the interest of the police who technically required travel permits to stay in the Tibetan areas, even though we would present ourselves to them. Somehow we seemed to slip through the cracks.

I also attended the Kalachakra Initiation with His Holiness Dalai Lama in Bodhgaya in 1985 as well as the initiations of the 13 Golden Dharmas given by His Holiness Sakya Trizin, which followed the Kalachakra. This established my connection with the Sakya tradition. In Dharamsala in 1986 in a conversation in a tea shop I was told about the temple of Triloknath which contains a beautiful white Avalokiteshvara statue. I was told the temple was in a valley beyond a valley. Based on this conversation I went there to write a PhD 20 years later.

At the end of 1986 I met His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche in Boudhanath, Nepal, and took refuge with him and commenced the study of the Longchen Nyinthig. I visited Tibet in 1987 and, on the advice of Tinley Norbu Rinpoche, spent time in Samye, Mindroling and various Guru Rinpoche caves. In 1988 I met Karma Lekshe Tsomo in Dharamsala who told me about the development of Sakyadhita and the needs of Tibetan nuns, many of whom, she said were illiterate, but who could chant texts from memory. They needed education and the higher ordination in order to fully develop as nuns and achieve a monastic life at the same level as monks.

In the mid-1970s the White Australia policy was removed and that coincided with a substantial number of refugees arriving in Australia from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia after the Vietnam War. Many came by boat, and I remember how they simply moved into houses in various neighbourhoods, set up businesses and were integrated. There was no organised campaign against them. Marvelously, they brought with them the Dharma, and soon there were temples belonging to many different Buddhist traditions in Australia's major cities. Simultaneously a new policy of multiculturalism was established, which sought to value everyone regardless of their origin, and which celebrated the different contributions new communities could make.

On return to Australia in 1988 I attended the Lamdre or Hevajra Initiation with His Holiness Sakya Trizin at Vajradhara Gonpa in Kyogle, northern New South Wales. During this time I became very close friends with the community of Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche's students and spent time at the newly created Sakya centre in Sydney, Sakya Tharpa Ling. Returning to Melbourne in 1989 I enrolled in a Bachelor's degree at La Trobe University and spent two years studying classical Tibetan with Zahiruddin Ahmad. At the end of 1993 I completed an Honour's thesis on the subject of the priest-patron relationship between Phagpa Lama and Khubilai Khan in the thirteenth century in Tibet, which was based on my translations of ancient Tibetan edicts. I was then given a scholarship to write a Masters and in 1996 completed a study of Tibetan treasure texts and the life of the first Jamgon Kongtrul, treasure revealer. Unfortunately my skill in the Tibetan language has atrophied over the years.

In 1991 His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche died and I became a student of Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche and continue to attend his teachings regularly. Attending Kalachakra initiation with His Holiness the Dalai Lama again in 1996, but this time in Sydney, I was asked by the Sakya Tharpa Ling abbot, Khenpo Ngawang Damchoe, to organise the visit of His Holiness Sakya Trizin to Melbourne the following year. I obtained the promise of sponsorship from a very important Indian lady, Zarna Somaia, who was a great supporter of lamas in Melbourne. His Holiness asked me to establish the Melbourne Sakya Centre, whose Tibetan name is Sakya Choekhor Lhunpo. I committed ten years to this task and hosted numerous lamas in Melbourne, including His Holiness a second time in 2003. On that occasion we held the Vajrakilaya initiation at the Prahran Town Hall. From the point of view of the practice of the perfection of generosity, I have seen my work as an organiser as a part of the generosity of giving the Dharma, and I think the work of organisation is as necessary as the work of teaching.

As a Dharma centre director I ran weekly meditation sessions, initially at the Kagyu centre in Carlton, and then later in some rooms above a restaurant in Balaclava. In 2008 I resigned as centre director after the arrival of a resident monk who went on to stay in Melbourne

for ten years. In 2005 I received a scholarship and commenced a PhD writing about the Triloknath statue I first heard about in Dharamsala and graduated in 2009. I did my PhD research in Lahul, Himachal Pradesh, and was assisted by Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo who provided me with a translator who had been her retreat attendant 20 years earlier.

During my time as Sakya Centre Director I joined the Buddhist Council of Victoria and held many different roles, including Vice President. Since 2001 I have been invited to be a speaker representing the Buddhist community at interfaith events and I have continued in this role up until the present. After a gap of some years I have also recently rejoined the Buddhist Council as Secretary and I represent Siddhartha's Intent Australia and also the 84000 Project. Working with the Buddhist Council has enabled me to develop an appreciation for the many different traditions of Buddhism that are now represented in Australia and to establish friendships with many temples. The Council structure has enabled us to work together on matters of common interest and present a unified voice to government. In 2003 I participated with representatives from other states in the creation of the Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils (FABC) at a meeting in Brisbane. The FABC acts at a federal level to represent the needs of the diverse Buddhist community to government.

My significant achievements with the Buddhist Council of Victoria include putting together a small booklet called *Buddhist Care for the Dying*. It was distributed to every hospital, nursing home and prison in the state of Victoria. The content of the booklet was in English, Vietnamese and Chinese, so as to reach a broad Buddhist audience. I took this with me to the Sakyadhita Conference in Seoul in Korea in 2004, where I also met and became friends with Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo. Another project was the creation of a guide to disability access to Buddhist temples and this was translated into seven languages and distributed to temples across the state and I distributed it at the Sakyadhita Conference in Bangkok in 2011. More recently I created a protocol which was promoted by the Buddhist Council for temples for the management of child abuse and sexual harassment and I took that to the Sakyadhita Conference in Jogjakarta in 2015. I gave a paper on interfaith dialogue at the Sakyadhita Conference in Vaishali in 2013.

The idea of creating a Sakyadhita Australia was mooted at various past international conferences but really took shape at the conference in Jogjakarta. A group of us got together and had an establishment meeting and then met again in Melbourne. We produced leaflets, a website and women, including nuns, came from around Australia to the formal inauguration in 2016. I was the first President and with the committee put in place the constitution and the membership structure. After one year I handed over to others as the conference was coming up and I had no wish to organise it.

Sakyadhita Australia, like the Federation of Buddhist Councils and the various state Buddhist Councils, is an organised expression of our sense of unity as Buddhists from diverse traditions in Australia.

I have included quite a long description of my early life and the teachers I met and the teachings I received so as to illuminate the causes and conditions of my Buddhist experience. I grew up in a country where the Dharma had not been proclaimed, or had been lost, and so discovering it required spending a very long time in India with Tibetan teachers and on pilgrimage, and then equally spending a very long time bringing teachers to Australia. I also spent ten years studying at university and have three research degrees.

One of my most important achievements has been in training other volunteers as Buddhist organisers and I see some of my former volunteers in numerous roles in many different Dharma centres, including Sakyadhita. Bringing the Dharma to Australia has required more than knowledge of meditation and philosophy, it has also required knowledge of event management - hall hire, publicity, travel and visas. While preparing for the Vajrakilaya Initiation with His

Holiness Sakya Trizin we had to find exotic things like kusha grass and organise the weaving of five coloured thread. These are the practical considerations that usually do not get recorded in the history books.

Sakyadhita International has always had a special role in supporting the vocation of nuns and I hope Sakyadhita Australia can continue this work. I have previously proposed that we need an organised program of consultation nationally so that we can understand the context of nuns in their different communities. I am also extremely interested in what is called in Christianity, 'formation'. This refers to the period at the start of a monastic novitiate where a novice is secluded within a community for several years. The novice learns to find her place within the life of the community and to nurture her inner development. She is given training in discipline, philosophy, meditation and particularly in the Tibetan tradition, ritual. Every time I hear a Westerner reimagining Buddhism as simply a process of mental development I feel aghast that they have not learnt the importance of Sangha, or community. As you and I know, Sangha has four parts, lay men and women and fully ordained men and women. Luckily in Australia we have all four parts of the Sangha, but as we know, the path to full ordination for women has been tricky in many traditions.

I would like to point out one thing. The Australian Buddhist community is now half a million strong and about half of that is comprised of women. This means we have approximately 250,000 women Buddhists in Australia. I would be surprised if there were more than 500 nuns in Australia (and there may be half that) so please consider that if the only focus of Sakyadhita Australia is the promotion of nuns, then we are only looking at 0.2% of Australian women Buddhists. This is one person in 500. We must not neglect the other 499!

In recent years my personal focus has shifted from organising teachings to working for justice for the refugees who came to Australia by boat and who have now spent nearly six years in offshore detention. Over the last ten years I have also devoted considerable time and energy to poetry and on occasions these two things converge. My last poetry book, 'the days pass without name', was launched by the former President of the Australian Human Rights Commission, Professor Gillian Triggs in 2018, and contains a number of poems documenting my experience of supporting refugees in detention. I see my work supporting refugees as another part of the practice of generosity, giving freedom from fear, in Sanskrit, *abhaya-dāna*.

Buddhism in Australia has come a long way. When I was born in 1960s Australia even the word 'Buddha' was not heard, and I never met a monk or a nun or visited a temple. Now the Dharma is established and we have not only monks and nuns but also lay teachers and practitioners and scholars. The possibilities of what it is to be a Buddhist in twenty first century Australia are quite different to what was possible a hundred years ago in traditional Buddhist societies. Our diverse, multicultural society, where Japanese and Korean, Vietnamese and Cambodian, Tibetan and Chinese Buddhist people and temples can all be friends is something special in the world and something to celebrate.

New Horizons for Emerging Sanghas: Community Groups and Lay Women Dharma Teachers

Anna Markey with Suzanne Franzway

(This paper is based on an interview that Anna Markey gave to Suzanne Franzway in Adelaide, South Australia in February, 2019.)

Anna Recognises the Dharma

I usually say that I recognised the dharma as opposed to taking it up. As a teenager I was hospitalised over two years with an apparently terminal illness and many surgeries. There were a whole variety of techniques I used to get through the difficult times. One was realising the power of staying in the present moment, being mindful and staying calm. Another was the importance of kindness for myself and for others. Being a child I could easily bring curiosity to various mind states and to emotions like fear or grief and to the effect of drugs and anaesthetics. So when I went to India and I heard about the dharma, I recognised it. I thought to myself, “I know this. This is what I learnt in hospital. How to do life!”

In India, I ended up Dharamsala, where many Tibetans and HH Dalai Lama lived in exile. I spent 2½ years working as a volunteer teacher and health worker in a small Tibetan settlement in the Himalayas. So I came into contact with Tibetan Buddhism and I took teachings from a variety of Tibetan teachers and lamas. Then I attended a retreat in Bodhgaya that involved the western insight tradition and the Dharma really clicked. I guess the cultural overlay was now gone.

My insight meditation teacher Christopher Titmuss shared a form of dharma that really resonated with me. The Buddha’s teachings seemed clear, practical and deeply effective. I thought, “Yes, I know this, this is what I have to do.” I committed. When I came back to Australia, there was no Insight tradition group in my town so I spent quite a few years in the Zen tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh. I also spent some time learning the dharma in the Mahasi approach with Patrick Kearney. I am indebted to all of these approaches for giving me a taste of the Buddha Dharma through different doors, through different traditions. These days I’m very influenced by teachers like Jason Siff, Stephen Batchelor and by the work done on the suttas by Richard Gombrich and Susan Hamilton and so forth, people who are looking at the Pali Canon prior to commentaries. This has given me more of a sense of the power of the teachings of conditionality, emptiness and the middle way. I am now leaning more towards the way of a secular dharma.

Perspectives on women in Buddhism in Australia

We are all affected by historical and cultural overlays. We come up against many prejudices around gender, race and class etc. But to me this enterprise of the dharma is an incredibly deep and profound way of approaching life. So given what we understand around dependent arising, emptiness and middle way, how could anyone be excluded? To really understand the dharma would imply that these teachings, these combinations of ethics, wisdom and clarity of mind are available to all and passed on by all. Giving women equal place in the dharma is a really important way to honour its depth. I have found that women bring qualities such as kindness and flexibility, connection and practicality. Women can bring qualities to the dharma that are being excluded in communities that over emphasise the masculine.

I remember my teacher at one of my first retreats said that in his opinion, “being born a woman was a higher reincarnation.” Everyone laughed but he said, “No I mean it.” He said,

“It’s women who really take up the dharma and support others; it’s women who go out and apply the teachings to life. They’re less often side-tracked by competition and power, etc.” I also want to say that even though all of my formal teachers have been men, there’s a lot of women who have had a huge influence on me, supported me and been great role models. My closest group of peer teachers now with whom I learn, study and share are women. So I guess I’ve been lucky with the opportunities I’ve had.

As far as I know, Australia may be unique in that the initial introduction to the dharma here, involved a lot of women. There were men involved too of course, but it just seems like a lot of the practicalities involved women. I’m thinking of Marie Byles, Sister Dharmadina and Ayya Khema who came with Phra Khantipalo to run Wat Buddha Dhamma. There’s much I don’t know but it’s unusual compared to other countries. So I want to acknowledge those women. Not just women in the dharma but in teaching positions in dharma, in positions of authority. These days there are people like Subhana Barzaghi, Robina Courtin, Susan Murphy and Chi Kwang. There are also many lay women like Carol Perry, Ellen Davison, Bobbi Allan, and that’s just in my tradition. These women are very articulate, experienced and talented teachers of the dharma. There are many others in other traditions like Sister Nirodha, Yeshe Khadro, Ajahn Vayama. And I don’t want to ignore the men who have been supporting this too, like Ajahn Brahm and Bhante Sujato. Of course, the Bodhinyana monastery in WA was the first place where women were ordained in the Theravada tradition. I’m proud of Australia as being on the frontline in that area.

Regarding the criticism of the ordination... in the big picture I can’t see how ordaining women would contravene an idea of a continuous lineage from the Buddha. The world needs dharma more than ever and the teachings are now passed on in a multitude of ways. As Nagarjuna said “When the Buddhas have gone and the lineages and followers have gone, the wisdom of awakening bursts forth by itself”. That’s a powerful idea. Looking through our lens of dependent arising there’s no such a thing as purity of lineage, or purity of anything for that matter. The dharma needs women.

Buddhism and Indigenous Australians

I think this question, on the place of indigenous people, is very complex, and it depends on your perspective when looking at solutions. Everyone is affected when you’re living in a country where the original inhabitants have been treated so badly. We can’t ignore it. How can we integrate these dilemmas that we inherit, into our practice? How can we address the inequalities that indigenous people face? How can we understand them more or learn from them? Quite a few teachers in Australia have both worked with aboriginal people and have learnt a lot from them. John Allan on the East Coast and Jenny Taylor from Alice Springs come to mind. I personally spent four years on aboriginal communities. Jenny Taylor’s practice and teachings are very informed by her experience with aboriginal people. Themes such as our relationship to place and response to kinship, connection and responsibility are what Jenny brings to her teachings from aboriginal wisdom.

A lay Buddhist teacher in Australia

In the late ‘90s I asked my teacher: “What shall I do? Adelaide just doesn’t have the right group to support my practice?” He said, “Either move across to the east coast or set up your own dharma group.” So I set up my own dharma group. I had a lot of support from the Insight Teachers Circle of Australia. We met once or twice a year and individual teachers were generous with sharing their wisdom. I could always get in touch with my own teachers as well.

I teach two or three retreats a year and we sponsor teachers to come from interstate or other countries. I nurture my practice, I study the dharma and of course the internet now makes it really easy to attend or hold online groups. In the Adelaide area we now have 2 main dharma groups that I teach and four smaller peer groups which I set up and support. I facilitate those groups and a study group as well as running retreats.

In the past, I have wondered “Shall I become a nun?” I thought about that seriously and weighed up the pros and cons. I realise that as a nun you have a community, a sense of support, continuity and the vows and robes help to keep you within a life of dedication and commitment. But I thought, “There are real disadvantages in being a monastic today and they seem to be increasing.” The main one for me involves deference. I don’t want robes or vows to be the reason why people respect me. I would rather their respect came from the fact that they’ve listened to me talk about the dharma and that it’s been useful. I live in the world just like others. I’m an ordinary person and teach ordinary person dharma straight from my experience. This world is fertile ground enough from which to experience dukkha, to see the causes and conditions arise and fall and to actually live the path. I often in my mind, see the image of the Buddha touching the earth. I have the earth and my world as my witness and support.

Sticky issues

Over the last few years Buddhist communities have been deeply affected by accusations of sexual abuse, manipulation and misuse of power and authority. It is now coming to light how many people have been hurt. Many teachers and communities have been complicit in this abuse, sexual or otherwise. This needs to be a part of our practice, looking into how we give power or take power from others. No matter how friendly and approachable I am, as a teacher I have authority and I must constantly be mindful of the effect of this. Even small dharma communities need to have grievance procedures, agreements and teacher ethics statements. My community is refining ours now.

Traditions and organisations often choose the survival of the institution over the wellbeing of an individual. Hierarchies have a politics and dynamics that have little to do with dharma. I understand the reasons for that. But this leads to many individuals being hurt and to some very damaging ethics.

Perhaps a new era is dawning where large organisations and charismatic leaders are less needed for individuals to learn the dharma and maintain their practise. The Buddha said that spiritual friendship is the entire practice. In small community based lay groups such as ours it is easier to maintain your boundaries, challenge a group norm or bring a teacher to task. We have quite a few refugees from abuse in our community and those who want no guru or hierarchical restraints. I know of quite a few groups, worldwide that have chosen to be teacherless too. The dharma can flourish easily in such circumstances.

Women in leadership

It is interesting that there are always more women than men on our retreats, and in our dharma groups. I’m not sure if this is the same in other groups or countries. So that’s a good place to start...to ask why this is so. Perhaps women feel more comfortable than men, in a group or retreat situation. I don’t know. There are now more female teachers too. I know that women who have been mistreated or even ignored by male teachers feel safer with this. Some prefer less hierarchy, dogma and blatant power dynamics. Some like a gentler tone. We need to ask more questions about this.

The difficulties and responsibilities in women's lives are also their incentive. Women come to the dharma saying, "Parenting, caring for parents, relationships, running a house, working in an organisation etc. is so difficult, and I make mistakes. The dharma is useful in helping me to work out ways, not just to find a quiet space amidst the turmoil but to big picture this, the difficulties we have in life, and to see there is a way out." This is grist for the mill. This is what we're working with, this is not something to be gotten rid of, this is the dharma.

An Australian difference

At first Australia was very dependent on international teachers, but they mainly only travelled to the east coast. So the rest of the country had to pay for costly travel to hear them. I was lucky I had a sponsor, a woman who was willing to pay my air tickets because I was a single parent. And more than once the international teachers would encourage us to support Australian teachers. There's been a big shift now in developing our own communities or sanghas. We can't operate the way they do in the States or Europe for example. We have these vast and relatively uninhabited distances between Adelaide, Perth, Alice, Darwin and the east coast and they operate as islands. We have many isolated communities too. Even with Zoom groups and available technology when it gets down to it, many prefer person to person contact for inspiration and support. And so what I think is emerging in Australia is a fabric of many small community based clusters of intimate dharma groups, either leaderless or led by lay teachers. And many of these teachers are women.

Paper Session 1

Rising To The Challenge: Healing and Transformation

Monday 24th June, Afternoon

What's in a Name?

Sarah Harding

“Buddhist Women Rising to Challenges” struck a chord with me since I have definitely felt the challenge of being a woman in the Buddhist world. But as that experience is certainly not unique, it never occurred to me to write about it. Then way down at the bottom of the Sakyadhita’s call for papers, it said “More personalized perspectives based on one’s own experiences will be welcome.” So for the first time ever I will try that.

I met my teacher Kalu Rinpoche at his monastery near Darjeeling, India around 1972. I immediately entered his program of practice through daily teachings in his room with a small group of Westerners in the midst of the usual life of an all-male monastery. One event that struck me was the sudden “liberation,” as it is called, of a three-year retreat that had been going on there unbeknownst to me. I was extremely impressed by the monks that emerged. Later, when Rinpoche announced the first such retreat for Westerners, I immediately applied and was not-so-immediately accepted. I learned Tibetan, did the preliminary practices, accumulated the money, helped to build the retreat facilities at a center in France, and entered retreat in 1976 with seven other women. There was only one nun among us. The men were similarly ensconced a short distance away. Rinpoche had not been deterred by criticism from other lamas for assigning women the same practice program as the men, but he did truly wish that everyone would ordain as monastic, and never gave up trying. On his visits to the retreat, he liked to regale us with true, if somewhat exaggerated, stories from his travels of marriages gone terribly wrong. Still, no one new took up a permanent ordination, and most of them gave back the temporary vows that we took for the retreat immediately afterwards. As of now, not a single woman or man from that retreat actually retains their monastic vows. In the highly monastic Kagyu and Shangpa traditions, lay people participating at this level of vajrayāna practice in extended, cloistered group retreat was virtually unknown. That left quite a dilemma for an elderly Tibetan master from a different era, culture, and experience to sort out, enlightened or not.

When the retreat ended in 1980, the first thing that happened was that Rinpoche had each of us give a Dharma talk there at the center in France. The message was clear: we would be teaching, even though no one had that in mind when they entered retreat (At least not the women. I can’t speak for the men.) The next thing was that we were all to accompany him on a tour of centers around France, sitting on stage with him in our maroon robes, advertised as “the first thirteen occidental lamas.” Rinpoche was clearly very proud of his achievement, and we basked in the glory.

After the glory tour, (mine was cut short by being sent to rescue a Sikkimese lama who had run away in Los Angeles), we were all assigned to various posts. I was already in Los Angeles, translating for the runaway lama. I noticed that all the other women were also sent to translate or attend Tibetan lamas, while all the men were sent to *be* lamas in various centers. So that was interesting. When I had a chance to inquire, there was some talk about how that was more skillful, since in Western culture men were dominant and would be listened to. Right - well, as a translator I can say that people might *think* they were listening to a man, but in fact they were listening to the invisible female voice beside the throne occupied by a monk. Doesn’t that just resemble the history of the modern world? After my first child was born and I wouldn’t wear Rinpoche’s new fashion for lay teachers of maroon with white stripes, Rinpoche seemed to give up on me. I had totally failed.

Around 1982, Kalu Rinpoche was preparing for another retreat in Canada, and I decided to attend the empowerments. Somewhat surprisingly, I was the only one of the earlier retreat graduates who was required to pay the attendance fees, which I could not afford. Perhaps

due to that injustice, I confronted Rinpoche over the whole issue. Were women doing the retreat the same as men? Yes, but the word “lama” is for men. (Funny, since it is a feminine gendered word in Tibetan.) What about Jetsun Lama Kushola? She’s called lama because she’s the sister of Sakya Trizin. What about, Lama Palden? Well, if someone calls *themselves* lama it’s polite to address them as they like. And so on. Later, in a public talk, Rinpoche actually said “You can’t call a cow a bull” and “If someone has qualities, they will automatically shine forth like a rainbow appearing when gold is under the ground.” And so forth. I was so devastated that Rinpoche thought I was trying to stake a claim for myself, I slunk away that very day, definitely *not* rising to the challenge.

An important Kagyu lama tried to prescribe the word “naljorma” (yogini) for lay female retreat graduates, but this didn’t really stick. However, Kalu Rinpoche’s successor, Bokar Rinpoche, had no trouble at all addressing and respecting lay women who completed the retreat as “lamas.” So perhaps it is no longer an issue. But my experience with my own guru, in whom I never had a moment’s doubt, spawned a series of questions for about thirty years that I will try to describe in two minutes:

I’ve always disdained titles. So why bother? But, at the same time, is it fair if men get it and women don’t? Is this even my fight? I don’t even like the job description of “lama” since I don’t want followers. But if I don’t stand up to it, am I abandoning women? If I do, will it seem arrogant and assertive? Aren’t claims and titles a male thing anyway? Why should a woman have to act like a man? Do I even want to buy into titles bestowed or withheld by men? So, “thanks but no thanks.” (Or something a little more rude.) Do I want a title in a foreign language that no one really understands? Would I rather be called “professor,” since that’s clear? If the power of women is communal and not hierarchical, why set ourselves up for reverence based on a name? Is all this my neurosis or my wisdom?

This last one is the burning question. We are taught, in the Tibetan Buddhist teachings, that the kleśas or toxic emotions are actually a kind of wisdom when they are not distorted by ego-clinging. Thus, desire is the wisdom of discernment, anger is mirror-like wisdom, and so forth. This is a fundamental teaching of the vajrayāna. Usually it is described as the wisdom present *after* those poisons are purified. But what if they co-exist? If desire exists alongside the wisdom of discerning that those specific desired phenomena are intrinsically empty; that anger is permeated by the mirror-like wisdom that reflects equally the merely superficial images of infuriating situations; that pride actually *is* the wisdom of equality that recognizes our interconnectedness, and so on?

And what if the wisdom of the noncompetitive nonassertive female power coexists in me along with the scourge of female low self-esteem? That not rising to the challenge of female equity in the Buddhist ranks or stepping up to the role of lama is both a kind of humility and resistance to egomania and at the same time a shrinking acquiescence to male dominance? I don’t know.

There’s no time now to report on my research regarding female titles, other than a few observations. While many Asian lineages have mostly kept the traditional titles in the west, occasionally sharing them with women, the Tibetan lineages use all kinds of titles, mostly deriving from Tibetan or Sanskrit terms taken out of context. So there are mitras, shastris, loppöns, āchāryas, naljormas, ngakmas, yoginis, jetsunmas, khandromas, etc. In a nod to the English, one group uses “vicar” and the hilarious “brevet lama,” borrowed from British military.

The important pattern to notice is that, aside from the word “lama,” when it is used for graduates of the three-year retreat, almost all the titles do not indicate any specific achievement. Titles are bestowed solely at the discretion of a teacher at best, or at worst claimed by the person themselves in what is a very literal “sense of entitlement.” The former requires us to have confidence in the clairvoyance of the preceptor that granted the title, and the one that granted that one, and so on back into the past. But this makes it quite difficult to research the

background of any perspective teacher, the way the Dalai Lama has recommended. And I found that the majority of title grants were more about promoting the teacher's sphere of influence than the spiritual realization of the disciples, which in any case is difficult to assess. Needless to say, the self-entitled teachers greatly add to the befuddlement of us mortals.

Ideally, titles should indicate something specific that anyone could understand. For instance, a PhD doesn't guarantee wisdom, but at least we know the person did their homework. Usually. That's why "Venerable" and "Venerable Bhiksuni" for fully ordained nuns works so well. Someone who takes and keeps vows is worthy of veneration for that alone. It's clear and universally understood. But for there to be an equivalent term for lay female teachers would require agreement on teacher training, programs, levels, names, and so forth across Buddhist schools and lineages, or even within one lineage. I don't think that is going to happen. It would be nice to do away with titles altogether, but that's not going to happen either. I guess each person has to figure it out alone.

Anyway, it's too late for me now: my five-year-old grandson already calls me "grammalama." I'm going to have a lot of explaining to do.

Silent No More! Critical Review of Sexual Exploitation in Buddhist Practice - A Monastic Perspective

Ven. Dr. Tenzin Dadon (Sonam Wangmo), Ven. Dr. Karma Tashi Choedron

Introduction

Instances of sexual abuse of women are not uncommon in the Himalayan region. It is perhaps too simplistic to correlate the sexual element in tantric Buddhism and the numerous cases of sexual abuse of women in the Himalayas by male clergy. However, Gutschow (2004), Wikan (1996) and Campbell (1996) have revealed that women in the Himalayas have become victims of sexual abuses/exploitation by male clergy, *gomchen*¹, *yogīs* and laymen. Himalayan Buddhist nuns, though they appear as androgynous, are very much susceptible to the dangers of the female body. Gutschow (2004) reported that during her fieldwork in Zangskar, at least one nun was raped and clandestine affairs occurred between monks and nuns.

Bhutan has its fair share of incidences of sexual abuse of nuns. Wikan (1996) narrated the story of a 76-year old ex-nun who was a nun until the age nineteen when she was raped by a monk and left pregnant. This demonstrates how nuns suffer tremendously after being raped, having to disrobe because the vows of celibacy have been broken; although sexual intercourse was unintentional on the part of the nun. This demonstrates that nuns are not immune to sexual abuse, especially by those who are supposed to observe lifelong vows of celibacy.

This paper is a critical analysis of the taboo subject of sexual harassment in the religious realm based on a doctoral dissertation on nuns in two nunneries² in Bhutan. The primary purpose of this paper is to pave the way for a meaningful discussion on the rising incidents of sexual abuse in religious institutions in hopes of finding effective and long-lasting solutions to this serious issue. The authors have no intention to discredit any individual, institution or country.

Sexual Relations—Consort Practice or Abuse?

Teachers are held in very high esteem in Vajrayāna Buddhism because of the heavy emphasis on the guru-disciple relationship. Yet, some demonstrate inappropriate behaviour towards their students. One incident involved a monk teacher in a nunnery having illicit sexual relations with his students. Senior nuns and some laypeople interviewed reported that the teenage nuns were being sexually exploited by the teacher's friends as well. Unexposed to the outside world, the young and naive nuns were easily lured into the trappings of sensual pleasures. Lacking secular and monastic education especially, which include subjects such as moral ethics and monastic precepts (*Vinaya*), nuns are open targets for sexual abuse.

Two years later, there was a case at another nunnery whereby a monk impregnated a young nun. He cleverly asked her to leave the nunnery and then followed suit not long after. Rumours have it that the monk facilitated the paying back of *ba*³ or monastic fine for the nun and are now living together.

These incidences demonstrate that some monk teachers who should be teaching dharma to the nuns and who should be beacons of morality are the ones who take advantage of the nuns. It is not fully clear if the sexual acts were consensual but the fact that monks and nuns have to observe vows of celibacy is taken very lightly by monks and nuns in Bhutan. One of

¹ Also known as *Ngag-pa*, it refers to a lay priest or practitioner.

² Due to the sensitivities involved and to protect the research subjects, the names of the nunneries and nuns are kept confidential.

³ Fine imposed by nunneries on one who disrobes

the gravest dangers in placing monk or *gomchen* teachers at nunneries is the scope for sexual abuse. As Gutschow (2004: 161) observed in the Zangskari context:

Even if the teachers contributed little or nothing to the nuns' education, they expected and received assistance in countless tedious tasks, all at no cost. The potential for abuse, especially in the case of younger monks or those with illicit intentions, need hardly be spelled out.

Had nuns been sufficiently empowered to teach their own nuns and taught the monastic code of conduct⁴, these incidences could have been curbed. Nuns dare not go against their teachers' wishes, paving the way for sexual exploitation by unscrupulous monks, many of whom are teachers and sometimes, even directors of nunneries.

Silencing the Whistle-blower

When a nun complained to the nunnery director, also a monk; instead of investigating the matter and punishing the monk teacher, the whistle-blower nun was expelled. Apparently, the director was having clandestine affairs of his own. For fear of exposing each other, the nunnery director expelled the nun to cover up the matter.

Monastic authorities tend to protect the interest of monks than nuns. Cases involving higher ranks of the Buddhist clergy as perpetrators of sexual violence and abuse are not uncommon. The Bhutanese scenario is not much different as Gutschow (2004: 18)'s Zangskari nuns,

Monks accused of adultery or rape were disrobed and fined, but with minimal public outrage. Cases of lapsed celibacy hardly shook the authority of the monastery.

There have been cases whereby a nun is expelled from the nunnery and forced to disrobe as the common assumption is that the victim has broken the basic vows of celibacy⁵, therefore, she can no longer continue to live as a nun. This happened to a Bhutanese nun decades past as retold by Wikan (1996), amongst many others. This should not be so as the *Vinaya* is "not so cruel, and deals with rape in a compassionate way, allowing the nun, who is the victim not the perpetrator, to continue her spiritual path" (Sujato, 2009: 141). According to the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* (cited in Sujato, 2009: 141),

If she⁶ is forced, then if she does not feel pleasure in the three times [i.e., when entering, staying, or leaving] there is no offense. The offender is to be expelled.⁷

Even though the *Vinaya* is crystal clear that "there is no offense for a nun who is raped, and the blame must lie with the rapist" (Sujato, 2009: 142), there is still the burden of proof for women that the sexual act was not consensual. This is an uphill task because many incidences of sexual violation are a result of brainwashing by monk teachers citing sexual relations with the guru as

⁴ The *Vinaya* punishes all intentional sexual conduct by monks or nuns, providing a hierarchy of penalties depending upon the nature of the offense. Penetration with emission results in expulsion from the order, regardless of the gender or species of the partner or the orifice penetrated. (Zwilling, 1992: 207)

⁵ Corresponding to *pārājika* 1 for *bhikṣuṇīs*

⁶ Referring to any of the three categories of female renunciants in Buddhism, i.e. *bhikṣuṇī*, *śikṣāmana* or *śramaṇeri*

⁷ "A man who rapes a bhikkhuni cannot ever be ordained, and if they are ordained by mistake, they must be expelled. Similarly, a novice who rapes a nun must be expelled" (Sujato, 2009: 141)

being in accordance with *karmamudrā*. Moreover, most nuns hail from rural areas, with minimum schooling, lack of exposure to secular legislation and are clueless about what to do in the event of rape. There is neither any awareness-raising on sexual harassment nor a corresponding grievance mechanism in the two nunneries studied. Thus, the monastic body must formulate guidelines to protect nuns and lay female dharma practitioners from sexual exploitation and educate them on their rights in prevention and post-trauma.

The monastic body should ensure that nuns and women in general understand that monks and lay male practitioners cannot lure them into sexual relations for any reason whatsoever, even on the pretext of consort practice, which is the most often reason cited. Many women, nuns included cannot resist the prospects of being a human *dākinī* through *kārmamudrā*. As Simmer-Brown (2002: 214) explains,

...human women are called *dākinī* when they are the mothers, sisters, or consorts of incarnate lamas. Consorts are considered *dākinīs* out of respect for their intimacy with the *lama*, but also because it is possible that together they practice the spiritual yoga of sexual union.

Karmamudrā or Tantric Seal (Consort Practice)

The tantric seal (Skt: *karmamudrā*, Tib: *las kyi phyag rgya*) is the consort practice which is said to be a speedy method to induce very subtle states of mind which accelerates the practitioner's direct realization of the true nature mind (Changchub & Nyingpo, 2002). The *karmamudrā* is strictly reserved for advanced tantric practitioners who have obtained the consent of their gurus to engage in such practices, not to be interpreted as ordinary sexual activity but a practice which requires extraordinary restraint and mindfulness. Without the necessary authorisation, the tantric seal practice can be extremely dangerous and results in the practitioner straying off the path and ending up in the lower realms.

Nuns' Perceptions on the Karmamudrā Practice

The majority of nuns interviewed said that nuns should not violate their vows of celibacy to become spiritual consorts because instead of leading to enlightenment it would instead lead to hell or in milder terms, give rise to numerous obstacles and problems in one's spiritual practice. However, a few, especially the young nuns do not seem to mind as they believe that becoming a spiritual consort would lead one to higher realizations. One young nun confidently asserts,

I will accept the offer without any hesitation as the practitioner is higher and can lead us to enlightenment.

I (the main author) too have experienced unwelcome advances by monks in India who tried to coerce me into becoming a tantric consort, citing mutual benefit since I would be 'helping' the monk to attain enlightenment and he would in turn, lift me up spiritually— a prospect I found repulsive, to say the least! Simmer-Brown (2002: 227) further explains,

...tantric partnership is viewed as a particularly rich opportunity for both partners to develop realization. The intimacy of the relationship provides the setting for the

sharing of wisdom, as the hagiographies attest. Reflecting this, the wives or consorts of *lamas* elicit instant respect in Tibetan⁸ culture.

Fortunately, I am well aware of the criteria for tantric consort practice and know that it is forbidden for monks and nuns.⁹ Secondly, one has to receive the three recognitions¹⁰ from one's guru who is usually a highly realized master before one is allowed to take a consort. Moreover, I am sufficiently empowered to know that *kārmamudrā* is not the only way to enlightenment. Gampopa, the great twelfth-century Kagyu master is believed to have attained full enlightenment while maintaining the monastic vows of celibacy. Lama Tsongkhapa, the celibate monk-founder of the Gelugpa school of Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism too waited until the moment of death to complete the ultimate realization of Buddhahood (Simmer-Brown, 2002: 247):

It is said that Tsongkhapa, the great advocate for literal observance of monastic vows, postponed full enlightenment until the moment of death, when he united with a consort in a visionary realm, thus completing his yogic discipline and attaining the rainbow body.

If only the nuns knew the exact criteria and conditions for the *kārmamudrā* and had access to the *Vinaya*, incidences of sexual exploitation could have been nipped in the bud. This is why women need to be fully empowered in Buddhist education!

Policy and Implementation: Sexual Harassment Grievance Mechanism

Buddhist institutions need to pay immediate attention to the growing incidences of sexual abuse. In the case of Bhutan, the government, through the Dratshang Lhentshog must provide the nuns with a sexual harassment grievance mechanism to report any incidences of abuse. Since many nuns remain silent out of fear of reprisals from nunnery authorities, a system which ensures the anonymity of the complainant and addresses grievances in a timely and professional manner is crucial. This grievance mechanism should be effectively communicated to the nuns and standardised across the country and accord full protection to whistle-blowers.

The root cause of incidences of sexual abuse of nuns by monks is the lax observance of the *Vinaya* by many monks in Bhutan. Hence, there is a pressing need for stricter enforcement of the *Vinaya* in Bhutan and elsewhere in the Himalayan region. The following observations of monks in Tibet by Gyatso (2010: 7) strike a chord with the Bhutanese monastic scenario:

Bhikṣus in Tibet regularly handle silver, eat dinner, spend time alone with women in rooms, and sow seeds of dissent in the *saṅgha*. They regularly do those things without censure or punishment.

Openness and transparency on the part of Buddhist institutions and leaders is imperative, i.e. to be able to employ deep listening and not pretend that these issues don't exist or worse still, try to cover-up. Some high ranking officials tried to dissuade the main author from revealing sexual abuses of nuns in her doctoral dissertation in order to maintain the good name of the

⁸ This holds true in the Bhutanese context as well

⁹ According to the *Vinaya*

¹⁰ Contained in the tantric vows which one takes when one receives Highest Yoga Tantra (HYT) initiations, the contents of which is not allowed to be disseminated to non-initiates, thus, cannot be explained in this paper

monastic institution and country in general. Concealing information to suit the needs of certain sectors of society does not do justice to the nuns in this study.

Conclusion

This study is not an exercise in male-bashing or an attack on Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism, as might be misunderstood especially by male clergy, but an effort to portray the heinous sexual abuses which continue to plague Himalayan women, including monastics. The Buddha himself challenged social norms for the betterment of women. If the situation of women has degraded in the name of Buddhism, then remedial measures are in definitely in order.

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Personal Reflections on Rigpa and the Aftershocks of the Fall of Sogyal Rinpoche

Damcho Dyson, Tahlia Newland, Jacqueline Wicks

Introduction

In July 2017 eight senior students of well-known Tibetan Buddhist teacher Sogyal Rinpoche, founder of Rigpa and author of the best-selling *Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, wrote their teacher a letter which soon went viral and sent shockwaves through the Buddhist community worldwide. The 12-page letter outlined years of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of students and the use of donations to support an extravagant and gluttonous lifestyle. Reports subsequently appeared in the mainstream media throughout the West. In the wake of the public scandal, including the response from His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Sogyal Rinpoche stood aside from his position.

Yet the Rigpa community remains deeply divided, with many students within the organisation choosing to remain loyal to their former guru and eager to justify his behaviour in terms of Vajrayana teachings on guru devotion. With a few notable exceptions, most lamas either continue to express support for the former head of Rigpa or remain silent.

We present personal reflections from people involved in Rigpa as they attempt to heal their personal and practice lives after the devastating loss of faith in their teacher. A common theme is the harm that his actions—compounded by his manipulative use of Buddhist teachings to justify them—wrought upon the lives of so many sincere practitioners. We reject the notion that violent and abusive behaviour has any place within Vajrayana or any other vehicle of the Buddha's teachings.

Damcho's Story

Sogyal Rinpoche was the first Buddhist teacher that I came into contact with.

Like many others, I met him at a time when I was yearning for a way to make sense of suffering after my life was derailed by a series of traumas. When I felt like I had nothing left to lose, Sogyal's best-selling book, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* provided me with great support and tools.

I didn't want to fall back into the confusion and suffering of my life and so reasoned that I should surrender my ego to the teacher and follow him and the lineage of the Buddha's teachings that he was transmitting. I'd already noticed the benefits of meditation and contemplation, so dismissed a number of the concerns that arose in those early days.

As a community, Rigpa had a culture in which faith and devotion—rather than rigorous study—were emphasised. The few who openly questioned Sogyal's manner of teaching were made an example of through a publicly humiliating dialogue, that could completely hijack a teaching session. We were told by Sogyal and his senior students that these so-called 'training' sessions were 'activity teachings' and Sogyal's erratic and tantrum-like behaviour was 'crazy-wisdom', and the way to view it correctly was to cultivate 'pure-perception'.

I blindly trusted in the authenticity of Sogyal and his methods. By the time I moved to Lerab Ling, Rigpa's main centre in France, I was inspired to take monastic ordination and aspired to surrender myself to the teacher and be trained in the manner of the great saints of the past. Therefore, when Sogyal first 'corrected' me by striking me across the top of my head with a wooden back scratcher, I took this as a blessing.

Over the years, I became closer to Sogyal, and he gave me greater and greater responsibilities for his household and personal affairs. Now his personal attendant, the frequency and severity of private beatings and public humiliations increased. For many of us

in the 'inner circle' it was not uncommon to have multiple lumps on our skulls or split scalps from beating. He once ripped my ear. We all saw that his worst moods were frequently caused by problems with the young attractive females—students he'd groomed for sexual relationships—that were on call to him 24/7. Yet somehow, we kept each other afloat by reflecting on the karma we might be purifying, and the ego-clinging that we were loosening. In 2008, six years after taking ordination, I started having waking and sleeping flashbacks of his beatings and verbal abuse, and began to feel physically ill at the sound of his voice. Sogyal sent me to 'Rigpa Therapy' which was supposedly a fusion of western psychology and the Buddhadharma. I was grateful to have someone I could talk through my challenges with, but the therapist manipulated me too, telling me that the beatings and trials were nothing to do with Sogyal but rather with some past issues with a family member that needed to be purified.

Finally, two visiting teachers could see that something was not right. They encouraged me to speak to them—something that we were always warned against as 'no-one will understand'. The first told me that I was too close to the fire and so was being burned. He encouraged me to slowly and skillfully take a step back. A few weeks later, the second told me 'this is abuse'. Upon hearing those three words, I finally saw the entire history of my 'training' for what it truly was. Over the coming months, I secretly planned how I could run away from Lerab Ling. When I finally did and went into hiding in India, I was publicly discredited and shamed by Sogyal. It was at least three years before the traumatic flashbacks and nightmares eased, and more years before I could turn to a professional therapist for help.

In 2017 I joined 7 other current and former Rigpa students who wanted to hold Sogyal to account for his behaviour. Each of us had different stories and when we spoke together, we realised that the damage went far beyond our individual experiences. Our open letter outlined the main concerns regarding Sogyal's misconduct in relation to sexual, physical, emotional and psychological abuse of students; and the ways in which his actions had tainted people's appreciation for the practice of the Dharma.

The letter quickly received wide coverage and has led to support networks being set up and official investigations launched in France, the UK, and Australia. Since co-authoring this letter, I have heard many more extreme and profoundly disturbing accounts of Sogyal's abusive behaviour and can state that what has been published in the press and the official investigation merely scratches the surface.

Tahlia's Story

When I and other students read the letter detailing Sogyal's abuse, we were shocked, angry, disappointed and sad.

Knowing that Rigpa students would need support, I set up a blog and Facebook group where we could discuss the issues raised by the abuse. I heard many stories of how students had been harmed by Sogyal's behaviour. Many had spent years in therapy healing from the trauma.

Some students refused to believe the contents of the letter. Others, many who had suffered from or witnessed abuse, didn't see the behaviour as abuse. They believed that Sogyal was a crazy wisdom mahasiddha with a pure motivation whose 'unconventional' behaviour was an expression of love designed to speed us along the path to enlightenment.

They saw maintaining this view as vital to their spiritual progress and were determined to never waver from it. To accept that they'd suffered abuse would be extremely painful for them as they would have to re-evaluate their whole experience and their perception of themselves.

Other sangha members felt that such beliefs had only enabled the abuse and that it could never be justified or condoned.

And so the sangha split in two with Sogyal's supporters on one side, and the abuse survivors and their supporters on the other side. Those of us who could no longer see Sogyal as our teacher left the sangha, grieving over what we'd lost. Attendance at Rigpa events dropped by up to 50% creating financial difficulties.

Instead of recognising that Sogyal had harmed people, his defenders blamed the victims for 'feeling' harmed, saying that they lacked pure perception, didn't understand Vajrayana, and lacked the capacity to practice it. These students accepted abuse as part of the tradition and blamed their troubles not on Sogyal's behaviour but on those who spoke out, calling them samaya breakers who would go to hell.

Sogyal resigned and ran off to Thailand, but took no responsibility for causing harm, saying only that he was sorry that students 'felt' hurt. Though Rigpa management set up an independent investigation and created a code of conduct, they showed no compassion for victims, never denounced the abuse, and chose spiritual advisors whose teachings gave the impression that accepting abusive behaviour was part of Vajrayana.

Since this attitude doesn't reflect the Buddhist stance of non-harming, it created more confusion.

Western psychological perspectives on abusive cults, trauma bonding, and cult recovery were more helpful than Buddhist teachers. Studying these topics revealed Rigpa's toxic culture and psychological manipulation. I saw complex post-traumatic stress syndrome in survivors, and the use of gaslighting, brainwashing, and trance and dissociative states in Rigpa.

In the support group, we questioned everything we'd been taught. Many left Tibetan Buddhism; some left Buddhism entirely; others stayed with Vajrayana but without seeking another teacher. On realising that we couldn't trust an external guru, group members turned to the guru within ourselves for refuge, vowing to trust our own wisdom and in future not to believe a teacher's words without solid analysis.

Sogyal desecrated the sacred role of teacher of the Buddhadharma, and we threw our discernment away in the name of guru devotion.

Unfortunately, Sogyal's behaviour is not an isolated incident; abuse is rife in the monasteries and, to various degrees, accepted conduct by many lamas. This kind of behaviour taints the whole Buddhist religion and cannot be allowed to continue.

Looking ahead

In the internet age, the Buddha's teachings are more widely available than ever before. Nevertheless, we see abuse occurring across traditions, in contradiction to his teachings. We even see Buddhist teachings used to justify abuse—particularly in Vajrayana.

The Buddha did not advocate the use of physical and verbal violence, nor teachers seeking sexual relationships with students. He did not advocate 'crazy wisdom'. He skillfully adapted teachings to suit every kind of person and never found it necessary to employ such methods.

So why are these 'methods' being used? The supporting argument is that they speed up students' spiritual development; that the teacher is uniquely placed to know what students need to address their karma and move forward along the path. Our perspective is that any teacher who finds it necessary to use violence as a teaching method is not a fully awakened buddha, and abusive behaviours are an expression of the craving, aversion, and delusion of their relative selves.

We argue that in the majority of cases these methods are used because they bring the temporary pleasures of samsara to the teachers who indulge them, and are not for the benefit of students. We also point out that they model the very behaviours that we as Buddhists

consider unskillful in the world; behaviours that are harmful to both victims and perpetrators and to human society at large.

Karmic arguments abound in justifications for overlooking, ignoring, and explaining teacher abuse. Sometimes the Buddha's teachings are used, overtly or covertly, to blame the victim. Sometimes they are used to justify inaction on the part of those who could do more to protect students. The argument goes that karma will 'catch up with' perpetrators anyway and therefore it isn't necessary to take action against teachers who abuse students.

In the case of Vajrayana, the idea of karma has been used to allow and even applaud abuse. Lamas such as Sogyal teach students that feeling hurt or having doubts—even when subjected to beatings, being yelled at, publicly humiliated or used for sex—are the result of students' self-clinging and lack of pure perception and devotion. Abuse is justified as a potent form of 'teaching', making the journey to recognising and healing from it especially challenging.

It is the authors' hope that practitioners can come to acknowledge, across all settings in which the Dharma is taught or practiced, that any mistreatment of others is not consistent with the teachings of the Buddha. May we take active measures to support each other and minimise harm.

Our final wish is to send loving kindness to all those who have been affected.

Buddhist Women and the Challenge of Modern Slavery

Emma Tomalin

Introduction

Modern slavery affects millions of Buddhist women and girls. It includes the sexual trafficking of people, but also encompasses forced labour, as well as domestic slavery and coercion into criminal activity. In Buddhist countries, the reason why so many girls and women are ‘victims’ of trafficking is complex, including unjust economic frameworks, weak political systems and civil unrest. While modern slavery does not just affect women and girls, they comprise the greatest number of ‘victims’, particularly of sex trafficking.

Academic studies on the link between religion and modern slavery tend to focus on how Christian groups are a continuation of the 19th-century European anti-slavery movement. We know much less about the implications of modern slavery for other religious traditions, and vice versa, as well as how they are responding to it. When we do hear about responses from other religions, they tend to focus on what men are doing.¹

In this paper, my aim is threefold. First, I examine how Buddhism has contributed to the practice of and debates about slavery. Second, with reference to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), where SDG 5 is to ‘achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls’, I explore the ways in which Buddhism blocks and contributes towards achieving this goal. Finally, I give some examples of the ways in which Buddhist nuns and women are providing support and services for trafficked people in different Buddhist settings.

Women and Modern Slavery

The UK based organisation, Anti-Slavery International, tells us that

Slavery did not end with abolition in the 19th century. Instead, it changed its forms and continues to harm people in every country in the world. Whether they are women forced into prostitution, men forced to work in agriculture or construction, children in sweatshops or girls forced to marry older men, their lives are controlled by their exploiters, they no longer have a free choice and they have to do as they’re told.²

The terminology used to depict these forms of human exploitation varies and is contested, with some preferring the term ‘modern slavery’ and others ‘human trafficking’, though even these terms are also used interchangeably. I am using the term ‘human slavery’ as an umbrella term to encompass a wide range of practices, including forced labour, debt bondage/bonded labour, human trafficking, descent-based slavery, child slavery and forced and early marriage.³ Voronova and Radjenovic (2016) demonstrate that women and girls are particularly likely to be trafficked, for sex work as well as domestic servitude. They ask

¹ <https://www.iom.int/news/myanmars-religious-leaders-meet-combat-human-trafficking-smuggling>;
<https://www.lionsroar.com/vatican-buddhists-join-us-in-anti-slavery-fight/>

² <https://www.antislavery.org/slavery-today/modern-slavery/>

³ <https://www.antislavery.org/slavery-today/modern-slavery/>

What makes women so vulnerable to human trafficking? How are they trapped in exploitative situations? What are the means used by traffickers to recruit and control them? (2016: 4).

They tell us that a combination of intersecting factors increases women's vulnerability where

Push factors include, among others, poverty, unemployment, lack of social security, gender inequalities, conflicts and violence. Pull factors consist of promises of steady employment, better living conditions and demand for cheap unskilled labour as well as for sexual services (2016: 4).

All religious traditions have strong patriarchal tendencies, which relegate women to a secondary status compared to men, including denying them access to leadership roles. In many Buddhist traditions, women cannot be fully ordained as bhikkhuni/bhikshuni, and women may be viewed as a lower rebirth than men.

How has Buddhism contributed to the practice of and debates about slavery?

Fleischman (2005) tells us that the Buddha 'seems to take slavery and prostitution for granted and does not condemn them' (see also Peach 2000). And the Encyclopaedia of Buddhism tells us that

There is copious inscriptional and documentary evidence for the institutional monastic ownership of slaves from Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Burma, Thailand, Korea, China, and Japan; Central Asian documents frequently refer to slaves privately owned by individual monks (Silk 2004: 780).

Indeed, according to the website of the anti-slavery organisation, 'Free the Slaves', the Buddhist teaching of 'karma and reincarnation has been used to justify slavery, reasoning that a person's enslavement must be a result of punishable actions in a previous life.'⁴ This website also includes details of other faith traditions that have previously either supported or failed to condemn slavery, and reflects that fact that faith traditions have been intimately connected to social and cultural systems throughout their histories. Today, however, we live in an era where human rights and equality are widely recognised as universal values, and there are strong movements within all faith traditions to oppose slavery and exploitation.

Buddhism, Gender and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) came into effect at the start of 2016 and comprises 17 global goals and 169 targets that will shape international approaches to

⁴ <https://www.freetheslaves.net/take-action/faith-in-action-ending-slavery/>

sustainable development until 2030.⁵ SDG 5 is to ‘achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls’ and includes a number of targets, including those outlined below.

SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women
5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere
5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation
5.5 Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

Buddhism arguably discriminates against women in a number of ways. First, there is a belief that women must be reborn as men to achieve nirvana and that women are a lower rebirth than men, due to the kamma/karma accumulated in previous lives. Second, women cannot touch monks or enter a temple when they are menstruating. Third, in some settings women are not permitted to be fully ordained as bhikkhuni/bhikshuni, and leadership roles are confined to men (fully ordained monks, bhikkhu/bhikshu) (Kabilsingh 1991; Analayo 2014).

5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

Buddhism is not a faith tradition that explicitly promotes violence and exploitation. However, some commentators have argued that the negative stereotypes about women, as well as the lack of female leadership, means that Buddhism plays a role in perpetuating gender inequality that allows violence against women and girls, including sexual exploitation, to flourish. Muecke, for instance, argues that prostitutes in Thailand invoke the Buddhist teaching about kamma and the inferior status of women to support their reasons for turning to prostitution. By doing something to help provide for their families and by also giving donations to monks and temples, they can gain religious merit and increase their kamma for future lives (see also Kabilsingh 1991; Peach 2000; Satha-Anand 1999). Peach argues that ‘traditional Thai Buddhist culture functions to legitimate the trafficking industry, and thereby deny the human rights of women involved in sexual slavery’ (Peach 2000: 65; Muecke 1992).

5.3 Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

How can we break this cycle between women’s secondary status to men and the role that religion plays in perpetuating this trend? I argue that SDG target 5.3 tells us quite clearly how to do this. As Peach writes, ‘Buddhist teachings have the potential to oppose and condemn practices of sexual slavery as well as to legitimate them’ (Peach 2000: 65) However, the lack

⁵ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

of voice women have within Buddhism has made it difficult for them to challenge and transform negative stereotypes. According to Puntarigivat, with reference to Thailand:

The replacement of mae ji⁶ by a bhikkhuni institution would greatly raise women's status at the core of Thai culture and would begin to address many of women's problems in Thailand – including poverty, child abuse and prostitution (2001: 225).

Buddhist Nuns and Women Providing Support and Services for Trafficked People

Despite assumptions made by many scholars and policy makers that religion would disappear and become irrelevant as communities 'developed,' the situation is actually more complex. Even in highly developed contexts such as the USA, religion continues to thrive, and in Global South settings styles of modernity have emerged that combine religiosity with economic and social development. With respect to the issue of modern slavery, partnerships between faith actors and between faith actors and secular actors have developed. Secular actors have realised the importance of religion in many people's lives, as well as the resources that it can provide to tackle social problems, and are increasingly looking for ways to engage with faith actors in pursuit of common goals. Similarly, faith actors of different types and from different traditions are joining together to address issues around modern slavery and human trafficking. Details of a Buddhist project in Nepal and a collaboration between Catholic and Buddhist nuns in Thailand are given in the boxed examples.

Dhamma Moli Project in Nepal

'Dhamma Moli is a Buddhist project based in Nepal that provides shelter and education to young Nepalese girls at risk of falling victim to human traffickers who will sell them to brothels in India. It was founded by two Theravadan Buddhist nuns, the Venerable DhammaVijaya and the Venerable Molini (hence the name DhammaMoli), both of whom received Ph.D.'s from a Buddhist university in Bihar, in northeast India.'⁷

'...parents decide to send their daughters to stay at DhammaMoli, so that they can escape dangerous situations that arise out of poverty, such as getting married off at an early age, or being sent to cities or to India for employment, which is how most girls are tricked into prostitution' (Campano, 2013).

Buddhist Nuns and Talitha Kum Sisters Work Together to Combat Human Trafficking

Talitha Kum was formed in 2009 and is an international network of Catholic Sisters 'promoting initiatives against trafficking in persons in their particular contexts and cultures.'⁸

'In March 2018, Talitha Kum Thailand organised a training course for their members to empower them for their work in the next year on anti-human trafficking in Thailand. The

⁶ Eight or ten precept white-robed nuns.

⁷ <http://www.dhammamoli.org/intro.htm>

⁸ <http://www.internationalunionsuperiorsgeneral.org/mission/talitha-kum/>

training was run by Buddhist nuns from the monastery Sathine Dhammasathan [of which Mae Chee Sansanee Sthirasuta is the spiritual leader]...The alliance between the sisters and the Buddhist nuns on anti-human trafficking work is very important as the issue is global and affects people from all communities and therefore needs a collaborative response.’⁹

Conclusion

In conclusion, I draw attention to a project called the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI) which has established a Learning Hub on the topic of Anti-human Trafficking and Modern Slavery. Please take a look at the website and sign up if you are interested in connecting with others working in this area.¹⁰

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⁹ <http://santamartagroup.com/thailand-buddhist-nuns-and-talitha-kum-sisters-work-together-to-combat-human-trafficking/>

¹⁰ <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/erikcampano/2013/02/buddhist-nuns-human-trafficking-nepal-dhammamoli-dhammavijaya-molini-erik-campano/>

Ānanda and Dispelling the Suffering of Sentient Beings

Darcie Price-Wallace

The full-moon day of the first Tibetan month, March 12, 2017, began with a brilliant, blue sky, and beneath the draped branches of smooth heart-shaped bo leaves of the famed tree where the Buddha reached enlightenment, nineteen recently ordained women sat in front of His Holiness, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, the 17th Karmapa, (Karmapa, hereafter). They chanted in Tibetan along with him, “In the future, *bhikṣuṇīs*, *upāsikās*, and women, at all times single-pointedly remember Ānanda. Respect and serve him, call out his name, and always remember his kindness. Otherwise, do not forget him in the six periods of day and night, and do remember him.”¹

Behind the Karmapa an image of a golden-crowned Avalokiteśvara poised amid a blue sky cast a serene, compassionate gaze above the crowd. Avalokiteśvara stood upon a rose-colored lotus flower. Turquoise beads descended from his saffron robe at his waist and a white cloth encircled his hips and draped over his left shoulder as a backdrop to a pearl-beaded garland. In his left hand between his thumb and forefinger, he held the stem of a rose-colored lotus and his right palm extended downward. From the center of his right palm an image of Ānanda elegantly emanated upward. Ānanda stood in his saffron monastic robes on a smaller, similar rose-colored lotus flower with his hands joined together in *anjali* mudra also casting his compassionate gaze outward as participants recalled his kindness towards women.²

In this paper, I study Ānanda in the Karmapa’s recently compiled ritual, *Dispelling the Suffering of Sentient Beings: A Ritual for the Flourishing of the Dharma for Women in General and Nuns in Particular, Based upon the Inseparability of the Noble Avalokiteśvara and Ānanda*. To do so, I first briefly take up the work of religious studies scholar, Robert Orsi, who notes that scholars who study religions do such work because “we believed that we would learn something essential about questions and problems that press themselves upon us with great urgency.”³ For me, the question arises whether the Karmapa’s ritual which celebrates Ānanda re-inscribes androcentric ideals and implies a need for male intervention on behalf of women. It also prompts unanswerable questions like: Would women’s Dharma practice flourish without Ānanda’s intercession? Would female ordination have happened? While the ritual calls to mind Mahāprajāpatī, the first *bhikṣuṇī*, and invokes notable *bhikṣuṇīs* such as Kshema, Utpalvarna, and so forth,⁴ a critical analysis could assume that supplication to a male figure is nothing other than re-inscription of patriarchal hierarchy by which I mean “a general system through which women have been and are subordinated to men.”⁵ Yet, I want to problematize such a critical analysis.

My primary aim is to consider Ānanda in the Karmapa’s ritual which celebrates, imagines, and invokes Ānanda’s brilliance. I argue that this practice of remembering and repaying Ānanda’s kindness illustrates how he transcends dynamics of *us/them* and *either/or* –

¹ Ogyen Trinley Dorje, The 17th Gyalwang Karmapa. *‘phags mchog spyan ras gzigs dang ‘phags pa kun dga’ bo dbyer med la brten nas bud med spyi dang bye brag btun ma’i sde rnams su bstan pa dar zhing rgyas pa’i cho ga skye dgu’i gdung sel* (*Dispelling the Suffering of Sentient Beings: A Ritual for the Flourishing of the Dharma for Women in General and Nuns in Particular, Based upon the Inseparability of the Noble Avalokiteśvara and Ānanda*). (January 24, 2014). This is my working translation for my dissertation and all mistakes are my own.

² Field notes and participant observation, March 12, 2017.

³ Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 178.

⁴ The 17th Gyalwang Karmapa, 2014, 12-13.

⁵ Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 55.

providing a model for mobilizing ethical action. By way of invoking Ānanda, this ritual not only addresses underlying social injustices, but also aspires for “great well-being and excellence in our contemporary time”⁶ through making women’s absence in the Dharma fully present.

Part One: Studying Lived Religion

Orsi offers a collaborative approach to the study of lived religions and clearly demonstrates the necessity of bringing self-reflexivity into the relational space of what it means to examine religious traditions, one’s own or not. Regarding the dynamics at play when one examines lived religion, especially religion(s) endorsed (and possibly practiced) by the scholar, those who engage from a confessional perspective or openly espouse or critique a tradition are more readily accepted than scholars who attempt to sustain a state of “in-betweenness” in relation to their own tradition which proves difficult.⁷ What I want to emphasize here is that holding an “in-between” position pushes the scholar to sustain an ethical mode (*à la* Foucault) which recognizes complexities in relationships including possible asymmetries of power⁸ and the need to be perpetually reflexive about and resistant to *us/them* and *either/or* dichotomies not only in principle, but also in practice. Thus, scholars must take a *both/and* approach that departs from segregated thinking, or else risks maintaining and reproducing dichotomies such *emic/etic*, popular/official, heresy/orthodox, and most fundamentally problematic – *us/them*, which we *must* move beyond.⁹

I also want to argue that Ānanda’s role in supporting women in the Dharma embodies an “in-betweenness” that we can all strive for when we occupy positions that confound injustices. Further, the Karmapa’s ritual celebration encourages us to remember and repay Ānanda’s kindness, further suspending the binaries such as *us/them*.

Part Two: Ānanda and a Ritual Remembering His Kindness

Annually since January 2014, the Karmapa, holds the Arya Kshema Winter Dharma Gathering for nuns’ advanced training in philosophy and debate. In the shrine hall of Tergar Monastery in Bodh Gaya, nuns wrapped in their yellow ceremonial robes chant in long rows just below the Karmapa who sits cross-legged on a red and gold throne beneath an immense gold statue of Śākyamuni Buddha. As much as this scene evokes Buddhist tradition, the Karmapa is also breaking new ground. In 2014, the Karmapa began exploring full ordination for nuns in the Karma Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism during the inaugural Arya Kshema.¹⁰

Prior to the first Arya Kshema, he compiled the ritual, *Dispelling the Suffering of Sentient Beings: A Ritual for the Flourishing of the Dharma for Women in General and Nuns in Particular; Based upon the Inseparability of the Noble Avalokiteśvara and Ānanda*. This three-hour ritual has many components including taking refuge and bodhichitta from *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, *The Ritual of Mahayana Sojong*, *Bhikshuni Lakshmi’s Praise of Noble*

⁶ The 17th Gyalwang Karmapa, 2014, 15.

⁷ Orsi, 158.

⁸ Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, (New York: The New Press, 1994), 286-293.

⁹ Orsi, 175.

¹⁰ The 17th Gyalwang Karmapa. “Gyalwang Karmapa’s Teaching during the 1st Arya Kshema Nuns’ Gathering –Why Bhikshuni Ordination is Important.” January 21-24, 2014. Last accessed 01/21/19.

<http://kagyuoffice.org/gyalwang-karmapas-teaching-during-the-1st-arya-kshema-nuns-gathering-why-bhikshuni-ordination-is-important/>

Avalokiteshvara, supplications to Avalokiteśvara, supplications to Ānanda from *The Great Skillful Means Sutra on the Buddha's Repayment of Kindness*, and the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Individual Liberation Sutra* followed by *The Dharma Blaze Aspiration* and compositions by the Karmapa himself. It has a special focus upon supplication and visualization of Ānanda emanating from Avalokiteśvara. Following Lakṣmī's praise of Avalokiteśvara, the ritual shifts its focus to Ānanda. It states:

Then with immense delight the very essence of the physical form of Noble Avalokiteśvara became the form of the Noble Bhikṣū Ananda. At all times I prostrate, make offerings, take refuge and request blessings at the feet of the Bhagavan Tatagatha, the Arhat, the pure and fully accomplished Buddha Śākyamuni. I prostrate, make offerings, take refuge and request blessings at the feet of the Noble Ānanda. I prostrate, make offerings, take refuge and request blessings of Mañjuśrī and all the male and female bodhisattvas. I prostrate, make offerings, take refuge and request blessings of the Noble Mahāprajāpatī and the retinue of female arhats.¹¹

This passage recited seven times compels the practitioner to recognize the inseparability between Ānanda and Āvalokiteśvara and make supplications for all who encouraged not only women's spiritual capacities to flourish, but also the Dharma to flourish amongst communities of women.¹²

Following the mantra for Śākyamuni Buddha, the ritual proceeds from *The Great Skillful Means Sutra on the Buddha's Repayment of Kindness* and briefly recalls the narrative of foundation of the nuns' order. Mahāprajāpatī is taught to tell the other *bhikṣunīs*, "We must direct our lives in taking refuge in the teacher Ānanda."¹³ From a critical analysis based on the text alone, we may draw the conclusion that the present day ritual asserts a set of values that reproduce hierarchal gender constructions. Yet, as Damchö Diana Finnegan notes, "Buddhist monasticism's interventions in prevailing constructions of female gender benefited women greatly, even though those mainstream constructions repeatedly re-inscribed themselves on monastic women's lives, bodies and institutions."¹⁴ So, on the one hand, this ritual invokes re-inscription and sustains an androcentric paradigm, but on the other hand, the narrative of Mahāprajāpatī's request for ordination opens up the possibilities to explore complexities and contradictions in the socio-cultural context in which ordination occurred in the past and is being re-established in the present. Anālayo posits taking a historical approach towards Vinaya "in terms of its teaching function in the context of monastic education and thus as an integral part of the project of inculcating a particular set of moral values and attitudes among monastics."¹⁵

¹¹ The 17th Gyalwang Karmapa, 2014, 9. The Karmapa has also noted that there is also another Nyungne ritual apart from the one in the Bhikṣunī Palmo lineage where the practitioner visualizes being in the presence of Avalokiteśvara who then transform into Ānanda (personal notes, Arya Kshema March 14, 2017).

¹² Barbara R. Ambros's article, "A Rite of Their Own: Japanese Buddhist Nuns and the *Anan kōshiki*" focuses on a Japanese Buddhist nuns' ritual that celebrates Ānanda. This ritual, as far as I understand, does not draw parallels between Ānanda and Āvalokiteśvara, but it does draw heavily from the *The Great Skillful Means Sutra on the Buddha's Repayment of Kindness* as does the Karmapa's ritual compilation. For more on Ambros see: Barbara R. Ambros, "A Rite of Their Own: Japanese Buddhist Nuns and the *Anan kōshiki*" In *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* Vol. 43/1 pp. 207-250.

¹³ The 17th Gyalwang Karmapa, 2014, 11.

¹⁴ Damchö Diana Finnegan, "For the Sake of Women, Too.": Ethics and Gender in the Narratives of Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya. Ph.D. Dissertation. (University of Wisconsin - Madison, 2009), ii.

¹⁵ Bhikkhu Anālayo, *The Foundation History of the Nuns' Order*, (Hamburg: Hamburg Buddhist Studies, 2016), 41.

By looking at the scriptures invoked in this ritual, it is also arguable that this practice re-tells social normativities and revocation of previous injustices.

Here, I return to Orsi's positioning of the scholar in a state of "in-betweenness." When the scholar hovers "in-between" critic or caretaker, it gives sway to engagement and receptivity to one's own and others' experiences in rituals, giving space to address intersectional variables. This ritual is a compilation of many common prayers and invocations earnestly chanted by those present which necessitates interaction between the Karmapa, monastics, and laity that are typical of the Arya Kshema and "addresses problems by shifting the very terrain on which they appeared."¹⁶ Regarding the latter, this ritual incorporates numerous Buddhist texts and its enactment recalls narratives of the Buddha, Ānanda, and Mahāprajāpatī. Its cultural practices are adapted to help shape a multi-cultural world in which these Buddhist practitioners wish to live. Orsi notes that "religions arise from and refer back to discrete social and cultural worlds and they are inevitably shaped by the structures and limits of these worlds as they engage them."¹⁷ In fact, this ritual references a past socio-cultural milieu amid a present day commemoration which in itself is creating its own narrative of women's active roles in flourishing the Dharma.

I want to turn back to Ānanda's role in the ordination narrative and how this practice of remembering the kindness of Ānanda illustrates how he transcends dynamics of *us/them* and *either/or* – providing a model for mobilizing ethical action. In this way, he also hovers in "in-betweenness." Not only does he literally mediate in between the Buddha and Mahāprajāpatī, but he also supports both positions in light of complexities and contradictions. Ānanda's role in any of the ordination narratives challenges segregated thinking. He doubts *either/or* conclusions about women and asks the Buddha about *both/and* possibilities. What I mean by this is that in the *either/or* category Ānanda asks the Buddha 1) whether *or* not women have capacity to reach arhatship *and* 2) whether *or* not they have the potential for full ordination. By asking such questions, he challenges *either/or* conclusions and shows that women have *both* capacities – for arhatship *and* full ordination.

Even after the Buddha acknowledges women's full spiritual capacities, through a series of metaphors he explains to Ānanda the potential problems of giving full ordination to women. While this arguably creates an *us/them* dynamic segregating male/female ordinands, it reifies how gender is both one of the most important determinants in Buddhist monasticism, a site for ethical cultivation, and an aspect of "asymmetrical reciprocity, with each encouraged to offer different forms of care to the other."¹⁸ The Karmapa's ritual shows how Mahāprajāpatī's request and Ānanda's intervention encourages such care and it opens up the possibilities to explore complexities in both the past narratives and present moment.

Conclusion

Ānanda's intermediary role extends beyond this ordination narrative. He hovers in "in-betweenness" in other narratives,¹⁹ and it is within his capacity to hold simultaneous views that not only do women in the Dharma flourish but also the Dharma flourishes with women's presence. I am not by any means equating scholars to Ānanda's brilliance, but if the scholar can also navigate a position of "in-betweenness," it benefits the study the religions by cutting through a binary of *us/them* that separates and otherizes.

¹⁶ Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspective and Dimensions*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 267.

¹⁷ Orsi, 171.

¹⁸ Finnegan, ii-iii.

¹⁹ I cannot adequately explore this here, but Ānanda's role in the first council would also be another example of his "in-betweenness."

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The Body as Third Term: Buddhist Women of Color Address Racism in America

Carol L. Winkelmann

We won't bring about peace in the world merely by praying for it; we have to take steps to tackle the problem of violence and corruption that disrupt peace. We can't expect change if we don't take action.

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama¹

What's wrong with a culture that doesn't have love as its central value? In this smallness, we miss the opportunity before us to liberate ourselves from the obscurations that keep us from knowing who we are, from knowing each other, from knowing that our birthright is exactly love.

Rev. angel Kyodo williams²

Introduction

Ibram X. Kendi, an award-winning scholar of the history of American racism, recently asserted that “education and love” are not the answer to the intractable problem of racism in the United States.³ This statement has been breathtakingly provocative to me. As a Buddhist, I rely on the efficacy of wisdom and compassion to change hearts and, as a professor, I believe in potential of education for social change.⁴

In this paper, I consider as the teachings of three influential American convert Buddhist women of color—bell hooks, Rev. angel Kyodo williams, and Zenju Earthlyn Manuel—in light of Kendi's statement. I argue that, while they are not in full alignment with his eschewal of love and education as effective solutions to racism, they have shifted away from a conventional white American Buddhist emphases on personal transformation and towards a more praxis-oriented synthesis of personal and social or political transformation; importantly, they deeply engage the body as a lived site of meaning and thus a main vehicle on path toward enlightenment.⁵ With these three terms (personal transformation, compassionate social action, and body wisdom), they stake out a path that—in profound ways—avoids binaries between love/anger and self/society that Kendi and white converts, however unintentionally, convey.

Ibram X. Kendi: De-emphasizing of Personal Transformative and Interpersonal Approaches

¹ Dalai Lama @DalaiLama (2.25.2019)

² *Buddhadharma* 17.2 (Spring 2019): 74.

³ Ibram X. Kendi is a history professor at The School of International Service and the director of the Antiracist Research and Policy Center at American University in Washington DC. See <https://theundefeated.com/features/ibram-kendi-leading-scholar-of-racism-says-education-and-love-are-not-the-answer/>

⁴ I wish to acknowledge Cheris Kramarae, a friend and colleague, with whom I've written previously about racism in the USA. We've had many conversations about the importance of attending to racism in our personal lives and spiritual paths.

⁵ My intention is to be present to the ideas of these four influential thinkers as I struggle (like many other white and black Americans) to make sense of current political language which—since the campaign and election of Donald Trump—has been openly racist. Please note the persons I refer to in this paper are not in actual conversation; however, they are emmeshed as we all are in an intense cultural climate of racism.

In his work, Kendi has consistently upset conventional ideas about racism. He's argued, for example, that ignorance and hatred are not the causes of racism.⁶ This is a staggering shift of a widely accepted point of view that attempts to eradicate racism by transforming individuals. Kendi bypasses the individual and aims for social structures. "[R]acist ideas," he writes, "grow out of discriminatory policies and not the other way around."⁷ When people are treated by law (thus social policy) as equals, cultural space for racial animosity is diminished.

Kendi rejects language at the intersection of civil rights and historically black American churches: concepts such as confession, self-sacrifice, selflessness, love, and other religiously-inflected language at the core of much anti-racist discourse. He rejects other concepts such as uplift suasion⁸ and educational persuasion—typical assimilationist⁹ strategies—as antidotes to racism. Dominant powers, he argues, are indifferent to affective or intellectual appeals if those sensibilities interfere with economic concerns. Elites are motivated by self-interest, will always be governed by self-interest, and are unmoved by appeals to religiously-affected language such as love. Power will never “confess” and cannot be educated away from self-interest.¹⁰

Interestingly, dominant powers, argues Kendi, can be swayed by appeals to long term “intelligent self-interest,”¹¹ that is, the end of disruption, chaos, and unprofitability created by dedicated social movements. Antiracist activity can make clear to elites that it is in their long term economic interest to create unbiased social policy. No altruism or empathy is necessary. This strategy contrasts with traditional Buddhist thought which begins with personal transformation towards equanimity: the practitioner strives for liberation from attachment, aversion, and indifference and then works, bodhisattva-like, for the benefit of all sentient beings.¹²

Buddhist Women of Color: Transformative and Transgressive

Buddhist conversations about racism often refer to compassion and wisdom—the two basic wings or movements of heart/mind on the path to enlightenment in Buddhism. While the meanings of compassion and wisdom are unique to Buddhism and are not exactly synonymous with Christian “love,” many convert Buddhists of color, influenced by culture and upbringing, use the language of love (if not the Buddhist concept of loving-kindness). For example, bell hooks is a Buddhist/Christian whose lifework is suffused with the language of love.¹³ Her books deeply explore its power and its absence in American culture: “I feel our nation’s turning away from love [...] I write of love to bear witness both to the danger in this movement, and to call for a return to love.”¹⁴

⁶ Kendi, Ibram X. *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*. Nation, 2016. 9.

⁷ Kendi. 2016. 9.

⁸ This is the abolitionist idea that white people could be “persuaded away from their racist ideas if they saw Black people improving their behavior, uplifting themselves from their low station in American society” (Kendi 124).

⁹ Assimilationists blame both racial discrimination by whites and unproductive behaviors of blacks for black inequality.

¹⁰ Kendi, 2016. 508.

¹¹ Kendi, 2016. 505.

¹² Yet the bodhisattva action element is frequently presented in the most tame and as ultimately unnecessary way.

¹³ *All About Love* (2000) and *Teaching Community* (2003)

¹⁴ *All About Love*. x-xi.

Hooks has been excoriated for her idealism, but her approach is hardly uncritical. Since she began speaking/writing for Buddhists (1992), her language is not at all soft or simply affective, feel-good language. She argues that love becomes meaningless in a capitalist society characterized by domination, control, and aggression. The “...revolution,” she claims, “must begin with the self, but it has to be united with some kind of social vision”¹⁵ She defines love not just as a feeling; rather, it is *doing* based on care, trust, respect, honesty, communication, and commitment--components not characteristic of Kendi’s disruptive approach.¹⁶ While hooks pushes beyond many white convert Buddhists by critiquing both superficial love and capitalism, her language focuses on the interpersonal rather than structural issues that Kendi foregrounds.¹⁷

Rev. angel Kyodo williams is a Zen priest¹⁸ and author of *Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation* (2016). She’s been identified as “one of our wisest voices on social evolution and the spiritual aspect of social healing. [The world...], she says, is our field of practice.”¹⁹ williams, like Kendi, points up the limitations of religious sensibility to address structural racism. Religion has functioned to sustain white supremacy. Still, williams argues, Buddhism provides tools to analyze the self and offer the possibility of personal liberation. Love is critical, but the practitioner engages radical dharma in all its dimensions for their own liberation, not directly for the liberation of others. Like hooks, she argues that self-love, and self-knowing, are essential to healing and liberation; yet, she ties personal transformation to social transformation unequivocally.²⁰

The non-conventional aspect of williams’ beliefs (that many white converts do not foreground) is the emphasis on the linkages of self, others, and systems. She recognizes hooks’ attempt to unite theory and practice in Buddhism, but pushes further by offering a radical perspective on the proper situating of people of color—that is, as central to the practice of white converts rather than as interlocutors toward whom to be nice, welcoming, or hospitable in the sangha.²¹ Meditation allows for interrogation of our racist beliefs, not just a peaceful respite. Importantly, for williams, love is an embodiment practice: an awareness of intersectionality with an ultimate trajectory not just as personal or privatized, but social as it manifests on behalf of justice.

One way of looking at the ideas of these two thinkers is that love, in distinction from a conventional understanding of many white converts, is the first term or condition of liberation and social change is the second term. For bell hooks and Rev. angel Kyodo Williams, both are necessary to eradicate racism. Yet love has shifted in clear ways to cohere to praxis or the process of putting it into action, embodying, or realizing it. It is compassionate social action in a richer relationship with personal transformation.

¹⁵ *Tricycle*, 1992.

¹⁶ 2001:5.

¹⁷ For example, she writes: “As a nation, we need to gather our collective courage and face that our society’s lovelessness is a wound. As we allow ourselves to acknowledge the pain of this wound when it pierces our flesh [...] we come face to face with the possibility of conversion, of having a change of heart.” *All About Love*, 234.

¹⁸ And founder of the Berkeley Center for Transformative Change.

¹⁹ Interview with Krista Tippett, *On Being*: 19 April 2018. <https://onbeing.org/programs/the-world-is-our-field-of-practice-apr2018/>

²⁰ She writes: “James Baldwin was always advocating love and transformation,” qualities she believes have been lost. And, as she puts it: “To do our work, to come into deep knowing of who we are — that’s the stuff that brings down systems that oppression is made of. And so capitalism in its current form couldn’t survive. Patriarchy couldn’t survive. White supremacy couldn’t survive if enough of us set about the work of reclaiming the human spirit, which includes reclaiming the sense of humanity of the people that are the current vehicles for those very forms of oppression” (19 April 2018).

²¹ *Radical Dharma*, 112-114. See also 101 for comparisons with bell hooks.

The third term, I propose, is the body. Zenju Earthlyn Manuel, also a Zen priest, emphasizes our various embodiments as actual paths of transformation.²² "Spiritual awakening arrives from our ordinary lives, our everyday struggles with each other. It may even erupt from the fear and rage that we tiptoe around. The challenges of race, sexuality, and gender are the very things that the spiritual path to awakening require of us to tend to as aspirants to peace."²³

Thus Manuel's is a fully intersectional, feminist, embodied, and contemplative modality that does not get mired in an uncritical or diminished language of love. She unveils the bridge between the personal and the social. She calls for practitioners to walk into the "fires," the "fear and rage," the places that scare us and that can lead to social transformation and peace. The sensibility here is a fully feeling embodiment to propel energy towards compassionate social action. It's not all about love. It's about a messy, vibrant, often chaotic or disruptive energy that bursts open consciousness when fully felt, acknowledged, lived, spoken about, and honored.

Manuel names "a way of tenderness" that is experiential, nonintellectual. Enlightenment emerges through the body. Anger and rage flow in and out again and again (i.e., not just love)—in an acknowledgement of the totality of life.²⁴ Tenderness extends from the woundedness of racism and a felt-sense of the multiplicity of oneness. In contrast to a more shallow articulation, emptiness recognizes multiplicity as well as interdependence. Oppositions, contradictions, and contrasts abound. Oneness cannot be practiced or experienced as much as it just is and we are within it. Thus language fails to define it and preplanned actions can fail to evoke it. Indeed, a simplistic notion of "compassion" or love can be a hindrance to authentic interrelationship with difference, different others, multiplicities in oneness.

Far from being a facile language of religiosity or of resistance, Zenju Earthlyn Manuel's is an appreciative language of human sentience and embodiment. It's not a superficial language of interracial politeness or hospitality. It's a walk through the flames to burn away fear of connection. It can be angry and disruptive as well as joyful and inspired. Like Williams, Manuel centers race, but in a deeply felt, energetic way rather than a confessional or intellectual way. This is body wisdom. Life's biggest regret, she believes, would be to hold silence around the social/political discrimination that we learn about initially from our very embodiment.

Discussion

As exemplified by these three teacher-practitioners (hooks, Williams, and Manuel) women of color are clearly challenging the language of western convert Buddhism. Their anti-racism is more nuanced than the language of Ibram X. Kendi, who has gained great prominence in anti-racism circles: that is, they do not settle for a one-dimensional secular or social approach. Nor do they employ a light-weight or conflict-avoidance language of love that may be tempting to Buddhist practitioners who often avoid the full extent of racism or our inability to address it more successfully in our sanghas.²⁵

²² *The Way of Tenderness: Awakening through Race, Sexuality, and Gender* (2015). Even further, she writes, "...if we were to simply walk past the fires of racism, sexism, and so on because illusions of separation exist within them, we may well be walking past one of the widest gateways to enlightenment. It is a misinterpretation to suppose that attending to the fires of our existence cannot lead us to experience the waters of peace. Profundity in fact resides in what we see in the world." Please note that Rev. angel Kyodo Williams also writes beautifully about embodiment and intersectionality.

²³ Manuel, 6.

²⁴ *The Way of Tenderness*, 31.

²⁵ She writes about these scripturally-based social actions: The first duty of the noble monarch (leader) is to provide lawful protection, shelter, and safety not only to one's own dependents, but to all the inhabitants of the

With greater and greater degrees of precision, these practitioners of color argue that love is critical, but it begins with the self, then extends to the community.²⁶ In a full articulation of the trajectory, angel Kyoto williams argues: we need affective language, its experience, its pathways. She asserts, “We can have the rhetoric of overthrowing oppressive systems, but we have to balance that with the work of overthrowing the oppressive system operating internally that actually keep us enslaved.”²⁷ williams ties back together the separate paths Kendi disentangles. “Love and justice are not two.” But—as for other Buddhist women of color—it’s the directionality and functionality of “love” that is expanded. “Without inner change, there can be no outer change.” Yet, presciently, she argues: “Without collective change, no change matters.”²⁸

This is a kind of “middle way” path: a trajectory that Buddhists value,²⁹ but it is a no-nonsense middle way that challenges American convert Buddhism. bell hooks once said: “For black people, the literature of Buddhism has been exclusive. It allowed a lot of people to say, ‘That has nothing to do with me.’ Many people see the contemplative traditions—specifically those from Asia—as being for privileged white people.”³⁰ This exclusivity is a function of white supremacism. And Rev. angel Kyodo williams wants no part of a white supremacist system that entices persons either to aspire to or sustain their privilege. It cannot cure what ails us. “I want no part of an illness that renders me unable to connect to love. That is not a privilege.”³¹ Indeed, Buddhism must evolve in the USA to account for the realities, the suffering, of racism.

These contemporary women of color map out a middle path on much more difficult three-term terrain: personal transformation, body wisdom, and compassionate social action. To different degrees, they insist on the fullest expression of these terms: a bodily-informed language of love, an ensuing commitment to anti-racism education, and social interventions for social change. They invite one and all to journey with them. Do we listen to the messages from our and other’s embodiment? Can we put our bodies on the line or do we remain on the meditation cushion avoiding the ties that bind us to others? Do we believe that personal transformation must include social action? These Buddhists of color invite white convert

town and countryside (190). Buddha counsels the noble monarch to give wealth to the needy and, in the Pāli canon, a story is told about a monarch who does all but share wealth with the needy. From this selfishness, there ensued in the domain: poverty, theft, war, killing, lying divisive speech, sexual misconduct increased; meanwhile, life-span and beauty decreased (191).

²⁶ “Harmony in any community, whether a small group or a whole society, depends on a shared commitment to ethical conduct...social harmony requires at minimum that the members of any group share the conviction that there are objective standards for distinguishing between good and bad conduct and that there are benefits, for the group and its individual members, in avoiding the types of behavior generally considered bad and living in according to standards generally considered good” (Bodhi 13). In an entire anthology of buddha’s teachings in the Pāli canon on social and communal harmony, the focus on loving-kindness is minimal in comparison with attention to the well-being of the community via right view/understanding. Right view, according to the Buddha, comes first (17). Loving-kindness not a virtue leading to happiness of self and other (as almost solely taught today); rather, it is enjoined as conducive to communal cohesiveness, non-dispute, concord, and unity.

²⁷ Jan Willis, a Black Baptist Buddhist, once wrote about her early encounter with Buddhism: “... it offered the best opportunity for clarity—about personal as well as political strategies.” 124.

²⁸ 209.

²⁹ Her political discourse is predictably filled with terms such as insurgence, liberation, empowerment, radical social transformation, and so forth. But the goal is to open a third space to compliment the first space of the personal, the inner, and love and compliment also the second space of the outer, externalized social liberation or justice. The third space is the dharma, the space where the dichotomies fold and where pain, fear, and apathy are transformed into healing, truth, and a levelled playing field (xxii). It is an imagined place, not realized, but emerging.

³⁰ *Tricycle* 1992.

³¹ *Buddhadharma*, 73.

Buddhists to affirm their powerful messages. If they lack the courage? Woman of color practitioner Pamela Ayo Yetunde³² puts it clearly: White Buddhists who cannot engage in disruption must be willing to “attend to” and “be present for” those who do engage. And Rev. angel Kyodo williams adds these words to the conversation: “Just commit—that’s your job. If you have fierce commitment to your own liberation, then you are worthy to walk on the path toward liberation for all.”³³ To me, that’s love.

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³³ *Buddhadharma*, 85.

Plenary Session

New Horizons in Buddhism

Tuesday 25th June, Morning

Wise Hope in Social Engagement

Rev. Joan Halifax

A good part of my life has been spent relating to situations that might be deemed hopeless—as an anti-war activist and civil rights worker in the nineteen sixties and as a caregiver of dying people and teacher of clinicians in conventional medical centers for fifty years. I also worked as a volunteer with death row inmates for six years, continue to serve in medical clinics in remote areas of the Himalayas, and served in Kathmandu Rohingya refugees who have no status, anywhere. Ending gender violence and feminism have also been a lifelong commitment.

You might ask, why work in such hopeless situations? Why care about ending the direct and structural violence of war or injustice, as violence is a constant in our world? Why have hope for people who are dying, when death is inevitable; why work with those who are on death row... redemption is unlikely; or serve refugees fleeing from genocide, and no country seems to want these men, women, and children? Why work for women's rights? What does it mean to hope in our fraught world?

Wise Hope

I have long been troubled by the notion of hope. It just did not seem very Buddhist to hope. The Zen master Shunryu Suzuki Roshi once said that life is “like stepping onto a boat which is about to sail out to sea and sink.” That certainly brings conventional hope up short! But some time ago, in part because of the work of social critic Rebecca Solnit and her powerful book *Hope in the Dark*, I am opening to another view of hope—what I am calling “wise hope.”

As Buddhists, we know that ordinary hope is based in desire, wanting an outcome that could well be different from what might actually happen. To make matters worse, not getting what we hoped for is often experienced as a misfortune. If we look deeply, we realize that anyone who is conventionally hopeful has an expectation that always hovers in the background, the shadow of fear that one's wishes will not be fulfilled. Ordinary hope then is a form of suffering. This kind of hope is a nemesis and a partner with fear.

We might ask then: what more specifically is hope? Let's begin by saying what hope is not: hope is not the belief that everything will turn out well. People die. Populations die out. Civilizations die. Planets die. Stars die. Recalling the words of Suzuki Roshi, the boat is going to sink! If we look, we see the evidence of suffering, of injustice, of futility, of desolation, of harm, of ending all around us, and even within us. But we have to understand that hope is not a story based on optimism, that everything will be ok. Optimists imagine that everything will turn out positively. I consider this point of view dangerous; being an optimist means one doesn't have to bother; one doesn't have to act. Also, if things don't turn out well, cynicism or futility often follow. Hope of course is also opposed to the narrative that everything is getting worse, the position that pessimists take. Pessimists take refuge in depressive apathy or apathy driven by cynicism. And, as we might expect, both optimists and pessimists are excused from engagement.

So, what is it to be hopeful and not optimistic? The American novelist Barbara Kingsolver explains it this way: “I have been thinking a lot lately about the difference between being optimistic and being hopeful. I would say that I'm a hopeful person, although not necessarily optimistic. Here's how I would describe it. The pessimist would say, ‘It's going to be a terrible winter; we're all going to die.’ The optimist would say, ‘Oh, it'll be all right; I don't think it'll be that bad. The hopeful person would say, ‘Maybe someone will still be alive in February, so I'm going to put some potatoes in the root cellar just in case.’ ... Hope isa

mode of resistance.... a gift I can try to cultivate.”

If we look at hope through the lens of Buddhism, we discover that wise hope is born of radical uncertainty, rooted in the unknown and the unknowable. How could we ever know what is really going to happen?! Wise hope requires that we open ourselves to what we do not know, what we cannot know; that we open ourselves to being surprised, perpetually surprised. In fact, wise hope appears through the spaciousness of radical uncertainty, of surprise, and this is the space in which we can engage. This is what socially engaged Buddhist Joanna Macy calls “active hope,” the engaged expression of wise hope.

It’s when we discern courageously, and at the same time realize we don’t know what will happen that wise hope comes alive; in the midst of improbability and possibility is where the imperative to act rises up. Wise hope is not seeing things unrealistically but rather seeing things as they are, including the truth of impermanence.... as well as the truth of suffering—both its existence and the possibility of its transformation, for better or for worse.

Through another Buddhist lens, we can see that wise hope reflects the understanding that what we do matters, even though how and when it may matter, who and what it may impact, are not things we can really know beforehand. As Rebecca Solnit points out, truly, we cannot know what will unfold from our actions now or in the future; yet we can trust that things will change; they always do. But our vows, our actions, how we live, what we care about, what we care for, and how we care really do matter all the same.

Yet often we become paralyzed by the belief that there is nothing to hope for—that our patient’s cancer diagnosis is a one-way street with no exit, that our political situation is beyond repair, that there is no way out of our climate crisis. We might feel that nothing makes sense anymore, or that we have no power and there’s no reason to act.

I often say that there should be just two words over the door of our Zen temple in Santa Fe: *Show up!* One might ask why would I want these words over the door of our temple, when despair, defeatism, cynicism, skepticism, and the apathy of forgetting are fed by the corroding effect of conventional hopelessness. Yes, suffering is present. We cannot deny it. There are 67.3 million refugees in the world today; only eleven countries are free from conflict; climate change is turning forests into deserts. Japan’s population is declining. Suicide rates for children are up. Violence toward women is increasing. Many feel no connection to religion or spirituality, and countless people are deeply alienated and take refuge in their digital devices. We also see that economic injustice is driving people into greater and greater poverty. Racism and sexism remain rampant. Our medical system is deeply challenged. Globalization and neo-liberalism are putting the planet at great risk.

The peacemaker Daniel Berrigan once remarked “One cannot level one’s moral lance at every evil in the universe. There are just too many of them. But you can do something; and the difference between doing something and doing nothing is everything.” Berrigan understood that wise hope doesn’t mean denying the realities that we are confronted with today. It means facing them, addressing them, and remembering what else is present, like the shifts in our values that recognize and move us to address suffering right now. Seven hundred years ago, in Japan, Zen Master Keizan wrote: “Do not find fault with the present.”. He invites us to see it, not flee it!

Returning to the difference between hope and optimism and why hope makes sense in our fraught world, the Czech statesman Václav Havel said, “Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.” For many of us, it is an imperative to march for peace, to work for the ending of nuclear proliferation, to put pressure on the US government to re-sign the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. It makes sense to shelter the homeless, including those fleeing from war and climate devastation; it makes sense

to support compassion and care in medicine in spite of the increasing presence of technology that stands between patients and clinicians. It makes sense to educate girls and vote for women. It makes sense to sit with dying people, take care of our elders, feed the hungry, love and educate our children. In truth, we can't know how things will turn out, but we can trust that there will be movement, there will be change. And at the same time, something deep inside us affirms what is good and right to do. So we move forward in our day and sit at the bedside of the dying grandmother or teach that third grade class of kids from the poor neighborhood. We bear witness to the young woman who wants to take her life. We hold our CEO's and politicians accountable. Barbara Kingsolver put potatoes in her root cellar, as we recall! It is exactly at this point of not knowing where our vows come alive..... in the midst of seeming futility or meaninglessness.

The American Benedictine nun and social activist Sister Joan Chittiser writes: "Everywhere I looked, hope existed - but only as some kind of green shoot in the midst of struggle. It was a theological concept, not a spiritual practice. Hope, I began to realize, was not a state of life. It was at best a gift of life."

This gift of life that I have called "wise hope" is rooted in our vows and is what Zen Master Dogen means when he admonishes us to "give life to life," even if it's just one dying person at a time, one refugee at a time, one prisoner at a time, one life at a time, one ecosystem at a time.

As Buddhists, we share a common aspiration to awaken from our own confusion, from greed, and from anger in order to free others from suffering. For many of us, this aspiration is not a "small self" improvement program. The Bodhisattva Vows at the heart of the Mahayana tradition are, if nothing else, a powerful expression of radical and wise hope and hope against all odds. This kind of hope is free of desire, free from any attachment to outcome; it is a species of hope that is victorious over fear. What else could be the case as we chant: Creations are numberless, I vow to free them. Delusions are inexhaustible, I vow to transform them. Reality is boundless, I vow to perceive it. The awakened way is unsurpassable, I vow to embody it.

Our journey through life is one of peril and possibility—and sometimes both at once. How can we stand on the threshold between suffering and freedom, between futility and hope and remain informed by both worlds? With our penchant for dualities, humans tend to identify either with the terrible truth of suffering or with freedom from suffering. But I believe that excluding any part of the larger landscape of our lives reduces the territory of our understanding. This includes the complex landscape of hope and futility.

When I began my work in the end-of-life care field nearly fifty years ago, dying in Western culture was often considered a failure of medicine, even a failure of life. At the time, I did not even consider hope as anything relevant. What motivated me to do the work was that it felt like an imperative to do the best I could to address the deficits of compassion that I witnessed in modern medicine and to serve those who were suffering, including dying patients, family caregivers, and clinicians.

At the same time, I could not be attached to any outcome, as I intuitively knew that futility might paralyze me. I learned that I had to do my best by moving away from the story that working for peace, justice, or an equitable and compassionate society, including medical culture, would turn out well, was too big a job, or was hopeless. I had to "just show up" and do what I felt was morally aligned with my values, my principles, my commitments, regardless of what might happen. Much later, I came to understand that this work was an outcome of the gift of wise hope, springing from not-knowing and as well from the sense of meaning it gave my life.

I also somehow understood that being with dying was sacred work. For most people, confronting death brings into focus existential dimensions of our lives. I knew that I too was

mortal; I too would face my death one day; I too would confront loss and sorrow. What happened was that I was unwittingly drawn into the strong current of the end-of-life care field without having the conscious intention to do this work. I only knew that I had to turn toward and serve dying people, because it felt aligned with who I was and who I was learning to be.

Living by Vow

In Zen, this is what I believe is called “living by vow.” I have come to understand that wise hope is in fact living by vow, and a powerful expression of fundamental integrity and respect.

As my Zen practice matured over the years, I came to understand that living by vow reflects our ability to be guided by our deepest values, to be conscientious, and to connect to who we really are. Living by vow also points to our capacity for moral sensitivity, our ability to identify morally relevant features in our interaction with others, in how we choose to live our lives, and in the organizations in which we work and those whom we serve. Living by vow also reflects our capacity for insight and our ability to manifest moral nerve to deal with issues of harm, no matter how egregious or seemingly insignificant.

I came to see that our vows are a grammar of values reflected in our attitudes, in our thoughts, in our hopes, and in how we are in the world. The promises and commitments reflected in wise hope are fundamentally about how we are with each other and ourselves, how we connect, and how we meet the world. Practicing our vows, embodying them reflect our integrity and help give us ballast and meaning as we confront the inner and outer storms of being human. And what we come to realize is that our vows are a bigger landscape than most of us realize, and they support integrity in our lives and protect our world and give hope gravity and momentum.

The most powerful vows are those that point us toward living a larger identity, of being Buddha, of being a Buddha now. These vows support us in recognizing impermanence, interdependence, unselfishness, compassion, and wisdom. I believe that these kinds of vows are essential practices that support integrity and the development of moral character, and they are the fuel of wise hope.

Living by vow with the spirit of wise hope shine through the decisions that we make every day of our lives. Our vows are strengthened and actualized through the medium of wise hope. If wise hope is not present, we might be afraid to take a stand and choose to ignore or back away from situations of harm. We might be in denial or willfully ignorant over the suffering experienced by others when transgressive situations arise. We might be morally apathetic, or paralyzed by hopelessness, or living in a bubble of privilege and be blind to suffering. But if we aren’t trapped by these defenses, we might step forward and meet harm with the determination to end suffering, even when our actions might appear futile; and we do so without a “gaining idea,” to quote Suzuki Roshi. We can also remember that Barbara Kingsolver said that hope is a form of resistance, and by using the word resistance, I believe that she means being resistant to apathy.

I have learned from my long experience of being with dying that what keeps us upright in our aspirations and vows is our moral nerve, the courage to stand in principles of goodness and non-harming. What keeps our integrity on track is our moral sensitivity, our ability to see the contours of reality that make harm and futility visible and also point past suffering to a larger and deeper identity. We need both a strong back and a soft front, lived equanimity and compassion, to keep ourselves aligned with our values and abiding in the strength of wise hope. We also need to have the kind of heart that is wide enough to accept rejection, criticism, disparagement, anger, and blame, if our views, aspirations, and actions are against the

mainstream and what we do is seen by others as without meaning or even a threat to the social order of the day. Furthermore, it is important to remember that our vows support us in staying aligned with our deepest values and remind us of who we really are.

Sitting with a dying person or a dying planet, we show up. We all know that indifference kills. In service to peace, in service to non-violence, in service to life, we live by vow, and we live in the embrace of wise hope

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Dekila Chungyalpa

Floods. Droughts. Tropical storms. Cyclones. Landslides. Wildfires. Tsunamis. Earthquakes. Natural disasters were responsible for the deaths of 1.3 million people from 1998 to 2017, and for displacing, destroying, and negatively impacting the lives of another 4.4 billion people.¹ Of that, almost half of the disasters were created by rising temperatures on land and sea and if current trends persist, global warming will continue to cause runaway climate consequences that are devastating for people and for nature. This global reality we live in today is often referred to as the Anthropocene era by scientists.² A new epoch that started somewhere around 50 to 70 years ago in the history of the earth, the Anthropocene marks the period when fossil fuel-dependent economic growth and development have resulted in irreversible changes to the earth's geology and ecosystems leading to a "biological annihilation of wild species worldwide"³ and global warming above an average of 1°C beyond pre-industrial levels.⁴

In the face of such distressing facts and figures, one can lose sight of the fact that the Anthropocene era is a blip in the 200,000-year history of human existence on this planet. While the urgency of climate change and environmental degradation is of paramount importance, characterizing this era in doomsday terms furthers a patriarchal and colonial narrative where the entire human species is at war with nature and we as individuals are on one side or the other; forced to fight for human well-being or the protection of nature. For cultures that are firmly rooted in daily interactions with nature, particularly those of indigenous peoples, the connection with the earth is a positive and unbreakable one. Even a basic examination of indigenous cosmologies is revealing. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*,⁵ Robin Wall Kimmerer describes the Haudenosaunee origin story of how human life begins with Sky Woman falling into an endless expanse of water. Out of compassion, the animals and birds gather to her and give her rest and sustenance and finally, Muskrat dives down down down into the depths of the ocean and returns with a handful of mud. Turtle then offers his back to Sky Woman who spreads the mud on his shell and so the earth is finally born, through that compassionate give and take between animals and the mother-goddess.

This kind of coexistence between nature and ple, between the wild and the tamed, between the spiritual and the material, is a common theme for indigenous cultures. Whether in North America or in the Himalayas, the relationship with the earth among indigenous people is primarily that of awe and gratitude. Mount Kanchenjunga, the 3rd highest peak on the planet, has not been climbed from the northeastern side in the Indian state of Sikkim to this day, despite the lure of tourism-based income generation. The mountain is the physical manifestation of Sikkim's protective deity for the local Buddhist population and the Sikkim state government has upheld a ban on foreign climbers. Indigenous cultures have known how to tread lightly on this earth, and they can do so again. What about everyone else?

¹ United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (2017), *Economic Losses, Poverty, and Disasters*. DOI: https://www.unisdr.org/files/61119_credeconomiclosses.pdf

² Summerhayes, C. P. and Zalasiewicz, J. (2018), "Global warming and the Anthropocene". *Geology Today*, 34: 194-200.

³ Ceballos, G, Ehrlich, P.R, and Dirzo (2017), "Population losses and the sixth mass extinction", *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* Jul 2017, 114 (30)

⁴ Summerhayes, C. P. and Zalasiewicz, J. (2018), "Global warming and the Anthropocene". *Geology Today*, 34: 194-200.

⁵ Kimmerer, R. W. (2013), *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions.

Neoliberalism is the most recent fruit of patriarchy, and a more comprehensive version of its older incarnations of capitalism and colonialism that came before, all of which have oppressed and exploited people of color, women, indigenous peoples, and nature itself while profiting from that oppression.⁶ It has been the dominant political-economic ideology in almost all government states and the ruling paradigm for the world economy since the late 70s. Neoliberalism embraces free and open markets and discourages anything, including state intervention in economics, that would inhibit international globalized trade. In response to the environmental and climate reality of today, neoliberal economists and policy-makers often argue that a global green economy model is achievable, one where systemic changes take form in the promotion of techno-science advances and solutions, and where the worst environmental offenders will be contained with a few basic checks and balances. This type of sustainability is essentially a cosmetic one; it avoids a shift in social values and behavior and ushers us towards economically efficient solutions, measured quantitatively through cost-benefit analyses that pursue voluntary commitments and corporate social responsibility and call that a win. Under no circumstances does it aim to fix the underlying inequities of geographies, race, and gender that have borne the actual costs for winners in this game. Therefore, if we are to reverse the trends that have brought us to this point of environmental devastation, we must find alternatives to the neoliberal model of development first. And in order to do so, we must give alternatives to what human development and success means in ideological *and* practical terms.

We must also consider exactly who suffers during environmental and climate disasters. Poor communities who are already disadvantaged, who live in areas that lack infrastructure and resources, and those who depend upon natural resources simply to survive are the most vulnerable and at risk during any disaster.⁷ Among the marginalized, women and children are the first to suffer the consequences of environmental and climate disasters even as women produce 80% of the world's food supplies.⁸ Of course, it is not just humans that are impacted. 60% of mammals, birds, fish, reptiles and amphibians have declined since 1970.⁹ The 2018 Living Planet Report points out that these populations have shrunk by more than half within the lifespan of one human generation due to two main drivers: *overexploitation and agriculture, both linked to continually increasing human consumption patterns*.

Given that over 80% of the world's human population identify themselves as religious and are strongly influenced by their faith in their attitudes and behavior, faith-led environmental values and action can provide a much-needed path towards ecological renewal and societal behavior change. Religious leaders command great respect within their communities and can mobilize attitude and behavior change in large numbers. Consider the global impact of religious leaders such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, whose moral authority helped frame apartheid in South Africa as an intolerable injustice, thereby creating a global outcry from Christian leaders in the 90s.¹⁰ Religious leadership has always had the power to transform public opinion. Moreover, religious traditions and spiritual wisdom provide a basis for emotional and social resilience that is often undervalued by secular scientists and thought leaders. Religious leaders are naturally suited to address the root causes of environmental degradation, including human greed and grasping which has provided the fuel for neoliberal economics to flourish. Religious

⁶ Gaard, G, and Gruen, L (2005), "Ecofeminism: Toward global justice and planetary health," Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology (4th edition).

⁷ **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2019), *Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5 °C*.**

⁸ World Health Organization (2010), *Gender, Climate Change, and Health*, Geneva. DOI: <https://www.who.int/globalchange/GenderClimateChangeHealthfinal.pdf>.

⁹ WWF (2018), Living Planet Report - 2018: Aiming Higher. Grooten, M. and Almond, R.E.A.(Eds). WWF, Gland, Switzerland.

¹⁰ Tutu, Desmond (1984), "Nobel Peace Prize Lecture", Nobel Media AB 2019.

leaders also often work on economic inequity and social polarization in ways that call for recognizing and respecting spiritual and environmental connectedness.

Within this context, Buddhism has emerged as one of the religions most suited to engage with faith-based environmental and climate ethics and action. Science describes ecosystems as being formed by living organisms, physical features, biochemical processes, natural processes and human activities. It is the relationship between all these entities that create life; essentially, life originates in interdependence. If any of these entities are removed or changed, the entire ecosystem cycle is impacted. The earth can be described as a much larger ecosystem, with global ecological processes regulating the water, biogeochemical, energy, and community dynamics for life to flourish. It arguably self-regulates and self-manages its processes, which begs the larger question of how consciousness should be defined and measured. Conservation scientists often turn towards Buddhist philosophy to better articulate how ecosystems function and apply the concepts of *karma* and interdependence in order to explain the entirety of ecosystem functions.

It is not simply Buddhist philosophy that is compatible with environmental and earth sciences. The fundamental basis of Buddhism is compassion and the profound wish to alleviate the suffering of all sentient beings is the core motivation that drives us to practice. In the Pratimokṣa vows that govern the behavior of Buddhist monastics, Buddha gave explicit instructions on moral discipline regarding the killing of an animal or insect. The knowledge that our collective human action has caused deep suffering of our fellow humans and sentient beings serves as a moral motivation for action. As written by His Holiness the Karmapa, the head of the Karma Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, in an article for *Conservation Biology*,¹¹ “if we accept that we are not isolated individuals but instead one whole made up of all life on Earth, we cannot remain indifferent to the suffering and ills that occur here. With this understanding, generating compassion for all living beings and turning that motivation into action is the most ecologically aware thing we can do.”

For Buddhists whose lineages are rooted in Tibet, the Himalayas, and the Mekong region, whether by birth or by choice, climate change should be an urgent concern. Whereas average temperatures around the world have risen by 1°C, the average temperature in the Tibetan Plateau has risen by 1.5 °C in the past 50 years and the average precipitation has risen by 2.1 inches per year in the past 25 years.¹² Scientists at Ohio State University studying glacial ice cores in Tibet have now estimated that at least half of the ice there will disappear by 2100 as a best-case scenario.¹³ The glaciers in the Tibetan Plateau are the source for all the major rivers in mainland Asia, ranging from the Indus, Ganges, Brahmaputra, Irrawaddy, Mekong, Yangtze and the Yellow. As the ice melts and results in floods and droughts, the livelihoods of over a billion people spread out across China, India and the Mekong region will be gravely affected.

Buddhist leaders and institutions are uniquely placed to address climate-related and other environmental disasters. In 2008, due to my work experience as a field conservationist working for the World Wildlife Fund in the Himalayas and in the Mekong region, I was asked by His Holiness the Karmapa to work with a group of senior monks to develop environmental guidelines for the Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in the Himalayas. The resulting publication,

¹¹ H. H. 17th Gyalwang Karmapa, Dorje, O.T. (2011), “Walking the Path of Environmental Buddhism through Compassion and Emptiness”, *Conservation Biology*, 25(6), 1094-1097.

¹² Kuang, X., and Jiao, J. J. (2016), “Review on climate change on the Tibetan Plateau during the last half century”, *J. Geophys. Res. Atmos.*, 121.

¹³ Ohio State University Press Release (2017). Chief researcher: Lonnie Thompson, Byrd Polar and Climate Research Center, December 04, 2017. DOI: <https://news.osu.edu/researchers-capture-oldest-ice-core-ever-drilled-outside-the-polar-regions/>.

Environmental Guidelines for Karma Kagyu Buddhist Monasteries, Centers and Community was launched in January of 2009.¹⁴ The booklet, initially published in Tibetan, Nepali, Hindi, Chinese and English, examined the major environmental problems affecting the Himalayas and the Tibetan Plateau; forest degradation, water loss, wildlife trade, waste and pollution and climate change; through a Tibetan Buddhist lens and offered religiously authoritative and scientific solutions that could be implemented by monasteries and centers. WWF made the decision to staff me as an environmental advisor to His Holiness due to his extraordinary vision for training monks and nuns to become environmental protectors for the Himalayas and the Tibetan Plateau. Following upon the success of that partnership, WWF replicated the model in Cambodia, and subsequently launched the Sacred Earth program to work with faith leaders and religious institutions in the Amazon, East Africa, the Eastern Himalayas, the Mekong region, and the United States.

The launch of these environmental guidelines took place in the first ever five-day training conference on environmental protection for Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and nunneries in Varanasi, which was attended by representatives of 22 Tibetan Buddhist monasteries (12 from India, 10 from Nepal, and 2 from Bhutan). An outcome of this experience was the decision of the attending monastics to organize themselves as an association, which was named *Rangjung Khoryug Sungkyob Tsokpa* (*Association to Protect Nature* in the Tibetan language) or *Khoryug* as it is known today. *Khoryug* has now grown to include over 50 *Ri-may* (non-sectarian) Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, the membership to which requires a set of environmental goals, activities and annual reporting.

Among *Khoryug's* achievements include annual five-day training conferences held from 2009 to today, with participants ranging from 50 to 85 monks and nuns. Although the conferences were attended by 1-4 *tulkus*, attendees mainly consisted of middle-tier monastics who were selected on the basis of being the project managers and factotums in their monasteries. These conferences were then further replicated each year by 5-8 monasteries and nunneries in smaller regional workshops. *Khoryug* monasteries took up individual projects that include reforestation, solar powered kitchens, community clean ups, organic farming, rooftop water harvesting, nurseries for medicinal plants, spring-shed restoration and more. It also produced 2 other publications; *108 Things You Can Do to Save the Environment*,¹⁵ and *Disaster Management Guidelines for Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries, Nunneries and Communities*¹⁶.

As a case study, *Khoryug* unequivocally demonstrates that an environmental call to action from a senior faith leader can result in pro-environmental behavior within his or her religious institutions and among his or her followers. The more specific the call, the more impactful and sustainable the pro-environmental behavior has proven to be. Moreover, the more committed the monasteries become, the more likely they are to recruit other monasteries, faith-based organizations, and individuals. Therefore, we see not only an impact within the religious institutions but also among the surrounding community.

An unexpected outcome of *Khoryug's* mobilization has been the emergence of leadership and rising confidence among the participating nuns. Furthermore, there is a significant difference in response from nunneries versus monasteries. The nunneries, which are often poorer than the monasteries, chose to internalize *Khoryug* training and focus on improving their own environmental footprint as their main goal. Activities include nunneries in Nepal upcycling their waste products to create items for raising awareness and funds, and nunneries in Bhutan and India turning their flower gardens into small-scale organic farms. Nunneries also chose to focus on first aid as their main contribution to community engagement

¹⁴ DOI: <http://hello.khoryug.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Environmental-GuidelinesFinal.pdf>

¹⁵ DOI: <http://www.khoryug.info/108-things-you-can-do-to-help-the-environment/>

¹⁶ DOI: <http://www.khoryug.info/disaster-management/>

in their disaster management plans. Most notably, it was nuns who decided to limit the number of robes they allocated for themselves and to turn old robes into bags that could then be used for their weekly shopping. One of the Khoryug representatives, a nun, explained these choices as following Buddha's example of being an environmentalist rather than talking about it.¹⁷

One of the clearest findings during the last 10 years of implementation is that direct experiences are more influential on attitude and behavior than classroom training. The capacity building exercises we created included at least one "field" day for monastics to experience the issues first-hand that they were studying by meeting with CSOs, NGOs, and community members working on those problems. For example, the 2013 training on freshwater conservation and water management added a day spent at the banks of Yamuna River, meeting with local communities and NGOs and witnessing how river pollution affected young children. When it came to future commitments, reports from the monks and nuns with experiential training demonstrated that they were less likely to be deterred by obstacles while implementing their projects and more likely to form partnerships with civil society groups. Monastics who were involved in *Khoryug* capacity building and project activities described themselves as feeling responsible for educating, warning and helping their local communities on climate-related disaster management. There was also a strong desire to exhibit the right example by adopting solar energy and other resilience building measures to the rest of the world despite the financial costs. Due to the strong interest of *Khoryug* monasteries, the 4th conference in 2012 focused on climate related disaster management, during which the participants insisted on signing the Buddhist Declaration on Climate Change. More importantly, 21 monasteries budgeted and invested in solar energy for water heating and electricity to minimize their carbon footprint. Following the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, *Khoryug* has focused all its capacity building efforts towards disaster planning and mitigation, including establishing disaster management plans and CERT (Community Emergency Response Training) teams in all monasteries and nunneries.

We are at a crisis point today, where we know that the global neoliberal order is destroying nature and its processes, which makes up all sentient life, and that we cannot let it go unchecked any further. Religious institutions can become the sources of great resilience, organizing themselves to protect biodiversity in their landscapes, clean up water ways, invest in climate-ready infrastructure and develop risk reduction plans. The common thread among indigenous communities and religious communities is the overt acknowledgement that we all need each other, and it is the compassionate give and take between diverse members that makes the community stronger. *Khoryug* provides one model for faith-led community resilience as it strives for a spiritually principled and scientifically practical way forward. Its members are prepared for the worst, but full of hope that their way of respecting nature, organizing themselves, and fortifying their local communities will replicate around the world and result in the alleviation of suffering for all beings.

¹⁷ Khoryug 2017 Annual Conference. Coordinator Interview Report, Bodh Gaya.

Healing Art: Seeing Women's Heart of Wisdom and Compassion

Paula Arai

It was raining that early spring evening in Nagoya when the phone rang. Nagai-san's elegant voice greeted me with a buoyant tone as she skipped the usual polite ritual exchanges and went straight to the heart of her concern. She was one of the elder women sharing her experiences with me as part of my research on Buddhist healing practices. "Paula-san, I finally understand. Emptiness is not cold. It is what embraces us with compassion, enabling us to live, move, breathe, even die." In earlier conversations, she had expressed frustration that despite having diligently studied the Buddhist philosophical concept of emptiness, comprehension had eluded her for years as she sought relief from the suffering of numerous losses. She had lost her two elder brothers to the deprivations of World War II, her parents to age hastened along by outliving two of their five children, her mentally ill elder sister to suicide after her parents were no longer there to care for her, and her younger sister to homicide at the hands of her newlywed husband. "Today I went to an exhibit of *Heart Sutra* paintings," she told me. "Upon seeing them I *felt* how warm and wonderful emptiness is. Tomorrow is the last day of the exhibit. You *must* go see for yourself."

And so I did. Venturing out the following morning, two-year-old son in one hand and umbrella in the other, I trudged my way to the museum through a downpour. I wondered how paintings could possibly help anyone see, much less feel, emptiness. On arriving, I immediately understood. Standing amid scenes of dewdrops, ducklings, and dragons, a luminous stream of nourishing, embracing wisdom flowed from the paintings into my heart. My doctoral training in Buddhist Studies did not yield the insights these paintings delivered directly in potent visual form.

I had the good fortune to meet the artist, Iwasaki Tsuneo, and learned that he had been a biologist before he started painting in retirement. A devout Buddhist, he wanted to share his insights into the resonance he saw in scientific and Buddhist understandings of reality. He joined the stream of those who were inspired by the *Heart Sutra*, and found creative ways to access its emancipating power, including being carried in a pouch close to the heart, chanted under the breath in moments of fear, bellowed in times demanding great power, intricately brushed on grains of rice, copied on reams of paper upon the death of a loved one, ingested one syllable at a time for wisdom insights, embedded in buildings, and clutched during childbirth. Iwasaki's novel inspiration was to shape the characters of the *Heart Sutra* to form birds, black holes, and DNA to illuminate the meaning of the sutra. Iwasaki was a visionary thinker who cared deeply about the fate of the world. Employing sacred words to form a vast range of images, Iwasaki's art reveals jewels for healing and empowering women buried deep in the interstices of the *Heart Sutra*.

Wisely, a Buddhist text about wisdom embeds the name of the Mother of All Buddhas, Prajñāparamitā, in its title. The *Heart Sutra* sets itself apart from other sutras by cutting to the chase. It is as if the reader has just missed Shariputra interrupting the bodhisattva of compassion—Kanzeon, the "one who hears the cries of the world" (commonly shortened to Kannon)—in the midst of deep meditation, ask, "How do I cross to the other shore?" The concise directions are clearly intended for someone familiar with the territory. In sum, Kannon cautions to be vigilant along the narrow and tricky pass of "form is emptiness; emptiness is form." Our senses and mental processes shape reality into perceptible forms, such as dewdrops and ducks, me and you, good and bad, yet these are ultimately boundless flows of energy in perpetual interaction and flux—our laughing and crying, working and playing, living and dying. The key is to not treat anything as separate from the interdependent flux of dynamic activity.

If you experience everything, including yourself, as a living web of interdependent events, you will be released down the path of freedom from suffering.

DNA

DNA is a record of interrelatedness that spans billions of years and connects all life forms; it provides evidence for the fact that we are not independent entities. Humans share DNA with ancient bacteria, grains of rice, cherry trees, butterflies, baboons, and frogs. Each of our cells contain the code of an interrelated web of life. With DNA being central for a code to life and the *Heart Sutra* a powerful code to enlightenment, Iwasaki proclaims that the code of enlightening wisdom sung in the scripture is embedded in the very code of life, embodied in every living cell.

He painted only the backbone of the two DNA strands to highlight the commonality of forms of life. Without the base pairs, the artist evokes a general image of DNA, from bacteria to blue whales. Iwasaki's *DNA* invites us to imagine it as that of a fly, a flower, an endangered tiger, a cancer cell, or our mother. To symbolize the shore of suffering—samsara—he painted a darkened muddy line in the lower right corner. To symbolize the other shore of enlightenment—nirvana—he painted a luminous gold line in the upper left corner. Iwasaki's painting offers cellular affirmation of our bodily form. Our very bodies—shaped and colored in various ways—are a vehicle to journey from suffering to enlightenment. The *Heart-Sutra*-coded DNA teaches that wisdom needs a form to bring the healing power of compassion to life.

Endowed with

Ears

To hear the cries of the world

To listen to teachings

And singing birds

Eyes

To see the pain

In your eyes

To visualize blissful realms

Noses

To smell roses

And the fragrance of forgiveness

Mouths

To taste

Does the soup need salt?

To savor the satisfaction of nourishing

Fingers

To tend a wound,

Or play a violin

Arms and legs

To carry

Books and bags,

And heavy hearts,

Hearts
Of gold
To beat in sync
With the drums of justice

Minds
To think about finances
And laundry,
To expand with the summons of wisdom

Wombs
To give birth
To forms of love

Wrinkly and smooth
Round and angular
Dark and light

Encoded with Buddha's DNA,
What superb vehicles
For transporting compassion!

Mother of Compassion

How do I nurture compassion?

Hear crying.
Pour healing.
Dissolve delusion.
Embrace
Beings in wombs.

Heart Sutra medicine ~
Take as needed.

Rice

Remembering how, during the severe food rationing of World War II, Iwasaki's mother said to care for each grain of rice. The artist depicts her gently curving hand, tenderly holding a single grain of rice. A *Heart Sutra* corona around her diaphanous hand invites us to feel reverence for the treasure on which the circle of life depends.

We can also see the hand as our own, reminding us to nurture ourselves and care for all things that support life. Contemplating the innumerable causes and conditions required to bring one grain of rice to our hand conjures images of other hands cultivating and harvesting the rice plant, an earth teeming with nutrients, clouds gathering, rain falling, and sun warming. The hand floating in a sea of darkness spurs us to extend our reverie to the cosmic conditions that beget this one grain of rice: the hydrogen atoms that formed some 13.5 billion years ago, the intense heat of star explosions that formed minerals, and the gravity that keeps our planet in orbit around a sun that provides just the right temperatures required for the rice plant to grow.

To reap the life-sustaining nutrients of the grain of rice, we depend on multitudes of microorganisms to digest our food as we, in turn, feed them. Pondering the robust microbiomes in our bodies strengthens awareness of interbeing and erodes notions of an autonomous self.

Cosmic forces form
One grain of rice
To feed the universe.

Nourishing emptiness,
Wisdom is filling.
Ahh, the taste of enlightenment.

Mizuko

The loss of *mizuko*—the Japanese word for unborn fetus, whether stillborn, miscarried, or aborted—is heartrending. Each *mizuko* is protected in a womb where nourishment is freely provided. Expressing a love that transcends birth and death, notice how the elixir of compassion does not flow *out* of Kannon's vase as it does in other paintings. Indicated by the characters being upside down and reading from bottom to top, the *Heart Sutra* streams back *in*. *Mizuko* rise into Kannon's vase and become an elixir of compassion. This provocative and visually compelling painting inoculates against harsh judgments as it offers a way to perceive the emerging and receding rhythm of birth and death. By making invisible connections visible, it heals with a compassion that knows no bounds.

Waves ebb and flow
Across a primordial sea.

Life forms.
Death re-forms.
Wisdom transforms.

Compassion conceives.
Who was I before I was born?

Compassion Ripples

Cradled in blue, a brood of ducklings swims in the protective wake of *Heart Sutra* ripples that their mother radiates as she looks lovingly aft. Embracing her young and vulnerable charges, she quells their fears and tends to their growth. Seeds of compassion are watered with each intimate connection. Mothers embody compassion when they nurture compassion in their children. Suffering ceases when we experience the universe as a vast interdependent web where we are all parents and we are all children.

Striving to keep up,
Straining to hold back,
Struggling to be together.
Ripples set in motion.

Understanding look, encouraging smile, comforting hug.
Patiently listening, patiently guiding, mindfully patient.

Ripples set in motion.

All us children.

All us mother.

Compassion breeds compassion.

Ripples set in motion.

Baby Buddha

How do I give birth to wisdom?

Shadows of bodies

Seared on stone steps that sunny

Morning in Hiroshima.

Sentinel at the Peace Memorial

A baby Buddha

Remains in radioactive rubble.

How many Buddhas must die

Before we learn

Every birth is

The birth of a Buddha?

Cat's Eye: Buddha's Mirror

Iwasaki's eyes twinkled as he told me he was moved to paint *Cat's Eye: Buddha's Mirror* by seeing himself reflected in the eyes of a stray mother cat he had been feeding. The distinction between himself and the cat dissolved. He realized the seer is the seen. Ultimately there is no separation—no “me” and “you,” no “us” and “them.” When one can see reality as it is when looking at anything—undistorted by anger, greed, delusion, fear, or insecurity—one sees with a depth that reaches all the way through to oneself. This view of the interdependent nature of our being brings into focus the nondual quality of reality and the exigency of compassion.

To illustrate this insight, Iwasaki embedded an eye with the Sanskrit seed syllables of the “Five Wisdom Buddha” mandala. The symbolism enlivens the enlightenment practices of transmuting five types of negativity into five aspects of wisdom. Delusions transmute into a wisdom that offers an unobstructed view of reality. Greed transmutes into the wisdom of generosity. Selfish desire transmutes into the wisdom of compassion. Jealousy and insecurity transmute into all-accomplishing wisdom, enabling one to act in ways that effectively cease suffering. Anger transmutes into mirrorlike wisdom, reflecting everything clearly and accurately.

This philosophically, ontologically, and existentially profound painting emerges from a tender concern to care for a particular hungry and vulnerable being. With an unobstructed view of reality, it is clear that compassion is not an abstract ideal suitable only for transcendent beings. Compassion occurs in concrete acts, done in specific places, in the present moment. Look into this mirror and you, too, will see yourself: an interdependent being capable of transformative wisdom and restorative compassion, a Buddha.

Mirror, mirror

Oh, so bright,

Dust has nowhere to alight.

What does the eye of wisdom see?
Mother Buddhas,
Everywhere.

Mandala of Evolution

In his depiction of mothers as red Buddhas and fathers as white Buddhas, Iwasaki's *Mandala of Evolution* asserts we are all progeny of Buddhas. Wielding the sword of emptiness, he disavows the idea stated in some Buddhist scriptures that only male bodies can be enlightened or gain rebirth in the Pure Land. He flanks Amida Buddha with the text "form is emptiness; emptiness is form" and places hundreds of female Buddhas under Amida's compassionate gaze.

Who are my ancestors?

Descendent of lightning,
Hydrogen atoms from the dawn of the universe aerate my lungs.
Iron traces of stellar explosions course through my veins.
The regenerative power of starfish fuels my creativity.
The adventurous courage of amphibians quickens my gait.

Begat from paramecium and ginkgo trees,
My great, great grandfather an amoeba,
My grandmother a cherry blossom.
I will become rain.

Big Bang: $E = mc^2$

Iwasaki's magnum opus, *Big Bang: $E = mc^2$* , illustrates the cosmic activity of transformation with the dynamic energy and forces at work in the *Heart Sutra*. Impermanence on a galactic scale shimmers across the seventeen-foot span that traverses six scrolls. The aesthetic rhythm of this painting is both thunderous and delicate as the eye dances across the cosmos and canticles through the galaxies. The darkness pulses with a vacuum of silence, scintillating with gold crescendos. Intricately rendering the 3,588 characters required to copy the *Heart Sutra* thirteen times, Iwasaki draws the viewer into intimacy with an infinite vista.

We are shown the cosmos from our perspective on Earth, off on a spiraling arm of the galaxy, rather far from the black hole that churns at the center. Our Milky Way—whirling with over 400 billion stars and billions and billions of planets—is foregrounded, an expanse requiring 100,000 years at light speed to traverse. Our nearest neighbor, the similarly spiraling Andromeda galaxy, is in the upper right corner in a swirling round of *Heart Sutra* energy. Like a massive constellation for radiating the light of compassion throughout interstellar space, Iwasaki infuses the cosmos with a gossamer Amida Buddha of Infinite Light. Light is energy. By summoning this luminous Buddha, Iwasaki invokes the power of wisdom and compassion available in our cosmos. He avouches our cosmos is a Pure Land, a womb that embraces with compassion and nourishes with wisdom.

The dragons are mothers protecting their eggs. The one on the right is incubating six star eggs in the North American Nebula. The dragon mother on the left protects the eight star eggs in the Eagle Nebula that features the "Pillars of Creation." The universe is an expansive womb where out of emptiness stars are birthed, die, and are reborn in an interdependent flux

of cosmic energy. A third dragon maternally swirls around a supermassive black hole that spins at the heart of our galaxy. He interprets a black hole as a purifying agent, for its gravitational force pulls interstellar debris toward itself. As matter approaches the hole, it swirls into the accretion disk where the searing heat transforms the debris into energy. Metaphorically, it dissolves delusions, purifies karma, and incinerates greed and hatred. This matter fuels jets that radiate light deep into the universe. That which falls beyond the event horizon of the black hole extinguishes the flame of suffering. In this way, black holes—fueled by the energy of emptiness—are cauldrons of compassion that generate immense gravitational force to absorb suffering. Black holes are bodhisattvas in astrophysical form that transform suffering into compassion.

A contemplative figure stands on a mountain range in the lower left corner, reflecting how we, too, can function like black holes. Our bodies pulse with the remains of stellar explosions as iron courses through our veins, affirming we are an integral part of this cosmic activity. Powered by the wisdom of emptiness, we, too, are capable of transforming suffering into compassion. We can burn off the causes of suffering and radiate rays of compassionate light.

Through this masterpiece, Iwasaki enraptures viewers to behold the boundlessness of the universe and experience our interrelatedness, thereby healing the delusion of separateness that causes so much loneliness and despair.

As emptiness is form, form is emptiness,
So, too, energy is mass; mass is energy.
There is birth and death. There is no birth and death.

Delusional, our spinning galaxy is a Wheel of Suffering.
With no fear, ignorance, attachment, or hate,
Our galaxy is a Wheel of Liberation,
Swirling with wisdom and compassion.
Swallowing tail, the dragon whirls.

Gazing, the seeker contemplates,
“Where am I?”
Home.

Conclusion

Iwasaki’s paintings invite us to look close enough to see forms are empty of own-being, yet far enough away to see forms in their wholeness. From this perspective, the illusions of divisiveness, permanence, and despair fade away, and impermanence, interdependence, and beauty come into focus. Propelled by the boundless power of emptiness, our forms give birth to homes for healing, ears for hearing whispers of torment and attuning to the rhythms of justice, eyes for seeing a broken heart and envisioning harmonious beauty, hearts for pounding a call to courage and to pulse with loving kindness. This *Heart Sutra* art reveals women are vehicles of compassion, gracing the earth and nurturing wombs pregnant with wisdom.

“Gyate, gyate, hara gyate, harasogyate, Bodhi, sowaka.
Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone wholly beyond. Awake! Joy!”

The Serpent Gurrangatch and the Hunter Mirragan

Bhikkhu Sujato

Abstract

Global warming is an unprecedented threat to the survival of our civilization and culture, indeed our very lives. The aboriginal myth of Gurrangatch and Mirragan tells of a time when the land of the Blue Mountains was shaped in the struggle for life, a struggle marked by both passion and restraint. While the future has never been more uncertain, our wisdom traditions offer us ways of talking about and responding to change as conscious individuals able to reflect on and choose our own responses.

Bhante Sujato is an Australian Buddhist monk who ordained in 1994 in Thailand. He was instrumental in supporting the revival of the bhikkhuni order in the Forest Tradition. He has written several books, and 2016/2017 he translated the entire text of the four Pali nikāyas into English. He is the leader of SuttaCentral, which gathers together early Buddhist suttas in both original languages and translations in 40 modern languages. He currently lives in “The Monastery at the End of the World” in Harris Park near Parramatta, and teaches in the Sydney region and internationally. Website: <https://lokanta.github.io/>

I want to bring something of my own land for you all today. The wisdom of our indigenous peoples has been disparaged or neglected, and the cost of that neglect is becoming ever clearer as our climate changes and nature is decimated. They looked after this land for 50,000 years, and we managed to stuff it up in a couple of hundred.

Around 1900 an ethnographer and surveyor named R.H. Mathews met with Gundungurra people of the Burraborang Valley and recorded the creation story of the serpent Gurrangatch and the hunter Mirragan; of how their struggle shaped the rivers, hills, and valleys we know today as the Blue Mountains.

I am not of the Gundungurra people, and this is not my story. Yet it is my land; not in the sense of ownership, but of belonging and kinship. I will never fully apprehend what it means to be one story with the land, to have my song be the land’s song. I experience the story of Gurrangatch and Mirragan not while walking the paths they forged in the tale, sheltering under the mountains they built, and drinking from the streams they swam, but via a constellation of interpreters and technologies, removed and abstracted. I cannot tell you what this story meant to the people who lived in this place. I can only say what it means to me, offering their story for you today in a spirit of the deepest respect for the Gundungurra people and their culture. This is a story of the dawn; let us see what it has to say to those of us who live in the twilight.

Mythic echoes

As always with deep myth, we can tease out many threads from this story. It is a struggle between cosmic forces, an echo of the fires that shaped the land in geological time. Gurrangatch is an incarnation of the so-called “Rainbow Serpent” who figures in countless Aboriginal creation myths. The dragon or *nāga* mythology, so fundamental to Buddhist story and iconography, draws on the same set of mythic connotations, the formless powerful serpent hiding in the depths of the earth. The suttas speak of a serpent who glides along with fiery breath, manifesting a rainbow of colors (SN 3.1). At Wat Saman Rattanaram in Chachoengsao this has been brought to gloriously tacky life.

Figure 1: Rainbow naga at Wat Saman Rattanaram.

Source: <https://amazing-bangkok.com/en/sightseeing/wat-saman-2/>

In the curious mythological Vammika Sutta (MN 23), the protagonist must dig, dig, dig, and throw away all the odd things their digging reveals. At the bottom of all lies the *nāga*, but that is not to be thrown away: it is the enlightened one, and must be honored and revered. Here, the metaphorical road to enlightenment is not the ascent to higher spiritual realms, but the unearthing of the layers of the unconscious. The *nāga* symbolizes the deepest layer of all, that which is to be retained, not discarded.

Mirragan is the closest thing to a human protagonist in the story. He is a “tiger cat” or “quoll”, one of the many creatures that inhabit these woods that are neither kangaroos nor koalas. These days quolls are quite rare. Since the white man came, one species has become extinct and all that remain are in decline and under threat.

Figure 2: Spotted Tail Quoll.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Spotted_Tail_Quoll_2011.jpg

As a mammal, the quoll is quick on his feet, resourceful. Mirragan’s technology and wiles—poison, spear, club—overmatch Gurrangatch’s primordial strength. He is passionate, proud, and capable, but his obsession brings danger to himself and his kin. Only his wife speaks words of moderation and wisdom. Heroes like Mirragan are remembered because they are so very rare. Far more common are those who get distracted along the way; or those who listen to the begging of the wife, and give up the heroic quest for a smaller, more domestic happiness. In this story, the wife plays the same role as Yasodhara; she is the normal life, the life of contentment for those of us who are not heroes. For every great myth that tells of leaving her behind, there are a thousand tales of the one who gave up the quest; for who could blame them? But Mirragan’s true skill lies not in his persistence or his cunning, but in forging alliances; sending an unmistakable message of the importance of befriending others and maintaining relationships, it is only after he brings in the birds that he can win. Their attack on Gurrangatch, the birds of the air seeking out the chthonic monster of the deeps, recalls the universal mythic struggle of the phoenix or *garuda* versus the serpent or *nāga*.

Conscious incorporation

In all these motifs, and many more, there are points of interest, lessons to be learned, wisdom to be gleaned. But it is one little detail that strikes me most of all.

Just as the Vammika Sutta advises us to “leave the dragon”, the diver-bird fails to dislodge the monster. He contents himself with gouging off a piece of the serpent’s meat. This they consume, taking the serpent’s body into their own, becoming one in flesh. Mirragan, for all his destructive obsession with slaying the beast, is content with just this much.

In the Greek myths, Athena was a warrior maiden associated with the owl for wisdom and the olive for cultivation and civilisation. Her sacred olive has fruited in the Mediterranean region until the present, but even the goddess cannot stay climate change: Italy faces a 57% drop in olive harvest this year.^[1] Athena was a thoroughly modern goddess, suitable for a cosmopolitan and sophisticated people. Among her many virtues, she aided heroes in their conquest of the dragon. Here, with an owl in her hand, she presides as Jason is released by the serpent who guarded the Golden Fleece.

Figure 3: Jason being regurgitated by the snake who keeps the Golden Fleece (center, hanging on the tree); Athena stands to the right. Red-figured cup by Douris. Attic red-figure

kylix painting, c. 480-470 BC. From Cerveteri (Etruria).

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Douris_cup_Jason_Vatican_16545.jpg

Yet on her breast she wore, not a symbol of the beauty and virtue with which she is associated, but something far more grotesque: the decapitated head of the serpentine deity Medusa, who turned men to stone with a glare. How she came by this gruesome relic is another story, but the point is this: the new cannot completely leave behind the old.

What does it mean to become one flesh with the monster? It is an acknowledgement that when we reform, we make progress in some ways, but we also unconsciously incorporate the echoes or the dark side of what has been reformed. We imagine that we are better, that we have surmounted and are pure: *that* is our temptation, our conceit, our precious.

How often have we seen reformers who, in no long time at all, become worse than the thing they replaced? In the political sphere it happens all the time. In reformist spiritual communities we can frequently see the resurrection of hierarchies, the imposition of judgemental rules and harsh standards, the assumption of ethical purity, the corruption of wealth, fame, and reputation, and the manipulation of doctrine to serve the interests of those in power. We must learn how dysfunctional behaviours work in spiritual communities, so we may leave them behind. We can only do that when we are equally conscious of the value of the past, of what is genuinely sacred in our traditions, so that we can preserve it and give it new life.

If we are just going to incorporate the flesh of the old in the new, replaying the old patterns out again, it is tempting to think that perhaps the chase is not worth it; maybe we should have listened to Mirragan's wife after all. Psychologically, however, incorporating part of the old in the new is intrinsically healthy, an essential part of growth. Like any developmental process, it can go awry, for sure. But the new is not invented out of thin air. It must build on what came before. Incorporating the old is an act of compassion: it shows a connection between one and the other. It shows that, for all the limitations of the old, it was, after all, just a system built by humans who were trying to live. Yes, they made mistakes, and yes, we must do better. But we too are human and we will make our own mistakes.

I learned a key lesson on the nature of tradition from the aboriginal elder of the Nyoonga people, Ken Colbung. When I was only nineteen, I helped put together a seminar on vegetarianism. Hearing that Ken was vegetarian, I called him and asked if he would present with me, and he graciously agreed. He explained that in his traditional belief, animals were viewed as being brother or sister, so they would only be killed when it was absolutely necessary. A hunter would apologize to the beast, explaining that they needed to feed their family, and asking for forgiveness. These days, he said, there is no need to kill; he can just drive down to the market and buy some tofu!

This is what it means to have a living tradition. It is not a fossil preserved in stone, but something organic and evolving; we reflect on it, consider it, discuss it, improve it. We are aware of the ways in which we are shaped by the past, for good and for bad, and we try to do better. But awareness—real, clear-eyed awareness—takes guts.

Deep adaptation

With awareness and reflection comes choice. We do not have to be driven by the agendas of the past, for their struggle is not our struggle. We face new challenges, and for us, the greatest challenge is global warming. If our morality is the morality of the past, if our consciousness is the consciousness of the past, we choose to make ourselves unfit for the future. Reforming Buddhism is great; creating conscious spiritual communities is great; improving gender equity is great: but none of it means anything if our entire ecosystem is headed for

collapse. In the face of the imminent existential threat of climate catastrophe, all our moral priorities and agendas must be urgently reconsidered.

Figure 4: Atmospheric CO2 over 400,000 years.

Source: https://static.skepticalscience.com/graphics/CO2_history_1024.jpg

Global warming is all around us and all through us. We incorporate the flesh of change in the air that we breath, in the water we drink, it is in our own flesh and bones. Look around you, see the mighty, endless forests, that have lasted from the days of Mirragan and Gurrangatch. Australia has, still, one of the fastest rates of forest clearance anywhere in the world. This state, New South Wales, is one of the world's greatest coal-producing regions; and it is no coincidence that the level of renewables in our electricity production is stuck at a miserable 13%. Our politicians, incredibly, tell us that "now" is the time for government to push the creation of new coal power plants,^[2] while fish die off in their millions, and still we don't even have a target for renewables.^[3] When you turn on the lights, you are killing those trees. They are dying because of how we are living. The canopies are thinning, the seeds are reducing, fire is increasing, and their ability to recover is collapsing; so much so that even sober scientists say "the whole thing is unraveling".^[4] Species are becoming extinct before we even know they exist; Australia is losing its frogs, which are especially vulnerable to changes in water supply and temperature.^[5] As Australia suffers through yet another year of record-breaking temperatures, drought, fire, heat, and all manner of more obscure changes are creating a hidden, invisible crisis to countless little creatures of the forest,^[6] like the possums who are simply dropping dead from the trees from heat stress.^[7] It is not just on the land; in fact the vast majority of all the extra heat on earth is in the oceans, which now suffer from "heat waves" that devastate forests of kelp and cities of coral.^[8] And as I write, the indigenous people of the Solomons face a black tide of dead fish, unable to swim or to eat as their waters have been poisoned by an oil spill.^[9] Meanwhile, the mining conglomerate Glencore has been busted sponsoring covert operations to spread lies about coal,^[10] and a deal has been signed for two massive new coal power stations, just down the road from here in the Hunter Valley.^[11] How do they justify all this? Listen to the argument of Kepco, the South Korean firm that wants to open a new coal mine in the Bylong Valley, not far north of Joolundoo where Mirragan caught Gurrangatch. When the courts stopped their development because of climate change impact, their response was: *our* project will make a negligible contribution to global warming. In the scheme of things, what's an extra 200 million tonnes of CO2?^[12]

One of the nice things about writing on global warming is that research is super-easy. The articles I referenced in the previous paragraph were chosen by a simple criteria: they appeared in the news during the three or four days it took me to write this piece. That's right: these stories on global warming were all published between the 4th and the 7th of March this year. Between then and now there will have been hundreds more like them. This is the rate of change we face, and the depth of the challenge.

The last form of denial is the denial of the activist: the idea that by continuing to do the same things we have been doing for a generation, *this* time it will make the difference. We sign our petitions, choose our organic veggies, prefer renewable power. Meanwhile, the CO2 in the atmosphere keeps going up, and the temperatures keep rising.

Figure 5: Atmospheric CO2 over 50 years.

Source: https://www.esrl.noaa.gov/gmd/webdata/ccgg/trends/co2_data_mlo.pdf

This can be considered as a graph of the rise in global atmospheric CO2 since the post-war acceleration of industrialization. Alternatively, it could be considered as a graph of the rise in global atmospheric CO2 since the beginning of the modern environmental movement. How

can this be? It is because the kinds of things that we do to prevent climate change are already factored in. They are business as usual. And the net result of all this effort is the world we are living in right now. If we continue to do the same kinds of things, we will continue to fail. Painting a compelling, detailed picture of the climate collapse that is looming in the coming decades, Professor Jem Bendell speaks rather of “deep adaptation”.^[13] It is a questioning of the fundamental values and course of our lives, facing honestly the emotional and spiritual stress of living in a world that is coming to an end, and asking what life might be like after the collapse. Bendell discusses at some length the emotional ramifications of facing up to climate catastrophe. We feel scared, confused, let down, even risking plunging into despair and depression. Yet he points out that despair is not universally seen as a bad thing. The great spiritual traditions, including Buddhism, acknowledge that despair can be a spur to deep introspection and transformation. Think of the crisis that Siddhattha went through when he faced up to the reality of universal death and suffering. There is a way out, but we will not find it through denial or mollycoddling.

What then might we, drawing upon the best of our Buddhist traditions, have to offer the world in this time of unprecedented crisis? We must start by speaking the truth; and just this much is already a great deal. Too many of us harbor our worries and fears in secret, unable to speak them because, well, when is the right time to talk about the end of the world? Far from bringing despair to people, many are already facing a quiet despair. Even little children view the future through the lens of apocalypse rather than utopia. Our Teacher has taught us that all things are impermanent, that we should not hide from change, but should live each day in awareness and compassion.

Figure 6: Astrid (6) shows us her vision of the future: a place where rivers, winds, and people are threatened by a gigantic “carbon handprint”.

Source: <https://www.dw.com/en/this-apocalyptic-is-how-kids-are-imagining-our-climate-future/a-40847610>

Perhaps the most powerful thing we have to offer is renunciation. The joy of simplicity and contentment. The knowledge, learned from our own experience, that with a simple life comes clarity and ease. Enough, as Mirrigan eventually came to learn, is enough. Too often renunciation is seen as a purely monastic virtue, when it is there for everyone in Right Thought of the Noble Eightfold Path. It will not be long before renunciation is no longer a choice. Our children will have less than we, and their children less still. Having less, consuming less, is the most powerful way we can minimize the damage that we do, while also preparing ourselves to cope with the changes that we cannot prevent.

Finally, I would point out once more the key to Mirrigan’s success: he worked with his friends. The Buddha said that good friendship is the whole of the spiritual path, and creation of meaningful intentional communities (Sangha) has always been a core aspect of his dispensation, and through the Sangha, the Dhamma has survived for 2,500 years. In the days to come, those who survive will not be the preppers or the survivalists in their bunkers, or the billionaires with their walled estates and private armies. It will be the villagers and the tribespeople. Those who know how to work together, to create local, small-scale systems of work and exchange, who understand and respect the land and the sky and the water, the beasts and the plants. These are skills still found in Buddhist villages across Asia—perhaps we should start learning from them. Mirrigan pursued his goal, ferociously and relentlessly. But he was content to eat just a piece of flesh, leaving the great serpent-spirit alive and safe in the depths. That is why they both survived, a living presence in the landscape to this very day. We have shown no such restraint, no such wisdom. We kill the serpent, poison his waters, and wipe out his forests.

I don't come here to bring you hope. It's too late for that. We don't need hope; what we need is courage. Stay close to each other, support each other, live simply in the real world, and listen to the truth whispered to you in the trees. Never be afraid to step forward and show leadership to share your wisdom and compassion. As spiritual practitioners, it is up to us to show honesty and realism, to set an example of how it is possible to live in the face of radical change. Impermanence is core to our philosophy: are ready to live it? This world, this beautiful fragile world, needs you more than you know.

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Paper Session 2

Spiritual Training:
Nurturing Women's
Education and Enlightenment

Tuesday 25th June, Afternoon

Creating Buddhist Communities by Relying on the Six Harmonies

Bhikshuni Thubten Chodron

Life as a first-generation Western Tibetan Buddhist nun

I'd like to begin by sharing a brief history of how I became a nun and how my experiences shaped the establishment of Sravasti Abbey, a training monastery for Western monastics in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition located in Newport, Washington, USA.

When I ordained in 1977, the Tibetans had been in exile for about 18 years. They were very poor, and while our Tibetan teachers were happy to teach and ordain Western students, their priority was to restore their monasteries in exile. It was up to us to support ourselves financially. There were no monasteries for Western monastics and we faced visa restrictions in Nepal and India. Tibetan nunneries had even fewer resources. The first generation of Western monastics also experienced health and visa problems, and lack of good translations. But we were young and weathered these challenges with faith, confidence, and optimism.

Over time, however, these difficulties persisted. When some of us were sent back to the West to serve at new Dharma centers, we worked at the centers in return for room, board, and occasionally a small stipend. We had no health insurance, and if we wanted to do retreat or attend a special course at another center, we had to pay our own way. There came to be a two-tier system of rich monastics who, buoyed by savings or an inheritance, could travel, attend teachings at other places, and practice as they wished, and poor monastics who were scraping to get by. Having lived in community a great part of my early years as a nun, both in Dharma centers and later at Dorje Pamo Nunnery in France in the early 1980s, I very much wanted to support monastics to live in a stable community without having to worry about whether they had the resources to live, study, and practice.

In Tibetan culture, especially in monasteries, the decision-making process depended predominantly on our teachers. The spiritual mentor was at the top, and we students completely relied on our teachers to tell us where to live, what to study, and what to do. We related to our teachers in a vertical structure, but didn't learn how to get along with fellow practitioners at the horizontal level. I witnessed some of the difficulties of living within such a framework. Our Tibetan teachers ordained Westerners with little to no screening and sent them to our nunnery. We had no voice about who ordained or who joined the community, and when people with psychological problems came, there were many challenges. We wanted the Western sangha to be well-established and respected by the laity, but without proper screening before ordination and training afterwards, this could not come about.

The seeds of a Western Buddhist monastic community

A key turning point for me happened in 1993 at a conference of Western Buddhist teachers with His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala. During one session, Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo gave a presentation on the difficulties faced by the Western sangha, saying that although many Western monastics ordain with a genuine, sincere aspiration, they meet with difficulties and find it challenging to keep their ordination. She ended her presentation by saying, "May this precious jewel of the sangha not be lost." Hearing this, His Holiness began to weep.

His Holiness advised, "Don't rely on us Tibetans to do things for you. Go out and act to help yourselves. If you run into problems, ask us for help." Hearing His Holiness voice his

confidence in the Western sangha and give us his encouragement to act was an incredible catalyst.

To address the lack of monastic training for Westerners, Ven. Jampa Chokyi and I co-organized the “Life as a Buddhist Nun” program in Bodhgaya, India, in 1996. This brought Western nuns from many Buddhist traditions and Tibetan nuns together to share our experiences and learn from Geshe Thubten Ngawang, Taiwanese Vinaya Master Bhiksuni Wuyin, and each other. From Venerable Wuyin I also gleaned practical advice that came in handy when the time came to establish a monastery. For instance, she emphasized the importance of monastics having legal ownership of our property and sitting on the monastery’s board of directors, instead of leaving this to laypeople who are not familiar with a monastic way of life.

Since 1992, Western Buddhist monastics in the USA have also been holding an annual Western Buddhist Monastic Gathering, where celibate monastics from all Buddhist traditions come together to connect and grow in spiritual friendship. There, I met senior monastics who were part of established monastic communities in the West, whom I consulted for advice on what worked in our social and cultural context.

With encouragement and support from my monastic elders, and after a couple of false starts, I took the step of establishing Sravasti Abbey as a legal entity that purchased a 240-acre property in Newport, Washington, USA in August 2003. The first residents of Sravasti Abbey were myself and my two cats. There was no big organization or major donor backing us, and sitting in the living room after we had moved in, I couldn’t help but wonder, “How are we going to do this? How will we pay the monthly mortgage?” The only solution was to take refuge in the Three Jewels.

Establishing a community based on the six harmonies

In the Vinaya, the Buddha lays out six ways of maintaining harmony that benefit monastics as a community and as individuals. These are the foundation of the monastic community at Sravasti Abbey: to be harmonious (1) physically, (2) verbally, (3) mentally, (4) in the precepts we keep, (5) in our views, and (6) in sharing requisites.

The Buddha established an interdependent relationship between the sangha and laity—lay followers offer food to the monastics who reciprocate by offering Dharma teachings. Abbey monastics do not buy food and rely on the kindness of lay supporters to offer our daily bread. In return, we offer the Dharma freely to ordained and lay guests alike. Despite initial remonstrations from others who feared we would go hungry, this “economy of generosity” has functioned well from day one. In this way, we practice *harmony in requisites*—everything offered by the lay community is shared equally among sangha members. As Buddhism is still fairly new in America, we educate guests on the meaning of practicing generosity with a kind heart, and how that differs from an economic transaction of paying to attend a program.

Abbey residents give all donations received by virtue of being an Abbey monastic to the community. While we may keep savings from before ordination, we can only use them for medical expenses, traveling to attend teachings, and making offerings. There is also a sangha medical fund to support fully ordained monastics who are committed to living in our community. Abbey monastics are thus able to live, study, and practice together without worry about food, clothing, shelter, or medicine.

With respect to *harmony in views*, while the Abbey welcomes guests regardless of faith, it is clear that we are a Buddhist monastery practicing in the Tibetan tradition. We teach and strive to realize the three principal aspects of the path: the aspiration to attain nirvāṇa, the altruistic intention of bodhicitta, and the correct view of reality. We follow a common study

program based on the stages of the path (*lamrim*), mind training (*lojong*), Middle Way philosophy, and tantra. Our Vinaya rites and chanting are conducted in English. One of our common values is outreach to society: we offer courses and retreats for the public, help incarcerated people learn the Dharma, and make Dharma teachings freely available on the Internet.

In terms of *harmony in the precepts*, all Abbey monastics are ordained in the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya lineage as the bhikshuni ordination is not extant in the Mulasarvastivada Vinaya lineage followed by Tibetan monastics. Our monastic training program consists of living at Abbey for at least one year as an anagarika with eight precepts, followed by at least two years of training as a siksamana, before taking full ordination in Taiwan. As a gender-equal monastery, male sramaneras also undergo two years of training as a novice before taking the full ordination. This graduated progression has served monastics well in giving them a firm grounding in living in the precepts and preparing for the responsibilities that come with successive levels of ordination.

Once four bhiksunis lived at the Abbey, we began to perform the Vinaya rites of a bhikshuni sangha: establishing a territory within which we share requisites and do the rites of posadha (confession and restoration of precepts), varsa (rains retreat), pravara (the invitation at the end of retreat), and kathina (robe of merit). Engaging in these practices that many generations of monastic practitioners have conducted since the Buddha's time has had a powerful effect in bringing our community together. It also establishes the area as a "central land" where the Dharma exists. We engage in regular study of the Vinaya, discussing how it relates to our contemporary context, and while we do not believe in changing the precepts, we have made practical adaptations and established community guidelines to govern contemporary developments such as Internet use.

By observing monastic precepts and keeping a common daily schedule, our community cultivates *harmony in our body, speech, and mind*. Throughout the day we recite short verses to remember our shared motivation to attain full awakening. Any conflicts that arise as we offer service become part of our Dharma practice: we apply the teachings to settle our minds and learn mediation and non-violent communication to resolve disputes. Posadha is a platform for us to admit our faults and make amends. In this way, we are like rocks in a tumbler polishing off each other's rough edges.

This is just a thumbnail sketch of how the teachings of the Buddha come to life at Sravasti Abbey as we strive to maintain the purity of the Dharma while adapting the instructions of the Vinaya to life in the West. Please feel free to share your thoughts, comments, and questions as we participate in the ongoing development of the sangha together.

Bhikkhuni Thich Nu Nhu Nguyet

Introduction about Vietnam Buddhist University (Ho Chi Minh City)

The establishment of the Vietnam Buddhist University in 1982 is an important turning point in the history of the development of modern Vietnamese Buddhism. Over the past 36 years (1982 - 2018), the University has made major progress, constantly updating and learning from the advanced educational systems around the world. Since 2005, the University has recruited every two years instead of recruiting every four years as before. Many new departments have been established. Today, there are 10 departments at the University. In 2018, the Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam signed the decision to allow the University to open its Master and Doctoral degree programs. The number of monks and nuns enrolling into the University has increased year by year. The increasing demand for Buddhist studies calls for the building of a larger university which can accommodate more monks and nuns. The main headquarters of the University inside the City does not have sufficient space for the increasing number of the monks and nuns. During his tenure as University President, the Most Venerable Thich Tri Quang (2007-2012), the idea of building the 2nd Branch of the University in a large sub-urban land area was realized. On 4th November 2012, the project of constructing University Branch 2 was launched. The new branch is the Vietnam Cultural Buddhist Centre in a land area of 23,8 ha, at Le Minh Xuan commune, Binh Chanh district, Ho Chi Minh City. After nearly 4 years, the Vietnam Buddhist University (Branch 2) completed its first phase and on 8th May 2016, it was inaugurated.

Thus, in May 2016, Branch 2 of the University officially came into operation. The 11th batch moved from the Headquarters to Branch 2. In the first year, there were 450 monk and nun students at the 11th batch residing in the University's dormitories. Currently, there are three dormitories, of which are for nuns and one for monks. Among the 900 students residing in the dormitories, there are nearly 600 nuns. Attending the ceremony on the first day of dormitory life, the Most Venerable Thich Tri Quang, the President of the Vietnam Buddhist University, spoke to the monks and nuns: "The construction of the University with dormitories for monks and nuns has been the dream of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha in general and of the Executive Council of the University in particular. Today, our dream has come true. Initially, there will be difficulties and challenges, but the collective life and dormitory life will be a good environment for each person to grow and be mature..."

Life of the nuns at the Dormitories

In the beginning, life in the dormitories was very difficult. The land on which the dormitories are built is a wild land with alum water and acidic soil, so it was considered "a forest of death" full of poisonous insects and reptiles (mosquitoes, red-tailed snakes, earth snakes, scorpions etc.) After more than a year, the problem of alum water was solved but other challenges remained: insects, snakes etc....

However, with patience and hard work, the nuns at the dormitories, together with the monks and the Board of Dormitory Management, often worked at the dormitory garden after giving public lectures to improve the land, grow more trees and flowers... It was the spirit of service and solidarity from top to bottom that helped change the lowland where the University is located. Now, the University atmosphere has been much improved, with colorful flowers that can attract the eyes of visitors to the University and dormitories.

Before the Vietnam Buddhist University (Branch 2) was established, the nuns from provinces coming to Ho Chi Minh City had faced many difficulties in renting houses nearby the University. Some had to take shelter at various pagodas, which sometimes disrupted their studies. External and worldly life sometimes had its impact on the spiritual life of the nuns. Many young nuns found it difficult to focus on their nunnery life. It was also difficult to follow a strict timetable of studying and cultivation. The residence at the dormitories in Branch 2 of the University has solved all these issues. The nuns no longer have to worry about their accommodation, about the room rent and fees and living cost. The masters no longer feel worried while sending their disciples to the City for studies.

The daily life of the nun dormitories is arranged in a reasonable schedule, with proper rules and regulations, ensuring a good environment of learning and cultivation. In the morning, the nuns at the dormitories get up at 4 am. After meditating inside the rooms, they will walk in meditation around the dormitories, to the main worshipping hall to practice recitation, reviewing the Buddha's teachings. This walking meditation is done one more time in the evening at 18:45. The two times of walking meditation practice helps the nuns to memorise and gain deep understanding of the insightful teachings of the Buddha.

The diet of the nuns at the dormitories is also taken care of. Every day, the nuns have two vegetarian meals, at 5:45 in the morning and 11:00 at noon. The eating is done in mindfulness, i.e. eating in silence, chewing thoroughly and feeling the food being absorbed into the body, mastering the emotions so that the mind is not entangled in the taste of the food, not attach to the food which only has the function of maintaining the existence of the body. The nuns have buffet lunch with 5 main dishes. They are seated in accordance with their dharma seniority while eating. After having the meal, the nuns will walk in meditation from the dining hall to the nun dormitories. By this practice, every day, the nuns have at least 5 times of walking in meditation which not only help improve their health, overcome different kinds of illness but also give the nuns the chance to experience mindfulness and awareness now and here.

Regarding the studying program, every day, apart from the activities mentioned above, the nuns at the dormitory have 4 hours of Dharma learning through deep research and practical application. The studying program at the dormitories are designed in a way so that nuns from different schools of Buddhism can adjust. In addition, the nuns also take part in working at the garden, cultivating the crops and the trees, growing vegetables for food. They grow different kinds of vegetables, mushrooms and fruits which helps provide clean food and save the living expenses of the dormitories. The nuns at the dormitories also have the opportunity to do exercises such as badminton, table tennis, qigong (khí công) to improve their health.

The nuns residing at the dormitories do not have to spend much time travelling to the University. This helps avoid the risks that may arise due to transportation. It also gives them more time for studying. Living in the dormitories also gives the nuns more time to spend in the Library, to get access to the most update publications. This is very much helpful to their studies and deep research.

In addition, living in the collective environment/ common environment, the nuns can learn to lead a harmonious lifestyle. Apart from learning from the experienced teachers, the nuns also have chance to learn from their fellow practitioners. Collective life always helps train the qualities and virtues needed for social engagement, adjustment and sharing. It helps train the nuns the qualities of solidarity and selflessness. It also helps reduce selfishness. These qualities are essential for the nuns after they graduate so that they can lead a life of engagement and service for the Dharma and the nation. The studying results of the nuns residing in the dormitories are always better than the out-of-town students.

The Most Venerable Thich Tri Quang, the President of Vietnam Buddhist University (Branch 2) spoke at the Graduation Ceremony school year 2017-2018: "Since the 11th batch,

with the official operation of the Vietnam Buddhist University (Branch 2), the living and studying conditions of the monks and nuns have changed remarkably...” The Most Venerable emphasized: “The educational direction of the Buddha is the perfection or liberation of man on the basis of wakening, cultivating and fostering the moral, spiritual and intellectual virtues of each individual. Therefore, a learning environment to satisfy the goal mentioned above must have all the three things – Precepts – Mindfulness – Wisdom and the conditions that support the development of morality and wisdom of the individuals.”

According to Venerable Thich Nhat Tu, Vice President of the University: “The meditation lifestyle that the monks and the nuns are practicing at the dormitories at Vietnam Buddhist University in Ho Chi Minh City is a spiritual experience, a moral experience which helps bring intellectual opening, mindful growth and moral virtues. These are the three pillars of the spiritual life that any monk or nun can achieve by practicing. This will bring good results, help eradicate suffering and bring happiness for others.”

Sharing of nuns at the Dormitories

Bhikkhuni Thich Nu Phap Hanh (Top graduate of the Department of Buddhist Philosophy) shared her feelings at the graduation ceremony: “The days at the University have been closed, we are filled with memories. This place has given us the knowledge and experience for practice and cultivation. The life at the nun dormitories gave us the feelings as if we were living in the time of the Buddha. This period of life has really been wonderful and unforgettable. I am so grateful for all the good opportunities that the University has given me. The nun dormitories have given us a peaceful atmosphere so that everyday we can concentrate on practicing the precepts – meditation and wisdom. Particularly, besides giving lectures in the classes, the Venerables at the Board of Management of the dormitories have also encouraged us every moment with much love and care... We can never forget the care and love and sacrifice given to us. With immense compassion, the Venerables have always been with us through thick and thin, helped us to overcome numerous difficulties of the life in the new land...”

Bhikkhuni Thich Nu Hanh Phap (Department of Buddhist Philosophy) said: “We feel that the University has good teaching methods and qualities. Especially, the dormitories have given us peaceful environment so that we can concentrate on our studies.”

Bhikkhu Thich Minh Tue (Department of Buddhist History): “Although the conditions and facilities at the dormitories need to be improved, the learning and living environment at the dormitories is indeed convenient. The students residing in the dormitories do not have to pay any expenses. In addition to the retreats, the monks and nuns have plenty of time for studies and cultivation while living here.

Bhikkhuni Thich Nu Minh Tam (Topper graduate of the Department of Buddhist Preaching/Propagation): “Originally coming from a pagoda in a poor countryside, I always try my best to study and cultivate... Completing this course, I feel myself to be much more mature thanks to the Most Venerable President of the University, the Board of the Directors of the University as well as the Board of the Management of the dormitories who have helped create a very good environment for us to study and cultivate.”

Conclusion

In brief, it can be said that the establishment of the Vietnam Buddhist University (Branch 2) has opened a new chapter in the development and integration of modern Vietnam Buddhism. The Branch 2 of the University is an ideal environment for any student. The life at the dormitories was the dream of many nuns of the batches before 2016. The University is like

a closed monastery. The curriculum and cultivating programs are intertwined which helps give the nuns a peaceful life, as well as make the full use of their potential. In addition to those obvious advantages, the dormitory life continues to face difficulties and challenges such as the issue of poisonous insects, pollen allergies etc., which requires the continuous effort and strong will of the nuns to overcome.

The Sikkhamānā System –Necessary in this Day and Age?

Bhiksuni YuJeong

Introduction

Little interest is paid to the *sikkhamānā* (Skt. *śikṣamāṇā*, 學戒尼) system in the modern *sangha*. When even *bhikkunī* themselves have little knowledge of it, one might ask if it is even necessary in the modern age. The system of two-year training was to monitor for pregnancy. However, modern medicine precludes that requirement. And some might argue that the *sikkhamānā* system was designed only for the young *samānerīs* (檀策女) who were under 18 years old. Nevertheless, in the Korean *sangha*, starting in 1982, the *sikkhamānā* ordination is one of the requirements, before full ordination. And in 1995, the independent operation of the *sikkhamānā* ordination platform was initiated. At the same time in Taiwan, the *sikkhamānā* system was restored with an emphasis on the two-year training period and the six precepts as conditions. In order to explore why the *sikkhamānā* system may be relevant today, we will look to the history of the *bhikkunī sangha* and the goals of the *sikkhamānā* system as established in the *Dharmaguptakavinaya*.

Sikkhamānās in bhikkunī sangha history

According to the *vinaya* and *sutta*, the *sikkhamānā* system began in the early days of the *bhikkunī sangha*. In the *Therīgāthā*, verses from *Muttā*, *Puṇṇā*, and *Tissā* and others confirm their practice at the period of *sikkhamānā*. There is evidence in both the Sri Lankan and Chinese *bhikkunī sangha*, as well. In 433 CE, for example, Hui Guō and others took full ordination only upon completion of the two-year training and with the assistance of eleven *bhikkunīs* from Sri Lanka¹. Though it is unknown whether the tradition was upheld after this point, we can presume that the tradition has continued unbroken to the present. Indeed, at *bhikkunī* monasteries in present-day China, the two-year training with six precept practice is becoming more common and there is a good reason to see the influence of the *sikkhamānā* tradition in the shaping of the training.²

As for Korea, preceptors and *bhikkhunī* were dispatched to Japan in 577 CE during the Baek Je(百濟) dynasty. After that three *sāmaṇerī*, including Zen Shin (善信), came to Baek Je where they were ordained after studying the *bhikkhunī* precepts for two years.³ Based on this historical record, it is possible to assume that the *sikkhamānā* system was present in Korea at that time. In contemporary Korea, the first *sikkhamānā* was recorded as *Upādhyāyikā* (preceptor) Myo Eom (妙嚴, 1931-2011) who received the vow from *Upādhyāya* Ja Un (慈雲, 1911-1992) in 1950.⁴ In 1982, the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism restored the *sikkhamānā*

¹ [比丘尼傳]2, T50n2063, 937a.

² Tzu-Lung (Melody) Chiu, “The Gurudharma Rules for Buddhist Nuns in Contemporary Mainland China,” *Sakyadhita*, 15th International conference on Buddhist Women (Hong Kong, 2017), 280.

³ Kim, YeongTae, [삼국시대 불교신앙연구 Buddhist beliefs in the Three Kingdoms period] (Seoul, BulGwang Publication co. 1990), 381-385. ; Buddhism had been transmitted from China, but there is no record about the *sikkhamānā*.

⁴ Korean Bhikkhunī Research Institute, [Modern nuns books viewed as newspaper articles] I, (KimPo, 2007, Korean Bhikkhunī Research Institute), 317.

training for full ordination by the dual sangha system, and in 1995 the joint ordination of sikkhamānā was established.

In Taiwan in 1982, when Precept Master Guǎng Huà (1924-1996) stressed that the bhikkunī “Precept Body”(戒體)⁵ was obtainable only if one received the bhikkunī precepts after completing the sikkhamānā ordination, many bhikkhunī began to take interest. In 2002, Upādhyāyikā Shào Ān (紹安) of Taiwan’s Yì Dé Sì (義德寺) went to Liaoning Province to invite Preceptor Gǔ Míng (古明), a fully accomplished master in the six precept training, to preside over a dual ordination in the bhikkunī precepts to sikkhamānā. With this, sikkhamānā training became seen as compulsory for full ordination to bring about the purification of the bhikkunī sangha.

In Sri Lanka, the bhikkhunī sangha come to an end more than 1,100 years ago and was only revived in 1996 and 1998, with the help of monks and nuns from Korea, China, and elsewhere, through the dual ordination system in the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya*.⁶ Currently, they only educate sāmaṇerī for three months before receiving bhikkhunī precepts. This restored system excluded sikkhamānā system.

Given this, why is it that the long lasting traditional bhikkhunī orders of China, Korea, and Taiwan restored the sikkhamānā precepts and to put emphases on this practice?

Some might consider the sikkhamānā system as a vestige that can be gotten rid of. However, there are two reasons to keep it. For one, the sikkhamānā system ensures a gradual, lenient development process for educating the bhikkhunī sangha. Second, the rights bestowed upon the bhikkhunī sangha in the operation of the sikkhamānā system provide bhikkhunī with the power to shape not only the bhikkhunī sangha, but the larger Buddhist community as well.

Definition and purpose of sikkhamānā precepts

In terms of rank, sikkhamānā fall behind *bhikkhu* and bhikkhunī and before *sāmaṇera* and sāmaṇerī. Only sikkhamānā can receive the bhikkhunī precepts, not sāmaṇerī. The word itself comes from *sikkha* (Skt. *śikṣa*), which means ‘study,’ specifically studying the practices of “supreme virtue” *adhisīla*, “supreme mind” *adhicitta*, and “supreme wisdom” *adhipaññā*.⁷ Sikkhamānā could thus be understood as the sāmaṇerī studying the supreme practice. In the *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya*, also explain that sikkhamānā training is to achieve the *Arhat* fruit.⁸ This is also referred to as “Two Year Training” because they must study bhikkhunī precepts for two years in preparation for full ordination while maintaining the strict practice of the Six Precepts.

1) The Two Year Training

The qualifications and duties of sikkhamānā can be found in the collection of bhikkhunī *pācittiya* (Skt. *Pāyattica*) throughout the vinayas. All renunciants must be 18 or older and celibate. Only after studying the bhikkhunī precepts for two years while practicing the Six Precepts and receiving the permission of the full bhikkhunī congregation can a sikkhamānā receive the full bhikkhunī ordination. If a sikkhamānā receives full bhikkhunī

⁵ “Precept body: an imperceptible form generated when one receives prātimoksa precepts.” Bhikṣu Benyin, *Karmans for the Creation of Virtue*, (Washington, Sravasti Abbey, 2015), 297.

⁶ Goonatilake, Hema. “Women Regaining a Lost Legacy: The Restoration of the Bhikkhuni Sangha in Sri Lanka.” In *Out of the Shadows: Socially Engaged Buddhist Women in the Global Community*, Karma Lekshe Tsomo ed., (Delhi, SriSatguru Publications, 2006), 42-47.

⁷ T.23n1441, 594c.

⁸ T.2n1435, 327c.

ordination without fulfilling all of their duties, the bhikkhunī who is a teacher of sikkhamānā has committed a pācittiya. We know from the texts that these qualifications and duties of a two-year period of adhering to the six precepts were established by concerted efforts of the bhikkhunī training them. However, what we don't know is why that the length of the training is two years. There are two common explanations.

The first is to evaluate the candidate's possible pregnancy, based on the Sarvāstivāda Vinaya. But this reason is not found in other vinayas making the following explanation more persuasive. This second reason is that the two-year period is necessary for the gradual acclimation to the precepts for those who have many defilements, called *kumāribhūtā*⁹. The Buddha established the precept that upon turning 18 years old, *kumāribhūtā* were required to receive permission from the bhikkhunī sangha and then given the sikkhamānā ordination during which period they would study the full bhikkhunī precepts. This is explained in the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*:

The *kumāribhūtā* have many defilements, this is why she must study the bhikkhunī vinaya gradually. ... Even though sikkhamānā may find great joy in studying the full precepts, full ordination should not be given suddenly. It is essential that the learning take place over a long period, two-years, then, only after coming to a deep happiness and pleasure in the precepts can the full ordination could be given.¹⁰

By this explanation, the two-year training period represents the minimum amount of time necessary to train somebody who, even after entering the sangha, has many defilements. As such, it is a preventative defense against the possibility that someone could become a bhikkhunī without understanding the concept of “precept form (戒相)”. The average age of a renunciant is now much higher and our medical technology is much advanced these days. Regardless of one's age, however, two year training period is still important. This period gives the trainee a chance to adapt to the precepts at a high level. So, only after at least two years one is able to properly learn the precepts and receive full ordination. What then are the Six Precepts and why are they so critical to this training?

2) The Six Precepts

The Six Precepts were used to allow the sikkhamānā room to grow as she studied the full precepts. This is why Lord Buddha ordered sikkhamānā to practice the Six Precepts while they were in their Two Year Training.¹¹ As we know, pure precepts can only be kept by the people practicing themselves over time and cannot be bestowed from without.

In the *Dharmaguptakavinaya*, the first of the Six Precepts is to refrain from having sexual relations, even that is including the precepts “prohibits touching body with a man having a desire in his”.¹² The second, against theft, states that one should not steal “even a penny nor a leaf of grass”. The third, against killing, orders “not to kill even a baby ant”. The fourth, against improper speech, says not to lie, “even while laughing and making jokes”. The fifth prohibits eating at the wrong time and the sixth prohibits drinking alcohol. The prohibition against alcohol occurs only in the *Pāli Vinaya* and *Dharmaguptakavinaya*. Six Precepts and it

⁹ *Kumāribhūtā* means *sāmaṇerī*; VN, vol. IV, 327.

¹⁰ T30n1579, 591b.

¹¹ T22n1428, 756b.

¹² T22n1428, 924c. “與染污心男子共身相摩觸犯戒 應更與戒.”

bears looking at examples from others.¹³

Collectively the vinayas emphasize prohibitions against sexual desire and eating at the wrong time. The prohibition against sexual desire in the Six Precepts is classified within all the vinayas as *pārājika* and *saṅghādisesa*. The prohibition against eating at the wrong time is meant to curtail the most fundamental of all desires, our appetite for food. Though the prohibition against alcohol in particular is taken somewhat lightly, given that in the full ordination precepts it is a *pācittiya* offense. And in the Five Precepts and Bodhisattva precepts of the *Brahmajāla Sūtra* by *Mahāyāna*, it is a *dukkata* (minor offense). However, alcohol is a drug that causes one to fall into stupor and lose one's composure. Desires for food and alcohol comprise the deeply rooted afflictions that keep us locked in *samsāra*.

In short, the Six Precepts transcend the age of the renunciant, or the time and place of the training, and can be taken as that part of the spiritual practice that solidifies the foundation for becoming a pure bhikkhunī and directs the practitioner towards her own enlightenment.

Conclusion

The Vinaya Pitaka is not only a historical record of the sangha, but a living reflection of the lives of these renunciants. When a bhikkhunī renounces the full ordination, she cannot become a bhikkhunī again in this life. Therefore, the Two Year Training is understood as a preventative measure to protect the future bhikkhunī from destroying her vows. Given these differences and the biological differences between the bodies of male and female renunciants, many vinaya-teachers emphasized that the Two Year Training while practicing the Six Precepts is the most important procedure to fortify the bhikkhunī's precept body. If the Six Precepts cannot be maintained, then the vows must be taken again and another Two Year period begun before receiving the full ordination.

The sikkhamānā system can be understood as a solidity that sustains the purity of the bhikkhunī sangha and creates the gradual foundation of spiritual practice. The role of educating sikkhamānā and the bestowal of ordination vows was distinctly afforded to the bhikkhunī sangha. Accordingly, in this age when the size and power of the bhikkhunī sangha is on the rise, the necessity of the sikkhamānā Two Year training becomes even more important.

Furthermore, while recognizing the differences in criteria for monks and nuns, the sikkhamānā training, ordination ritual, and other such instances provide the bhikkhunī sangha the means to maintain its independence and in this way provide the foundation for the cultivation of a devoted and pure practice, none other than the path to Buddhahood within a woman's body.

¹³ VN, vol. IV, 318. ; In other vinayas, such as the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya* which states, "don't go out alone, don't cross a river alone, don't touch a man, and don't live with a man," the prohibitions are concerned primarily with sexual desire. This is true with the *Sarvāstivādinaya* as well, which mainly guards against sexual desire.

Living a Monastic Life in Equality

Miao Fan Shih

First, I would like to thank the organizers for inviting and allowing me the opportunity to share my reflections on monastic life. The theme of this year's conference "New Horizons in Buddhism" is a fitting reminder that Buddhism must maintain a broad perspective and adapt to changes brought about by various time periods and cultures.

During my journey of learning the Dharma, two things about Buddhism profoundly impacted me. First is the idea of buddha-nature, where all beings are equal in their potential to attain Buddhahood. Second is that everything in the world comes together because of causes and conditions. So long as we practice right mindfulness and right action to continuously purify the Three Karmas in our daily lives, we are able to create our own liberation and be our own master, even in an impermanent world. It is why my teacher, Venerable Master Hsing Yun, advocates for the practice of the Three Acts of Goodness in daily life: "do good deeds, speak good words, think good thoughts".¹

Today, I would like to speak on "equality within the sangha" drawing from my experience as a monastic for nearly thirty years.

We all know what equality is, but is it easy to practice? In Chinese culture, men have always been valued and regarded as superior to women. When a sangha that teaches and pursues the "equality of all beings" is faced with social norms of inequality, will it be met with the same challenges? The answer is yes.

I once visited a traditional monastery where I was given a tour by its superintendent, a bhikṣu. Two things about the visit left a deep impression on me. First, we came across a nun who was cleaning. When this bhikṣu passed her, he impolitely shouted at her, and the nun was fearful. What I witnessed was not communication between bhikṣu and bhikṣuṇī, but rather master and servant. Second, we met a monk who was around fifty years old, and this superintendent immediately reminded me that I should lay three prostrations upon seeing a bhikṣu. I didn't fully comprehend what he said and didn't respond in time. Naturally, I did not prostrate.

Why wasn't I able to respond? It was because I had never done such a thing in my years of renunciation. Ever since I came to Fo Guang Shan to learn the Dharma at twenty-one years old, my teacher—Venerable Master Hsing Yun—has taught me equality and mutual respect in interpersonal relationships. Upon seeing someone, we smile and greet them courteously, respecting every individual. At the same time, in response to the Buddhist malpractice of having people to lay prostrations at every turn, Venerable Master reminds us that it is considered very rude to bow to someone in the streets or a public space as it is an inconvenience to them. If one wishes to prostrate, then one should go to the shrine to do so. Therefore, when I encounter elder bhikṣu and bhikṣuṇīs at Fo Guang Shan, I always join palms to greet them. Similarly, when meeting another monastic, we also join palms to greet each other. At Fo Guang Shan, the same applies to men and women, young and old, monastic and laity.

Fo Guang Shan is a monastery which consists of both men and women. Although interactions between monastic and lay members, men and women, young and old are limited outside of meetings and events, but at the same time, we are Dharma friends who treat one

¹ Hsing Yun 星雲. "Renjianfojiao de shehui yundong" 人間佛教的社會運動 [Social movement of Humanistic Buddhism]. *Xingyun dashi quanji - fuguang jiaokeshu: fuguangxue* 星雲大師全集. 佛光教科書. 佛光學 [Complete Works of Venerable Master Hsing Yun - Guides to Buddhism: Buddha's Light Studies] vol. 11: 153.

another with equality, respect, and spiritual camaraderie. Where does the culture of equality in Fo Guang Shan come from? I raise the following three points for discussion: 1. education, 2. temple system, and 3. Dharma propagation.

1. Equality in Education

Venerable Master Hsing Yun has the ideal of emphasizing education and fostering talents, as these are the only way to ensure the future of Buddhism. Therefore, this was the first endeavor Venerable Master Hsing Yun took on upon founding Fo Guang Shan in 1967. Today, in the 53rd year of its founding, Fo Guang Shan Tsung-Lin University² has trained over 1,300 monastics who currently serve on all five continents across the world to propagate the Buddha's teachings and promote Humanistic Buddhism.

Fo Guang Shan Tsung-Lin University is different from other Buddhist colleges in its practice of equality. Most Chinese Buddhist colleges only accept monastic students, but Tsung-Lin University also accepts lay students, providing them with meals and accommodation, education, and scholarship. After these young adults come to learn the Dharma and the bodhisattva path, they can then apply to enter the monastic order. Those who finish their studies and choose not to renounce can also remain at Fo Guang Shan to work. They can also choose to resume normal life and form their own families. No matter monastic or lay, all graduates have benefited from the Buddha's teachings, taking it as their lifetime faith and refuge.

2. Equality in Temple System

The Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order has the following consensus: "Recognize the spirit of leadership by system; abide by the principle of relying on nothing but the Dharma; do only what is in accord with Buddhism; and accomplish by collective effort." The *Pure Regulations of Fo Guang Shan* (*Foguangshan si qinggui* 佛光山寺清規) expressly specifies rules for the two assemblies—monks and nuns, and includes etiquette within the shrine, dining hall, classrooms, as well as different types of meetings and venues.³ Instead of having women seated behind men, men are seated in the east (right hand) side, and women in the west (left hand) side.

Since a temple system has been established and implemented, it is natural for people to respect one another, establishing equality as a cornerstone of practice by Fo Guang Shan in all parts of the world. Therefore, I find it unfamiliar and strange when expected to lay prostrations on the spot when visiting other temples.

Kneeling and laying prostrations does not equal respect; not doing so does not mean disrespect either. Extending this philosophy to how one pays respect to the Buddha, Venerable Master Hsing Yun believes that paying homage does not necessarily mean laying prostrations. Joining palms, gazing at the Buddha, offering flowers are also ways of paying homage. Whether one is sincere and respectful is more important than outwardly expression.

The spirit of equality is a practice for all members of Fo Guang Shan, from the founding master Venerable Master Hsing Yun to new renunciants. As for the relationship between master and disciple, Venerable Master believes in and practices what he calls "three parts guidance and seven parts friendship."

² Hsing Yun 星雲. *Xingyun dashi quanji: xingyun dashi nianpu* 星雲大師全集. 星雲大師年譜 [Complete Works of Venerable Master Hsing Yun: Timeline of Venerable Master Hsing Yun] vol. 227: 279.

³ Hsing Yun 星雲. *Foguangshan qinggui* 佛光山清規 [Pure regulations of Fo Guang Shan] vol. 295-296.

3. Equality in Dharma Propagation

During the same temple visit, the bhikṣu also said something that struck me. He asked, “Why does Fo Guang Shan’s leadership include women? I disagree with this.” This incident reminded me of when Master Huineng, the Sixth Patriarch of the Chan School, first arrived at Huangmei to seek the Dharma from Fifth Patriarch Hongren.

The Fifth Patriarch asked Huineng, “Why are you here?”

“To seek Buddhahood,” answered Huineng.

“You are from Lingnan, an uncivilized jungle rat,” replied Hongren. “How can you possibly attain Buddhahood?”

“Human beings discriminate between north and south, but buddha nature does not,” said Huineng. “While the form of a jungle rat differs from that of a monk, how do their buddha nature differ?”

Similarly, Venerable Master says, “I do not see men nor women, I only see monastics with resolve.”

From this, we see that although external qualities vary, the essence of Buddha nature is equal.

In the 21st century, we tirelessly advocate for equality, but inequality still continues to exist. How do we go about bringing change? Venerable Master promotes the status of women through tangible actions. For example, the compilation and editing of Buddhist canons in the past were sponsored by the government with its tasks designated to bhikṣus. However, Venerable Master established Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Canon Committee in 1977, which consists of bhikṣunis.⁴ Since then, the Committee has been passed down three generations, publishing works that include *Agama Canon* (17 vol.), *Prajna Canon* (51 vol.), *Chan Canon* (33 vol.), *Pure Land Canon* (33 vol.), *Lotus Canon* (55 vol.), *Illustrated Canon* (20 vol.), *Yogacara Canon* (40 vol.), and *Biographical Canon* (19 vol.). Similarly, roles in Fo Guang Shan’s Dharma propagation endeavors in culture, education, and temple management are filled based on one’s resolve and skills, regardless of gender.

When facing injustice and unfairness, Venerable Master Hsing Yun says, “Get motivated, don’t get agitated.” “Get motivated” does not mean striving over emotions at the spur of the moment, but to strive for thousand-year endeavors of Buddhism. “Get motivated” does not mean striving for one’s own benefit, but for the welfare of all beings. When we work with the vow to “only wish for the liberation of sentient beings, never for one’s own well-being” with persistence, time and history will bring us justice. A person gains the respect of others not because of their gender, age, or skin color, but through their character. As long as we work resolutely and diligently, treating others with kindness and serving others selflessly in our bodhisattva practice, we can hold our heads high to live with liberation and ease. Always with the bodhisattva path as our direction, it is necessary to have the vow that “I am the future of Buddhism.”

Conclusion

⁴ Chaired by Venerable Master Hsing Yun, the Committee invites monastics and scholars worldwide to compile and edit the Buddhist canon by adding punctuation, paragraph spacing, footnotes, and reference sources. Additionally, commentaries and indexes are added to facilitate comprehension and understanding of Buddhist texts for contemporary readers. The *Fo Guang Buddhist Canon* is divided into 16 categories: *Agama Canon*, *Prajna Canon*, *Chan Canon*, *Pure Land Canon*, *Lotus Canon*, *Avatamsaka Canon*, *Yogacara Canon*, *Guhya Canon*, *Sravaka Canon*, *Vinaya Canon*, *Jataka Canon*, *Biographical Canon*, *Illustrated Canon*, *Liturgy Canon*, *Literature and Arts Canon*, and *Miscellaneous Canon*.

“He who respects others will be respected himself, and he who loves others will be loved by them.” Equality, compassion, respect, and tolerance are universal values needed by every era. In regards to the rapid development of modern technology, including the impending rise of artificial intelligence, Venerable Master comments, “Technology has become more and more advanced. Human beings have already been to the moon, yet it is difficult for us to reach the innermost depths of our hearts.”⁵ Although history is replete with change, the truths of equality, compassion, wisdom, and resolve remain the same. In a world of dependent origination, these are inexhaustible treasures within us, shared by all of humanity. And, thus I would like to share this sincere wish with everyone in attendance—that we can all cherish our true Buddha nature, remaining unmoved while following conditions, being joyful and at ease.

⁵ Hsing Yun 星雲. “Fojiao yu kexue” 佛教與科學 [Buddhism and science]. *Xingyun dashi quanji - foguang jiaokeshu: fojiao yu shi xue* 星雲大師全集. 佛光教科書. 佛教與世學 [Complete Works of Venerable Master Hsing Yun - Guides to Buddhism: Buddhism and Secular Studies] vol. 8: 69.

Shared Inquiry: A Buddhist Hermeneutics of Gender

Brianna K. Morseth

Opening a new chapter for Buddhism in the West, the recently-accredited Dharma Realm Buddhist University (DRBU) at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas in northern California provides a distinctive context for contemporary discussions about gender. In the spirit of *shared inquiry* — a discussion method of open and equal exchange — university classes welcome both lay and monastic students and instructors of all ages and cultures. At the same time, DRBU operates in a Mahāyāna Buddhist monastic context characterized by gender-segregation, conservative values, and traditional Chinese cultural norms. Drawing on these factors and the application of *hermeneutics* — the study of interpretation, not only of classical *texts* but also social *contexts* of discourse — the DRBU curriculum integrates voices from across various backgrounds. This paper explores the method of shared inquiry around the hermeneutics of gender through classroom discussion and textual representation of female voices in the university curriculum, revealing a liberating path that transcends gender yet simultaneously acknowledges the experiential significance of gender.

The first significant representation of female voices in the DRBU curriculum to reflect shared inquiry is the *Therīgāthā*, featuring verses from the early Buddhist nuns. Illustrating the dangers faced by women is Subha's narrative. While walking through a mango grove, the nun Subha encounters a man who obstructs her path. Rather than react with fear or hostility, she engaged him in shared inquiry. One student reflected, "By standing in her way, he tried infringing on her very traversal of the contemplative path." Yet Subha stood her ground. Another student commented, "She refused to let him touch her, whether physically or mentally." Subha differentiates herself from him, not on the basis of gender or physical form, but by the quality of their minds. Without recourse to the gender binary, she remained "unagitated," "unimpassioned," "unblemished"¹, ultimately unmoved by his advances. A student remarked, "Her only movement is to help turn the situation around for his reflection." Subha opened up a space for shared inquiry, as the man had a chance to answer when questioned three times

In response to Subha's invitation to reflect meaningfully, however, the man continues to externalize his lust. Referencing the dangers of her solitary wandering as if to intimidate her into submitting to him, he asked why she wanted "to go unaccompanied into the great, lonely, frightening forest."² On top of such remarks that hinted at the valor of the male as a protector, as well as the weakness of the female, the man lusted after Subha's physical form.³ Against his attempts to objectify her, she retorted: "What do you assume of any essence, here in this cemetery grower, filled with corpses, this body destined to break up? What do you see when you look at me, you who are out of your mind?"⁴ Subha refused to be swayed from her path, both that upon which she stands with him and the contemplative path she walked as a nun. The body, whether male or female, is doomed to decay. Only those who are out of their minds and preoccupied with carnality are blind to this. Indeed, the man's frequent reference to Subha's eyes rather than his own in the form of the male gaze reveals his obliviousness. Blind to the

¹ Thanissaro Bhikkhu, Thig 14.1

² Ibid.

³ The Pāli Vinaya documents several cases of rape perpetrated against nuns (see Vin I 89,10, Vin III 35,7, Vin IV 63,8, Vin IV 65,9, Vin IV 228,13, Vin IV 229,25, etc.) including the bhikkhuni Uppalavaṇṇā, who was raped in her own forest hut shortly after ordaining and achieving arahantship. In the Uppalavaṇṇā Sutta (SN 5.5), spoken some time after this tragic incident, she is confronted by Māra while alone in the forest, attempting to frighten her with the possibility of rape, to which she replies she feels no fear (Bodhi 225-226). Like Subha, Uppalavaṇṇā stands her ground.

⁴ Thanissaro Bhikkhu, Thig 14.1

faults of his own mind, he sought her body to satisfy his desires. Yet as a student reflected, “Subha objects to his objectification of her by recontextualizing the very object of his lust.” Indeed, after a long back-and-forth, their shared inquiry culminated in Subha gouging out her eye to present it to him. Completely beyond physical form, “with mind unattached,”⁵ Subha finally got her point across to the man. Miraculously, her eye was later restored in front of the Buddha.

Perhaps related to Subha is “One-Eyed” Jingang,⁶ a Chinese nun of seventeenth-century late-Ming/early-Qing dynasty whose poetry is also featured in the DRBU curriculum. Indeed, given their shared association with the eye, they may represent the same archetype. Addressing gender directly, Jingang writes:

Male or female: why should one need to distinguish false and true?
What is the shape in which Guanyin would finally take form?
Peeling away the bodhisattva’s skin would be of no use whatsoever
Were someone to ask if it were the body of a woman or that of a man.⁷

Here Jingang begins with a rhetorical question, dismissing gender offhandedly?⁸ Perhaps alluding to the transfiguration from female to male as depicted in some Buddhist texts,⁹ “she deems physical form an insignificant distinction.” A female monastic instructor adds, “peeling away the bodhisattva’s skin only reveals the same Buddha-nature underneath.” Rather than discuss gender as something real, Jingang cuts straight to the point by rejecting gender as a meaningful construct. Yet, as asked by a student during shared inquiry around these poems in class discussion, “is she skipping over the felt-realities of gender directly into non-duality, as if to pretend gender discrimination is not a problem that affects both women and men, really the solution to the suffering experienced through gender discrimination?”

While female-authored *texts* constitute a small fraction of the curriculum, *contexts* of shared inquiry around gender have increased to the extent that at DRBU a “women’s group” for continued conversation has formed while “restorative justice” processes for non-violent conflict resolution around gender-related challenges have been invoked. To investigate these trends, a series of testimonials were collected via investigative fieldwork, taking the form of shared inquiry in a sample of classroom discussions.

Content analysis of these testimonials revealed statistically meaningful trends, sometimes in conflict with one another. Among the most highly reported themes were the “felt-reality of discrimination” and the “un-reality of discrimination,” an initially puzzling, seemingly contradictory, finding. Yet in the context of the “two truths,”¹⁰ gender

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ 獨目金剛; her biography reveals that she “got her name from the fact that she lost the sight in one eye as a result of reading the Diamond Sutra (Jingang jing) with great single-mindedness” (Grant 54).

⁷ Grant 55:

男女何須辨假真，觀音出現果何人，皮囊脫盡渾無用，試問男身是女身

⁸ Like the nun Somā’s response to Māra’s anti-women rhetoric (i.e., women are of inferior wisdom) in the Somā Sutta (SN 5.2):

What does womanhood matter at all, When the mind is concentrated well, When knowledge flows on steadily, As one sees correctly into Dhamma. One to whom it might occur, I’m a woman’ or I’m a man’ Or I’m anything at all’ — Is fit for Mara to address. (Bodhi 222-223)

⁹ For instance, see Lotus Sutra Chapter 12 for the story of the Dragon King’s daughter, who undergoes transformation from female into male form.

¹⁰ The two truths doctrine distinguishes between “conventional” (Pāli: *samuti*; Sanskrit: *saṃvṛti*) truth and “ultimate” (Pāli: *paramattha*; Sanskrit: *paramārtha*) truth. While tracing its origins to the early Buddhist texts, the distinction was fleshed out fully by Nāgārjuna (Garfield 90-92).

discrimination may be treated as conventionally real—insofar as it is experienced—even if the phenomena underlying it are ultimately empty. That Subha and other nuns faced the real threat of harassment and even rape testifies to the importance of acknowledging the *first truth*—that these experiences indeed affected them and continue to affect many. Accepting the conventional reality need not necessarily conflict with the *second truth*—that all phenomena is empty of self.

In shared inquiry on gender, students and faculty alike appeared to balance the two truths. A male student positively reflected that gender-segregation “breaks down the feedback loops between genders, which gives us the space to go into our own processes.” In the spirit of shared inquiry, when a female student replied that she felt gender-segregation limited opportunities for “a beautiful and rare situation where you can come together and be vulnerable,” thereby closing off the possibility for collective processing as an integrated community, the same male student added, “I want to make a space for that.”

Reflecting a similar balancing of perspectives, a male instructor remarked, “if the masculine privilege took control, I would have a problem with that” while “ultimately, gender identification is still a problem either direction.” Commenting on the curriculum, a male student reflected, “We find a lot of these texts affirming male identity.” Turning the question to the female members of the discussion, he asked, “Do you feel the need to affirm female identity?” A Chinese-born, lay-female MA student in her 40s commented, “It’s irrelevant to me. Maybe that’s just how I was raised” while a US-born, lay-female MA student in her 40s commented, “Whenever I try to say, ‘It’s not an issue,’ that doesn’t work. I’m working internally to make systemic change. What about classism? What about race? There’s a lot that’s been excluded from these discussions.” Reflecting on the challenges of shared inquiry around these subjects, another student noted, “It’s essential if the university wants to create space for empowerment. It will require trusting in a massive place of vulnerability, drawing on stability and mindfulness, meeting each other in a meaningful way with forgiveness and compassion. To move through it, a lot of pain would have to be shared and held, which is beyond our resources...at this moment.”

Students further reflected that several women in the classical texts comment directly on the social dimensions they encountered on the contemplative path. Kisagotami, for instance, depended on the birth of a son for social status. When her son died, she was left distraught, as with his death very identity also died since at the time women were valued primarily for their ability to bear male children.¹¹ After she is guided to the truth of impermanence through shared inquiry with the Buddha, who asks her to bring back a mustard seed from a household that has never experienced death, Kisagotami is liberated from the shackles of short-sighted suffering.¹² “As a universal truth, impermanence affects all, regardless of gender or social status,” reflected one student. Likewise breaking down the barriers of gender, the Chinese nun Lianghai looks on with empathy at “a solitary man[...]with no commitments.”¹³ A female student reflected, “He may walk the contemplative path however he pleases, without social crutches (“with not

¹¹ In her verses, Kisagotami reflects:

Stressful, painful, is the woman's state: so says the tamer of tamable people. Being a co-wife is painful. Some, on giving birth once, slit their throats. Others, of delicate constitution, take poison. In the midst of a breech-birth both [mother & child] suffer destruction. (Thanissaro Bhikkhu, Thig 10)

¹² An excerpt from the commentary reads:

It’s not just a truth for one village or town, Nor is it a truth for a single family. But for every world settled by gods [and men] This indeed is what is true — impermanence. (Olendzki, ThigA 10.1)

¹³ Grant 153: 孤獨人[...]無事客

even a walking staff¹⁴) or social fetters (“love of sons and daughters”/“nagging of a wife”¹⁵) inhibiting his free-flowing path-going. Perhaps she sees herself as him, collapsing the gender binary.” In Lianghai’s poem, women are no more encumbered by social contracts than are men. The same student noted, “While the exact stipulations of such contracts differ on the basis of gender, both men and women may find liberation from them in the form of the contemplative path, which is open to all.”

Whether it be on the contemplative path, an educational setting, or society at large, women’s voices are essential to meaningful shared inquiry. The exclusion of *any* voice makes inquiry enclosed unto itself and cease to be shared. While much work remains to be done, the willingness to openly engage in the vulnerability entailed by this mode of discourse marks a positive step forward in contexts such as DRBU. Not setting themselves up as women in opposition to men, the poems of the Buddhist nuns convey the real experiences of human beings, much like the classroom reflections featured here. The path is theirs to walk, no matter what obstacles stand in their way. Ultimately, the method of shared inquiry is a path through which all, regardless of gender, may find freedom.

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¹⁴ Ibid.: 無杖策

¹⁵ Ibid.: 兒女情 / 妻子迫

Historic Geshema Degree for Tibetan Buddhist Nuns in Exile

Lhamo Tso¹ & A.K. Joshi

Overview

Geshe is a prestigious title of an academic degree for the monks of the Gelug School of Tibetan Buddhism. It is believed that the academic tradition of this degree began during the time of the 5th Dalai Lama (1617-1682) and continues to the present day. During its 380-year history, the *Geshe* tradition did not offer equal opportunities for nuns to study fundamental Tibetan Buddhist philosophical texts. During his exile, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama has always encouraged the empowerment of women through basic and higher education. The first recipients of the title *Geshe* were the esteemed Kadampa masters such as *Geshe* Chekawa Yeshe Dorje (1102-1176), whose followers subsequently emerged as a scholastic Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism oriented towards the *Geshe* degree. The *Geshe* curriculum is based on subjects studied in the Nalanda Buddhist Universities during its functional existence in ancient India.

The following table outlines the various ‘sects’ of the Tibetan Buddhism in India, Nepal and Bhutan:

Different sects of Buddhism and the number of the Nunneries²

Sl. No.	Country	<i>Nyingma</i>	<i>Kagyü</i>	<i>Sakya</i>	<i>Gelug</i>	<i>Rime</i>	<i>Jonang</i>
1	India	05	03	02	02	03	01
2	Nepal	01	02	01	03	02	01
3	Bhutan	01	01	02	01	00	00
Total: 31		07	06	05	06	05	02
Percentage: 11.83%		02.7%	02.3%	01.9%	02.3%	01.9%	0.76%

There are far less nunneries than monasteries in Tibet and abroad. Overall, there are less Tibetan Buddhist nuns than monks. Among 262 registered monastic institutions at the places where the Tibetan people are settled in exile there are only 31 nunneries in India, Nepal and Bhutan. These 31 Buddhist nunneries are registered with the ‘Department Religion and Culture of Central Tibetan Administration (CTA)’.³ There are a few other small nunneries established by and for the Tibetan people living in India and elsewhere in exile. The Tibetan Nuns’ Project was founded in 1987 to provide education and humanitarian aid to Tibetan Buddhist nuns living in India.⁴

In 1995, His Holiness the Dalai Lama strongly conveyed the need of a *Geshema* (‘ma’ being the female particle) degree for Tibetan Buddhist nuns during the first nuns’ Jaang Gun Chen⁵, a winter seminar of the Gelug School in Gaden Choling in Dharamsala. His message led to the establishment of a *Geshema* learning curriculum for Tibetans in exile. The project of the *Geshema* degree has been going on for approximately three decades now.

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² The History Tibetan Monasteries In Exile. Volumes I, II&III (2011). Published Department of Religion and Culture, Central Tibetan Administration, GangchenKyishong, Dharamsala, H.P. India. The numbers of nunneries collected from three Volumes.

³ *ibid*

⁴ Geshema Degree Archives of the Tibetan Nuns Project. Available at: <https://tnp.org/tag/geshema-degree>

⁵ Interview with five Geshemas by Voice of Tibet 2016

The Institute for Buddhist Dialectics (IBD) in Dharamshala, India conferred the first *Geshema* degree on the German Nun Venerable Kelsang Wangmo in April 2011, thereby becoming the world's first female *Geshema* after studying for more than 21 years in India.⁶ The historic decision to confer the *Geshema* degree to the Tibetan Buddhist nuns in general was announced by the Department of Religion and Culture of the CTA in 2012. On 22nd December 2016, His Holiness the Dalai Lama enthusiastically awarded the *Geshema* degree to 20 Tibetan Buddhist nuns at Drepung Monastery in South India. These nuns were the first batch to receive the historic *Geshema* degree in a group congregation ceremony by the hands of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. During the ceremony, His Holiness commented on the great contribution of education towards establishing gender equality in the modern world. He further commented by telling the audience that "Science tells us that women are biologically more compassionate. Education should install compassion. We should focus on secular ethics...and 'education' has played a big role in the advancement of gender equality and material development."⁷ He considers that these steps are an important part of introducing modernization to Tibetan education.⁸

This paper presents a short background of the female *Geshema* degree for Tibetan women living in exile outside of Tibet. This degree for women represents a historical and monumental change in the Tibetan Buddhist traditions in the context of the modern era. It also demonstrates the role of higher education in empowering women's roles in Buddhist society, including the fields of religion, academics, entrepreneurship and politics. Increasing the degree of education among Tibetan women has also enabled them to rise up as effective and popular political leaders and social workers in their communities. The majority of Tibetan Buddhist nuns were mostly illiterate before they were forced to escape from Tibet to India. Their education was confined mainly to their ability to recite some Tibetan literature and Buddhist scriptures. In India, all new generations of Tibetan people have been given equal opportunities for better education in the Tibetan, Hindi and English languages, with courses and subjects of their own choice. This has helped Tibetans a great deal in reaching the historical milestone of granting the *Geshema* degree for Buddhist nuns in exile. Realizing the importance of education in this regard, Rinchen Khandro Choegyal, the Dalai Lama's sister-in-law, said "Educating women is powerful" and dedicated her efforts to founding and directing the Tibetan Nuns' Project.

Curriculum

The *Geshema* curriculum follows almost the same topics as the course for the male *Geshe* degree.

'Debate' (Tib. *bsdus-grwa*) is the primary mode of study in the Gelug School, which is very helpful in fostering intelligent inquiry and gaining knowledge of a subject. His Holiness the Dalai Lama gives much attention to the art of debate, saying that it should be popularized among laypeople and all schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

Generally, the exoteric study of Buddhism has been based on and divided into 'five subjects'. These are mentioned and explained as follows:

⁶Becoming a Geshe by Ven. Geshe Kelsang Wangmo, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dw1-5oduB2Q>. In this video Ven-Geshema describes the challenges and strengths of becoming a Western Geshe from Germany in Tibetan exile society in Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh, South Asia.

⁷ <https://tibet.net>

⁸ 'An Interview with Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama by Dagmar Bernstorff and Hunertus Von Welck edited. Exile as Challenges: The Tibetan Diaspora. Orient Longman.(2003).p.108

1. **Abhidharma:** Considered the superior knowledge of and within Buddhism, it is known as '*mdzod*' ('treasury') in the Tibetan language. Up to four to five years are dedicated to its study, though that can vary from monastery to monastery. It depends on an individual's degree of devotion and capacities of learning as well.
2. **Prajna Paramita:** The 'Perfection of Wisdom'. It is called '*Phar-Phyin*' (Paramita, or 'Perfection') or the '*Phar Phyin Class*'. The main text studied in this subject is '*Abhisamayalamkara*' (Ornament of Clear Realization) by Maitreya, and is related to teachings by Asanga and Santideva's 'The Way of the Bodhisattva'.
3. **Madhyamaka:** The 'Middle Way' shown by Lord Buddha. It is the longest class in the Gelug School curriculum and called '*dBu-ma Class*' in Tibetan. When students finish this Madhyamaka Class they are awarded with the Graduate Degree. In order to complete the Madhyamaka Class they need to study five books, which are: 'The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way (Mulamadhyamkakarika)' by Nagarjuna; 'Four Hundred Verses on the Yogi's Deeds of Bodhisattva (Catuhsataka)' by Aryadeva; 'Introduction to the Middle Way (Madhayamakavantara)' by Cantrakirti; 'Ornament of Middle Way (Madhyamakalamkara)' by Santaraksita, and 'The Way of the Bodhisattva (Bodhisattvacaryavantara)' by Santideva. These five major books were written by ancient Buddhist scholars in India. Along with these books, students must study other textual commentaries of the Gelug School composed by Tibetan scholars like Je Rinpoche (Tsongkhapa) and other prominent Tibetan Buddhist scholars.
4. **Pramana:** 'Pramana' is 'Logic', called '*Tshad-Ma Class*' in Tibetan. Scholars and students need to study the major texts on this subject such as 'Treatise on Valid Cognition (Pramanavarttika)' by Dharmakirti and 'Compendium on Valid Cognition (Pramanasamuccaya)' by Dignaga for two years.
5. **Vinaya:** 'Vowed Morality', called '*Dul-ba*' in Tibetan. The '*Dul-ba Class*' on moral precepts and behavior has a duration of one year in which its basic subject is studied through the book 'The Root of Vinaya (Vinaya Mula Sutra)' written by Pandit Gunaprabha.

Duration of the Course and Eligibility

The course of the *Geshe/ma* degree can be pursued only by monks and nuns in the age group of 12 to 40 years. However, the minimum duration of study should be 17 years in order to be eligible to enter the examination for the *Geshema* degree. The examinees have to go through a number of educational and academic exercises and activities like interpersonal and group-based debates, memorization, written tests, essay writing, and Q&A sessions. Only those who score an average of 75 marks out of 100 can enter the six years of examinations to qualify for the *Geshema* degree.

Case Studies

- 1) Geshema Tenzin Palmo

Geshema Tenzin Palmo came to India from the Kham region of Tibet in 1990. She is the first Tibetan woman who received the *Geshema* degree from His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. At present she is teaching Buddhism and Buddhist literature to Tibetan children at Sambhota Tibetan Schools. She introduced her ambitions in Tibetan nunnery society. Prior to her degree, Tibetan Buddhist nunneries did not have any tradition of education and academic studies for nuns. Now they can facilitate the study of any Buddhist subject. She had never thought of becoming a *Geshema* earlier in her life, but destiny played her cards. She worked hard and achieved this precious degree and thereby paved a clear path for many other Tibetan women pursuing Buddhism. She feels very positive and satisfied with her life in exile. When she arrived in India, there were no Buddhist nunneries for women to live in as nuns. Realizing the CTA Government planned to send women to state schools to be re-educated. Geshema Palmo and many other nuns sent a request to Rinchen Khandro, the founder of the Tibetan Nuns' Project, to exempt nuns from secular schools. It was not acceptable for their families and sensibilities to allow daughters, who were ordained as nuns, to join mainstream schools. In the light of this situation and their concerns, His Holiness the Dalai Lama quickly established the Dolma Ling Monastery in 1990 for nuns to receive higher Buddhist education.⁹ In this way, Geshema Palmo and other nuns with her at the time got opportunities for higher education in the area of Buddhist philosophy.

2) Geshema Namdol Phuntsok

Geshema Namdol Phuntsok is a Buddhist nun in Kopan Monastery in Nepal. She is also one of the gracious recipients of the Geshema Degree. She was able to secure the top position within the First Division of her class in a period of six years. She had wanted to become a Buddhist nun since childhood, but her family refused on the grounds that she was too young to handle the tough life of a nun. In addition, she is the eldest among her five siblings, so traditionally she had the responsibility as the eldest to help her parents with work and family. However, at the age of 12 years she managed to come to Lhasa, where she was supported by her aunt to become a Buddhist nun. In those days around Lhasa, no Tibetan nunneries had any educational and academic provisions for higher Buddhist education as monks did. At Buddhist monasteries, nuns usually were allowed to perform only selected rituals and prayers, and often served as cooks and cleaners during major ceremonies. A nun's main responsibility was to look after her nunnery well. On a few occasions, they would visit their parents to meet and look after them, and to help them during harvest seasons. After she was exiled from her Tibetan homeland, her uncle proposed to send her to a school in Nepal or India, but she was strongly determined become a nun. Following her determination, she was admitted into the Kopan Nunnery in Nepal, where she was deeply involved in her studies and whatever tasks were assigned to her. When she heard the announcement of the Geshema degree, she felt extremely happy and excited, anticipating that her ultimate dreams were going to come true soon in future. That announcement encouraged her to complete her studies in a focused and committed way¹⁰. With her positive life achievements and circumstances, she has started learning the English language, as she is still young. With a good knowledge of English, she will be successful in teaching and serving not only the students of Tibetan society, but students of societies across the globe.

⁹ Geshema Tenzin Palmo's life history is told on Tibet TV Net, "Discussion with four Geshemas" by RFA Tibetan in Dharamshala.

¹⁰ Geshema Namdol Phuntsok's life histories are collected from various interviews such as "Historic Award of Geshema Degree to 20 Tibetan Nuns" on 23.12.2016 by VOA Tibetan Daily Radio based in the USA and Voice of Tibet interview.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dw1-5oduB2Q>. In this video Ven-Geshema describes the challenges and strengths of becoming a Western Geshe from Germany in Tibetan exile society in Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh, South Asia.

Oral Source: Geshema Tenzin Palmo in Dolmaling Nunnery in India and Geshema Namdol Phunstok in Kopan Nunnery in Nepal

Paper Session 3

Women Paving the Way: Future Directions in Buddhist Thought and Practice

Wednesday 26th June, Morning

Awakening at Home - Language and Practices for the 21st Century Woman

Jacqueline Kramer

Distinguished teachers, scholars, venerables and practitioners, thank you so much for this opportunity to share what I've learned about teaching Buddhist thought and practices to mothers. There are over 2 billion mothers in the world. Making Buddhist wisdom accessible to them is the surest way to support the flourishing of Buddhism in the 21st century. In order to make these thoughts and practices available to mothers we need to address their everyday realities, speak their language and offer practices that are meaningful to them. I have been studying this population, inside and out, as a mother and a teacher, for over 37 years. I'd like to share what I've learned with you.

A mom's dharma needs to take into account getting up in the morning, brushing our teeth making breakfast, strapping the baby onto our chest or getting the kids dressed and fed, and stepping outside the front door, sometimes even before our first cup of coffee. We have errands to run, bills to pay, meals to prepare, and daily decisions to make that impact the lives of our families. In contrast, the monastic usually has a more deliberate rhythm with time to reflect, read and meditate. This contemplative model of spiritual practice has been predominant in Buddhism where family life is often regarded as a distraction and, indeed, if you are trying to reflect, read or meditate a child can be perceived of as a distraction.

Yet our dharma is every bit as powerful and lovely as our contemplative sister's dharma. Ours is a dynamic dharma requiring a more "on the tarmac" approach than the traditional path. The lavender lotus and blue sky are ours as well, we just see them reflected in the dish water. Little bodies, little sincere kisses, little dreamers telling us their dreams, the juxtaposition of emptiness and luminosity are ours as well. We walk down the street and there is no "I" walking just the sensation of air and movement. We smell the sweet pea our child picked for us and experience a moment of blissful at-one moment with everything. The emptiness and luminosity are the same but the approach to their realization is, by necessity, different.

The Buddha spoke with sensitivity to the varied realities of those he taught. When he taught a king he employed metaphors about ruling and warfare. When he taught a farmer he used metaphors about the ox, the yoke and the plow. Mothers need unique metaphors as well, metaphors about achingly powerful love, metaphors about giving birth and pregnancy, metaphors about driving and cleaning and balancing work life with home life, metaphors about sitting up all night with a sick child and giving until you no longer recognize yourself in the mirror. We live our lives in a very physical, practical and heart centered fashion. Our approach to spiritual unfoldment requires a paradigm and way of practicing that is relevant to this ground level reality if it is to speak to us. Going on a retreat once a year is very helpful for re-centering ourselves in our practice, and this is something I did as a young mother. But retreats require time and money that a family may not always be able to afford, long periods of meditation require quiet we may not always be able to find in our homes, and reading, well reading is often done in bits and starts.

But the mother has some advantages as well. She is thrust into an experience of real, visceral unconditional love, she generously gives her body over to nature in order to create the next generation and, if supported to understand giving birth as a spiritual transformational process, she is fundamentally changed by the experience. A conscious mother practices selfless service everyday without calling it that. Love for her family makes her aware of her shadow, bidding her to grow for the sake of her family. A conscious mother will go to lengths for her family she would never go for herself alone. It's important to take this into consideration when developing teachings for her.

This is the work and aim of Hearth. We are committed to building a structure that is truly family friendly and are willing to draw from any tradition that offers insights leading to awakening to further these intentions. We do not have the luxury to be translating an already existing home enlightenment tradition from another culture or continuing an established Buddhist mothering lineage. There are very few home enlightenment traditions in any religion, just some small windows up so high we can hardly see out to the expanse beyond and walls made out of bits and pieces of traditions that often either glorify or demonize mothering. It's shocking how few traditional stories and practices there are for mothering dharma given that mothers make up such a large portion of the population. What little stories there are have so many problems we may as well just throw the debilitating myths into the dumpster, and build anew with an eye to greater kindness.

But the foundation for any authentic Buddhist system does exist. It begins with the core of all Buddhist traditions, the truth of suffering and the way out, the four noble truths, and annica, annata, dukkha. These are the weight bearing beams for our home. Mother's are no strangers to the truth of impermanence, no self and suffering. These are everyday realities for us. We develop awareness of impermanence as we watch birth turn to aging. Just when we figure out how to deal with our child's current developmental stage they move on to the next. Nothing stays the same from one day to the next, from one moment to the next, and we need to constantly adjust. We develop selflessness while spending time making meals which are consumed leaving us with dirty dishes, waking up at night to take care of a sick child when we really want to sleep, and forgoing things we'd like to do in order to take care of the needs of our family. The truth of suffering is not a dry, nihilistic teaching to mothers but one we experience viscerally as our hearts have been broken open by love. The wisdom teachings can be employed to support mothers to accept things as they are, allowing the luminosity to break through unimpeded by fear or denial. We can guide mothers to use their life's challenges for awakening and to realize that there is not something wrong with them, that their struggles have real value and meaning.

The way out of suffering, the 8- fold path, is the time- tested blueprint for our structure. The first 4 steps on the path; right thought, right speech, right action, and right livelihood, easily translate into action for mothers. They help guide our everyday encounters and inform the decisions we make. The next three steps speak of mental training; right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. Right effort brings us to our practice each day. It is through right effort that we return to the present moment again and again. Right mindfulness is a useful practice for mothers, much touted by current teachers in the West. Mindfulness for mothers is a great tool, but there is so much more. But right concentration, well that's a bit trickier for moms. How do you stay focused when you're called in so many different directions? We need to learn how to develop concentration amidst activity.

The last step on the 8- fold path is right view, or wisdom. We develop wisdom by becoming intimate with the Wisdom teachings and by honoring the wisdom we are cultivating as we engage in conscious mothering. The suttas, as well as other teaching stories, further help in the transmission of the Buddha's teachings. In translating these stories for mothers we need to eliminate any misogyny otherwise women will feel shame and turn away from them. We need to reframe the myths, like those of Yasodhara and Mahajapati, and create new stories that women can see themselves in. We want a home tradition that will serve our sons and daughters for years to come, a home that is warm and friendly in which we can experience our deepest unfoldment. Koans, gathas and poetry are wonderful bite sized wisdom tools for mothers. We moms often take our coffee and our dharma on the run. A structure that best serves us needs to take this reality into consideration.

Mothering dharma is not about being a “good mom”, home schooling or public schooling, working outside the home or being a stay-at-home mom or any other personal family prerogatives. It is not about being “perfect” or always saying and doing the “right” things or looking a certain way or never yelling at our kids. If the dharma is to nourish our growth we need to feel comfortable within it. It needs to take into account our human frailties, our unique personal styles and our challenges. Rather than hide who we are or think of dharma as a way to get beyond having any challenges, we can reform challenges into the nails and wood that build the walls of our home. We start where we are and draw ever closer to our own illumination using the raw materials in our everyday lives to sculpt the doors and stairways. The process is creative because each family’s circumstances are unique and ever changing. Each family requires different structures but we all share the same need for a strong foundation if the home is going to stand.

There is no need to water down the teachings for moms. We can take the real stuff. If insight can be found in all places it surely can be found while rocking a baby or making breakfast after a sleepless night. There is beauty and luminosity in tired eyes, in bowls of cereal and in our hands as they touch loved ones. This is our dharma. We are not afterthoughts and, although we love to serve, we are not handmaidens. We are the weavers of the cloth of civilization. As the keeper of the home goes, so goes the world. Please join me in supporting the women at home.

A Study on the Education Method for Reconstructing - a Sense of Community

Yudeok Sunim

In *Presence* by Peter Senge, several examples show the importance of the container as a transformative vehicle: the ancient alchemists' building of a container as the crucial preliminary process, the Swiss psychoanalyst C.G. Jung's claim for material transformations as much as psychological process, and chrysalis' state of cocoon before becoming butterflies.¹ There are more examples of similar phenomena. For example, to fire pottery in a kiln demands very close and attentive maintenance, such as the degree of fire, kinds of firewood, and size of the kiln. How about the delicate container of the embryo during pregnancy? What about hens sitting on eggs until they hatch? These transformative containers are not limited to merely the physical and material world; we can also see them in the mental and spiritual process. One example is the novice period for monks and nuns under the careful guidance of teachers and retreat practices during certain times of the year in various spiritual traditions. At the subtler level, what is the transformative container of individual practice of meditation, prayer, or chanting? The container probably includes a physical body comprised of postures and movements of subtle energies, commitments, mental states, moral virtues, and external environments, such as Siddhārtha Gautama's journey and the adventures of many known and unknown awakened beings.

Let's expand the scope of an individual's container to the collective environment. Even though there is the possibility and historical fact of one being awakened by him/herself, in many cases—especially in the beginning of the spiritual practice—a community that nurtures individuals plays a crucial role as the transformative vessel. In fact, a community does not always perform as a transparent, creative, and transformative vehicle. The community can also act as either the part of a limited, superimposed, and stifled box or merely a neutral boundary. My question started at this point: what does Gautama Buddha say about the optimal state of the spiritual community called sangha?

The Buddha's answer to this question is very simple. With the good example of the Vajjis Kingdom as a prosperous community, the Buddha says to his disciples as he comes close to his *parinirvāṇa*:

Monks, as long as monks continue to **meet together frequently and regularly**, then they can be expected to prosper, not to decline. As long as monks continue to **sit down together in concord, to get up together in concord, and to conduct the business of the community in concord**, then... As long as monks continue **not to make pronouncements that have not been agreed, not to revoke pronouncements that have been agreed, but to proceed in accordance with the precepts that are agreed pronouncements**, then... as long as monks continue to **respect, honor, revere, and worship those monks who are elders, possess the pearls of wisdom, went forth into the religious life long ago, are the fathers and leaders of the community, and listen to what they say**, then... As long as monks are **not overcome by the kind of craving that leads to rebirth when that arises**, then... As long as monks continue to have **regard for living in the forest**, then... As long as monks individually continue to **establish mindfulness**, such that well-behaved companions in the spiritual life who have not come are encouraged to come, and those that have come easily, then... Monks,

¹ Peter Senge, *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future* (Cambridge: The Society for Organizational Learning, 2004), 34-35.

as long as these seven principles remain established among monks as long as they abide by them, then they can be expected to prosper, not to be decline.²

Looking at these seven principles, the first four are about how members of community behave together, rather than about individual practice. Frequent meeting together, orderly concordant gatherings, agreement, and honoring elders are suggested as ways of organizing community activities. After that, the Buddha discusses individual practices, giving advice on how to conquer craving, live in the forest, and establish mindfulness.

The first principle—**meeting frequently and regularly**—is the root of the following principles, because being able to meet and communicate with each other brings about the opportunity to share ideas and a sense of community. The harmonious community is also very conducive to individual practice, the last three principles, because it offers a trustworthy and grounded environment for contemplation and meditation.

Meeting frequently and regularly in community can be done in many ways: study, meditation, chanting, ceremony, ritual, physical activities, discussion, and conflict resolution. Studying together creates shared views. Meditation, chanting, rituals and physical activities cultivate a sense of community and create an invisible energetic connection with concordance. Discussion opens diverse approaches towards shared issues and becomes the ground for creativity. Traditionally, according to the Buddha's teachings, *uposatha* (reading vinaya together), *pavarana* (atoning for an offense one may have committed during the retreat of rainy season), and *karma* (making a decision together) are established as main purposes for the gatherings of monks, which are more or less obligatory.³ Furthermore, *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya* and *Mahīśāsaka Vinaya* define harmony of sangha as doing uposatha, pavarana, karma, and living daily life together.⁴ This definition is very simple and straightforward, not complicated. Yet, this is very wise teaching. Meeting together often, even without talking, such as in meditation and ritual, is the very opportunity for self-identity to gradually dissolve into community, which offers a bigger sense than the limited self. Although the experience of dissolving self-identity takes time and practice, community living and meeting together with discipline makes it easier.

In the Mahāvagga of the *Vinaya-piṭaka*, one story about a community of three monks is introduced. This story illustrates well and straight-forwardly how harmonious community is cultivated. While there was a dispute between monks in Kosambī, the Buddha visited the Eastern Bamboo Grove, where the Venerable Anuruddha, Nandiya, and Limbila are staying together. Seeing their harmonious dwelling, the Buddha asks them, “How is it that you, Anuruddhas [Anuruddha, Nandiya, and Limbila], are living all together on friendly terms and harmonious, as milk and water blend, regarding one another with the eye of affection?”⁵ Responding to this question, the three of them answer:

As to this, Lord, it occurred to me: ‘Indeed it is a gain for me, indeed it is will gotten by me, that I am living with such Brahma-farers.’ On account of this, Lord, for these venerable ones amity as to bodily conduct, whether openly or in private, has risen up in me. Amity as to speech, amity as to thought, whether openly or in private, has risen

² *Dīgha Nikāya* 16; Rupert Gethin, *Sayings of the Buddha : A Selection of Suttas from the Pali Nikāyas* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 44.

³ *The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-piṭaka)*.

⁴ T.22, p.595a, “和合者 同一羯磨 同一 說戒.” P. 20 하, “和合者 同布薩自恣羯磨常所行事.” as quoted in the article, Sin Seonghyeon & Ha Chunsaneng, “Han’guk bulgyo gyeyulhak ui yeon’gu seonggwawa jeonmang.” (The Studies on Korean Precepts and its Future), *Han’gul Bulgyohak* (Korean Buddhist Studies) 68 (2013): 697.

⁵ *The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-piṭaka)*, Part 4, 502.

up. Because of this, Lord it occurred to me: ‘What now, if I, having surrendered my own mind, should live only according to the mind of these venerable ones?’ So I, Lord, having surrendered my own mind, am living only according to the mind of these venerable ones. Lord, we have diverse bodies, but assuredly only one mind.⁶

After further discussions about community life, the Buddha praises and encourages them, and leaves. As the monk’s thoughts in the story above illustrates, what enables one to participate in community living is the conviction that it is beneficial for spiritual growth. At the same time, this conviction creates harmonious community living since strong willingness to practice within community and to cultivate community can manifest. With the support of community living, disciplined bodily conduct, speech, and thought can be practiced both in the relationship with one another and in private. Eventually, surrendering one’s own mind to be accordant with spiritual friends, community life becomes like one flow of a river stream, not the mere gathering of drops. This expression actually, I think, illustrates the experience of lack of self-centeredness—selflessness—within the collective flow of community. One is led by the flow and is able to relax even the strong enthusiasm towards spiritual practice. This flow can be a comfortable and harmonious dwelling that serves as the optimal foundation for individual spiritual practice. Creation of the flow in a comfortable dwelling is, I assume, in concert with the purpose of community living of sangha. Thus, living together in community can become a powerful way to exercise selflessness, which is one essential point of the spiritual practice, especially in Buddhism.

Lastly, there are not only philosophical aspects, but also practical elements in community life. In the following story of the Anuruddha’s community above, how members work together both in daily chores and dharma are presented.⁷ Not only studying and discussion, but also physically working together for a decent environment, should be considered as practice. A decent environment cannot be established by one individual, rather it is collective work with understanding, which requires education. Moreover, the direct experience of physical collaboration for a decent environment encourages harmony as much as having shared view. Another practical element is related to sharing material gains with others impartially. This advice is presented in both the *Kosambiya Sūtra* and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* as one of six principles of cordiality to avoid the decline of the sangha. While the other five principles are friendliness of body, mind, and speech, as well as shared view and discipline, impartial sharing of possessions is about actual use of material gains. This impartiality in materials should not be overlooked for harmonious community living. For a community of monastics and lay practitioners to live together, I think, more examination and careful consideration should be applied.

In order for community development to be an adequate tool towards the exercise of selflessness, the principles presented in the Buddha’s teachings should be an initial step for developing a community. In addition, it is important to share these ideas and visions with the community as they are implemented. Often, community development is seen as separate from studying and practicing the Buddhist view. As the story of Anuruddha’s community living demonstrated, however, conviction and direct experience of beneficial community living are the most powerful factors to see the indispensable role of community living on the spiritual path. With an intellectual understanding of the importance of community living, members can utilize community more actively for their spiritual growth. Above all, in order for these principles to be embedded in individual practice, education and communication about these

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 503.

principles and the importance of community should accompany studying philosophical views and meditation. From this conviction, the remainder of this paper will be a tentative curriculum that explicitly supports the role of community in Buddhist practice.

While community members are imbued into the stream of visible collaborative life, education of Buddhist philosophy should include how to relate Buddha's teaching to daily life within community. As I have gone through with monastic life, many novices have had difficulties to apply what they have learned in class to daily life within sangha. Therefore, in the following table, I will suggest a curriculum or guideline for Buddhist philosophy with expected conduct, which is a series of step-by-step processes as well as comprehensive in each stage.

Ground	Path	Fruition
First Turning	Second Turning	Third Turning
Recognizing our own suffering and focus on our experiences	Appreciating all beings' suffering and cultivating Bodhicitta	Relaxing and developing a spontaneous and natural way of being
View: Five aggregates – non-self Interdependence – systems theory	View: Emptiness of phenomena Recognizing where we are stuck through logical approach	View: Buddha-nature Trusting in our innate Buddha-nature
Meditation: Through <i>Satipattana Sutta</i> , recognizing the Five Aggregates (body, feeling, perception, mental formation, consciousness) and accepting impermanence becomes the foundation for sympathy, empathy and non-self. Interdependence: understanding interconnected system.	Meditation: Meditation on emptiness (with awareness of complexity and diversity of systems and human experiences)- cultivating flexibility Tonglen- by recognizing our experience of Five Aggregates, we can appreciate and be with other's suffering with good intention (Bodhicitta).	Meditation: Dwelling in Buddha nature. Relaxing in a non-striving state (no longer fixated on accumulating virtues or purification)
Conduct: Morality or discipline as a basic attitude for ourselves and community development (karma) Self examination through direct experiences -The Eightfold Noble Path	Conduct: Being a mirror of our own stuck thoughts and others' habitual way of thoughts in community Develop stable and balanced emotion in community -The Six Pāramitās	Conduct: 안심(安心), Manifestation with spontaneous and non-judgmental presence (demeanors).
Focusing on individuals (if there is unresolved trauma from childhood or adulthood, psychotherapy probably is needed before meditation instruction)	Reaching out to the seemingly outside world (community). In a community, developing communication skills based on a new view, which is wisdom : empathy, compassion, social cooperation	Relax in self-trust, which is faith in Buddha nature and power of practice. Staying in flux Following a given flow

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The Fourth Assembly: *Upasikas*, New Circles of Meditation and Women's Agency in Urban Buddhism in Sri Lanka

Darini Rajasingham Senanayake

The past two decades has seen an explosion of scholarly interest in women in modern Buddhist societies in Asia, particularly in relation to women's agency and 'liberation' from *samsara* and patriarchy. Fueled partly by a desire to understand unprecedented socio-cultural transformations, new socio-religious movements and their gendered practices, as well as, ethno-religious conflict in contemporary *Theravada* Buddhist polities in countries like Burma, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, a significant number of studies have focused on the challenge of establishing *Bhikkhuni* orders, sometimes after a hiatus of centuries.

In the *Theravāda* tradition and Pāli canon, four assemblies form the foundation for the Buddha's teachings and are necessary for the *Sasana* to flourish. These four assemblies constitute: *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs*, and *upasaka* and *upasika* (male and female lay disciples or attendants), who must be "wise, well-trained, and self-confident", for the *Sasana* to flourish, according to the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*.¹ While a great deal of work has focused on *bhikkhunis* and 10 precept nuns or *dasa sil matas* (*thilashin* in Burma), less attention has focused on the roles that the 'fourth assembly' or *upasikas* play, often creatively re-interpreting *vinaya* prescribed and circumscribed roles, as women enter the labor force and access new communication technologies and take on new gender roles. Of course, it is arguable that *upasikas* as householders do not face the forms of institutionalized discrimination that *Bhikkhunis* and women aspiring to become ordained face, hence the lack of research on the 'fourth assembly'. For instance, the post-colonial Sri Lankan state that often presents itself as a "protector" of the Theravada doctrine that led the move to establish *Vesak* as an international public holiday at the United Nations General Assembly was less pro-active in establishing a *bhikkuni* order in the country for many decades.²

This paper focuses on the Fourth assembly, *Upasikas*, who play a central role in sustaining the *sasana*, yet are marginal in studies of women in Theravada Buddhism. It focuses on the emergence of new circles of meditation among urban Buddhist women to map out the transforming roles, trajectories and contributions of *upasikas* to the *Sasana* and society in Sri Lanka. Historically, women have played an important role and arguably have been the unsung everyday sustainers of the *sangha* as providers of the four necessities: food, shelter, robes and medicine, particularly during the *Vas* season or rains retreat.

The question of women's agency in Asian Buddhist societies has been debated in light of claims that women tend to be institutionally marginalized, self-abnegating, and play a highly subordinate role to male monks. Hence the focus of Sakyadhita too, on contemporary struggles to establish a *Bhikkuni* order in counties with ancient histories of Theravada Buddhism. Some Asian scholars have questioned the focus on establishing *Bhikkuni* orders and instead suggest that the project is itself ethno-centric and may not square with the diversity of women's roles

¹ There are four types of well-disciplined assemblies.. a disciplined *bhikkhu*, a disciplined *bhikkhunī*, a disciplined male lay follower, and a disciplined female lay follower.. Capable at discussing without fear, being learned, they have penetrated the Dharma, they practice the Dharma, following the Dharma, these are, indeed, the good assemblies. A *Bhikkhu* who maintains his virtue pure, a *bhikkhunī* who is learned, a male lay follower who has pure faith, and a female lay follower who is like that, these are reckoned the good assemblies, like the light of the sun, they shine on their own. Indeed, like this the community is well, indeed, this is what is excellent in the community. This condition leads to the excellence of the community. Like the light of the sun, shining on its own."

² An international day of *Vesak* recognised by the United Nations became a reality only on 15 December 1999. The proposal to declare *Vesak* as an international public holiday was tabled at the United Nations General Assembly by Sri Lanka

and agency as Buddhists. Scholars like Salgado have challenged colonial and western constructions and framings of women's agency and hint at other avenues that women in Buddhism may take.³

This paper then explores the practice of *upasikas*, as women who pursue other paths of Buddhist practice and explores their roles and agency, as *dayakayas* (donors), meditators and subtle activists. The paper suggests that emergence of new circles of meditation provides new spaces for agency and even activism for women in and beyond the *dhamma*. Simultaneously, drawing from ethnographic fieldwork and interviews, the paper traces alternative scripts and forms of agency, apparent in how meditating *upasikas* re-position themselves, vis-à-vis family and within a politicized and largely male public religious field where ritual is a dominant public form of religiosity.

Emergence of New Circles of Meditation (*bhavana*)

The practice of Theravada Buddhism is associated with *dana* (alms giving), *sila* (observing 5 precepts) and *bhavana* or meditation. Traditionally, lay people focused on *dana* and *sila*, whereas meditation or *bhavana* was perceived to be the activity of monks and those well advanced in the *dhamma*. However, increasingly, new circles of meditation have become popular among women in Sri Lanka, particularly in urban and suburban areas over the past decade.

Women are the majority in the new meditation circles, 60-80%. Many of the women interviewed for this research were in their mid-fifties, older women, who had retired or had more time on their hands as their children had grown up. Traumatic life events such as serious illness or death of a loved one, as well as, awareness of personal physiological changes seemed to have propelled the turn to meditation, for self-development and a new space for regeneration. The turn to meditation was most often spoken of as a needed respite from the stresses and strains of modern life also in an age of internet connectivity.

While new meditation movements are in line with older transnational Buddhist circulations in Sri Lanka going back to the Theosophists, Alcott and Blavatsky, the emergent popularity of meditation among various small groups of women living in urban areas has also seen expansion of established meditation centers (Dhamma Kuta Vipassana Center, Kanduboda and Meethirigala, Kalalgoda) are notable. The Mahamevnawa meditation center for Bhikkunis and *upasikas* was established in 2006. Ajahn Brahm from the Buddhist Society of Western Australia and Bhikkuni ayya Tathaaloka from Dhammadharini Vihara on several visits to Sri Lanka raised the profile and visibility of meditation circles and *upasikas*.

The types of meditation practiced in new meditation circles vary and may be canonical meditation practices such as anapanasati, brahmavihara, Samadhi, and Vipassana, meditation on impermanence and the anussatis such as recollection of the Buddha, Dhamma & Sangha, recollection of death, and recollection of virtue. Often the pledge of noble silence was observed for the duration of the meditation program which may vary from a couple of hours to ten day courses. Such programs contrast with the public, political and ritual face of official Buddhism after war ended in 2009 in Sri Lanka.

Reasons given for the turn to religion and the growing popularity of meditation were diverse and depended on age, family status, education levels, work history, and social capital of *Upasikas*. Meditation provided an escape from the stresses and strains of life which is increasingly hectic and consumeristic, also given new media and communication technologies,

³Nirmala Salgado (2013) for instance in *Buddhist Nuns and Gendered Practice: In Search of the Female Renunciant*". OUP.

social media and hyper connectivity. Problems within the family, children who were not obedient, spouses who were unfaithful or lack of interest in having sexual relations with spouses were other reasons. Meditation provided a culturally coded means for *upasikas* to negotiate space and autonomy for themselves vis-à-vis family members and society at large. It would appear that new circles of meditation also provided a space and were a ‘coping strategy’ for some women, and for some an ‘exit strategy’ from difficult family relationships and conjugal obligations, and from socially prescribed roles of ‘wife’ and ‘mother’ through embrace of spirituality and even celibacy that is religiously sanctioned as part of devotion to the 5 precepts and noble eightfold path.

Simultaneously, meditation programs and retreats provided a new space for extending one’s social or dhamma circle and self-development, through other such meditation programs. Email, social media, and Whats App helped maintain these loose networks of meditators some of who were well connected and on many email lists. There were also *dhamma* study groups that met weekly such as that linked to the Walpola Rahula Institute. Interviews conducted with *Upasikas* during meditation retreats in Colombo indicated that increasingly new circles of meditation provide a space for women who have the means to take on more institutionalized and high profile roles as community leaders and dhamma education sustainers, (Jayawardene called them Buddhist benefactresses), and thus have more opportunities for networking, self-development and growth.

As women enter the labor force and join professions and business and become income generators and even heads of household they are also emerging as *dayakkayas* (donors), who are also promoting spaces for meditation or retreat for other women. *Upasikas* played an important role in the organization of the ‘Global Mindfulness Summit’ in 2017 in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Meditation circles may be also seen as in-between or liminal space in urban Buddhism, mediated through transnational and diaspora Buddhist networks, in contradistinction, to the increasingly elaborate official and institutionalized political religious rituals in post-war Sri Lanka where Buddhist symbolism was harnessed by political authorities and the military to deflect allegations of war atrocities. It is arguable that without commenting on such developments, the rise of small meditation group practice may constitute an oblique critique of increasingly elaborate public Buddhist ritual. Several *upasikas* interviewed were critical of ritualized forms of practice, planting of Buddhist statues at street corners, and building of grandiose temple edifices. New meditation circles may be a tacit critic of public ritual or official religion in Sri Lanka.

Finally, the category of urban Buddhism that this paper seeks to develop gains salience in relation to gendered religious practices, particularly, women’s agency in crafting modern Buddhist roles. Some *upasikas* played activist roles, such as, in the recently formed initiative: “Religions for Good Governance” meditation program, that engaged leaders and congregations of the four great world religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity), that comprise the socio-cultural fabric of Sri Lanka with the leadership of the Walpola Rahula Institute and the former Anglican Bishop of Colombo, which was held at a time of acute political economic and governance crisis in December 2018. A number of *upasikas* were present at the event which presented an alternative form of citizen’s engagement for peace building and good governance.

Fragrance of Deep Realisations: Reflections on Social and Spiritual Empowerment of Drukpa Kagyu Nuns at Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery, Himachal Pradesh¹

Sourajit Ghosh

Historical Background and Context of the Study

In enlightened thoughts, there is no male and female
In enlightened speech, there is no far and near.²

Over the centuries, this Tibetan proverb has inspired innumerable female monastics to serve the *dharma* and tread the noble path of *Sakyamuni* Buddha. This proverb shattered the barriers of gender and make them realize the true nature of non-duality. All the four traditions of Tibetan Buddhism emphasize the cultivation of *bodhicitta*, irrespective of gender.³ Monastics and *dharma* practitioners worship female deities and accomplished beings such as *Ārya Tārā*, great *yoginīs* and *dākinīs*. In both the Mahāyāna and Vajrāyāna traditions, there are innumerable examples of attainment of enlightenment in a female body.⁴ Feminine divinity has been the source of inspiration and spiritual empowerment for the Tibetan monastics for centuries. But still, in the Tibetan tradition the authenticity of the establishment of the order of ‘fully-ordained nuns’ and their ability to reach spiritual heights remain a topic of heated debate. In early *Pali* texts, female birth is considered an obstacle to achieving enlightenment.⁵ Secondly, from the day the nuns are admitted to the sangha, they are subordinated to the eight *gurudhammas* or eight heavy precepts.⁶ The permanently subordinated status of ‘nuns’ is inferior to the order of monks.⁷ Lastly, the lack of a quorum of the *Mūlasarvāstivādin*, fully ordained nuns, under

¹ This paper is an extract of my Master’s Thesis “The Voices of Independence: Reflections on Female Monastic Empowerment in Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery, Himachal Pradesh”, Nālandā University, 2018. For the extensive study see Sourajit Ghosh, “The Voices of Independence: Reflections on Female Monastic Empowerment In Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery, Himachal Pradesh” (Master’s Thesis., Nālandā University, Rajgir, India, 2018)

² See Kim Gutschow, *Being a Buddhist Nun: The Struggle for Enlightenment in the Himalayas*, (United States of America: Harvard University Press, 2004), 5

³ The four traditions in Tibetan Buddhism are Nyingma, Gelug, Kagyu and Sakya.

⁴ In *Saddharmapundarika-sutra*, the daughter of the sea dragon king Sagara attains enlightenment through the cultivation of compassion and training in Buddhist philosophy See this in Haeju Sunim. Can women Achieve Enlightenment? A critique Of Sexual Transformation for Enlightenment in *Buddhist Women across cultures* edited by Karma Lekshe Tsomo (United States of America: State University Of New York Press), 123.

⁵ See Hae –ju Sunim. Can women Achieve Enlightenment? A critique Of Sexual Transformation for Enlightenment in *Buddhist Women across cultures* edited by Karma Lekshe Tsomo (United States Of America: State University Of New York Press), 129 for detailed discussion on this issue. Further refer to Vinaya Texts Part III the Kullavagga, IV-XII translated from Pali by T.W Rhys Davids and Hermann Oldenberg “*Tenth Khandaka: On the duties of Bhikkhunis – X, I, 4*” (New Delhi: Motilal Banarisdass, 2014), 322. For a detailed idea on the nature of misogyny in Buddhist traditions refer to Diana Paul, “Buddhist attitude toward Women’s Bodies” *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, Vol. 1 (1981) 63-71 and Alice Collet edited “*Women in Early Indian Buddhism: Comparative Textual Studies*” (New York : Oxford University Press, 2014), 62

⁶ The issue of the full ordination of nuns is important, because without its revival even a senior most female practitioner who have spent half of her life in the practice of *dharma* are considered as a novice nun and not Bhikkhunis (dge slong ma). See Bhikshu Analayo and Bhiksuni Jampa Tsedroen. “The Gurudharma on Bhiksuni Ordination in Mūlasarvāstivāda Tradition,” *Journal of Buddhist ethics*, Vol 20, (2013): 743-774

⁷ See Kim Gutschow, *Being a Buddhist Nun: The Struggle for Enlightenment in the Himalayas*, (United States of America: Harvard University Press, 2004), 7. Also see Bhikshu Analayo and Bhiksuni Jampa Tsedroen, “The Gurudharma on Bhiksuni Ordination in Mūlasarvāstivāda Tradition,” *Journal of Buddhist ethics*, (ISSN 1076-9005, Vol 20, 2013): 743- 774.

the dual sangha ordination method⁸ deprive female monastic practitioners of the identity of being fully ordained ‘Bhikkhunis’.⁹ These three factors in combination create a vicious cycle for female monastics, leading to lack of education and confidence. Their acceptance and recognition are low in the Tibetan communities.

Anthropological study at Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery, Kangra, Himachal Pradesh

The main intention of this paper is to highlight the ‘shift’ in values that occur in response to gender inequality in Tibetan Buddhism, taking as the basis of this study a nunnery with a female abbess as their leader.¹⁰ I consciously chose the nuns of Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery located in Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, India¹¹ as my primary respondents in addressing the impact of the misogynist framework of Tibetan Buddhism on young practicing nuns. I documented the response of Ven. Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo¹² and around thirty young nuns at her nunnery.¹³ This paper aims to the strategies that modern young nuns, along with their female religious leaders, have come up with to counteract this deep-rooted misogyny, and to do so not at the expense of the competing order of monks. Secondly, Ven. Jetsunma¹⁴ is an accomplished *yoginī* herself, and my intention is to provide an overview of how she guides the monastic career of her young bright educated nuns at her nunnery through the revival of the broken Togdenma *yoginī* lineage.¹⁵

History and Background of DGL¹⁶

The nunnery was founded by Ven. Jetsunma in honor of her teacher, the 8th Khamtrul Rinpoche. She established the DGL Trust in 1999 to build a nunnery at Padhiarkar, Palampur in Kangra district. The reason behind establishing this nunnery was not only to encourage young Tibetan and Himalayan nuns to join the spiritual order, but also to revive the broken

⁷ See Committee For Bhikṣuṇī Ordination in The Tibetan Tradition (CBO) authored Revival of the Bhikṣuṇī vow in Tibetan Buddhist Tradition edited by Foundation for Buddhist Studies, 23. Also See http://www.bhiksuniordination.org/issue_faqs.html accessed on 3/2/18 at 12:48 P.M.

⁸ See “CBO- FAQ’s.” at http://www.bhiksuniordination.org/issue_faqs.html#methods accessed on 3/2/18 at 12:56 P.M.

⁹ See “Arguments on Full Ordination,” at <http://thubtenchodron.org/2007/08/arguments-full-ordination-women/> under the category of Berzin Archives accessed on 27/1/2018 at 2:10 PM.

¹⁰ I used the word shift because the impact of misogyny changes, based on perceptions of the local community and tensions that arise because of the integration and combination of international ideas with the ideas of the Tibetan community. Also look at Ann Heirman, “Buddhist Nuns: Between Past and Present,” *Brill, Numen*, Vol. 58, No. 5/6 (2011) : 615-616.

¹¹ “About DGL,” at <http://tenzinpalmo.com/> for details of the Nunnery.

¹² She is an accomplished *yoginī* of Togdenma *yoginī* tradition under *and* she is famous for her *Bodhisattva* vow. Just like goddess Aryā Tārā she took the vow of achieving enlightenment in a female body. See Vickie Mackenzie, “The Meeting,” in *Cave in the snow: A Western Woman’s quest for enlightenment* (Great Britain: Bloomsbury, 1998), 5

¹³ Some of the responses I have received from them were formalized and structured while some were lacking the same because of the lack of proficiency in English of some nuns, which limited my study.

¹⁴ She has spent twelve years in the caves of Tayul in Himachal Pradesh in Yogini retreat. See Vicki Mackenzie, *Cave in the Snow: A Western Woman’s quest for Enlightenment* (Great Britain: Bloomsbury Publications, 1998), 77-96. Also see “DGL- About Tayul Gonpa.” at <http://tenzinpalmo.com/jetsunma-tenzin-palmo/tayulgompa/> accessed on 27/03/18 at 6:47 P.M.

¹⁵ See “Togdenma Lineage,” at <http://tenzinpalmo.com/dongyu-gatsal-ling-nunnery/togdenma-lineage/> accessed on 20/01/2018 at 4:00 P.M.

¹⁶ From hence I will use the short form of Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery “DGL” for convenience.

lineage of Togdenma *yoginīs*.¹⁷ She expressed her deep concern about the transmission of the yoga to the nuns, as the number of Togden (rtogsldan) *yogīs* is very small and the knowledge has to be transmitted individually.¹⁸ It is believed that the Togdenma *yoginīs* were accomplished in the practice of ‘tummo,’ or psychic heat generation.¹⁹

Visiting DGL Nunnery

On my first visit, I was greeted by one of the senior nuns, Tsunma Aileen Berry. She introduced me to the nunnery. The walls of the main temple were beautifully decorated with Tibetanthangka paintings. The thangka paintings on the wall astonished me since they were unique.²⁰ On the right wall, one could see Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī preaching the *dharma* to the sangha of the nuns. On the left wall, it was *mahasiddha* Milarepa teaching the six yogas to his female disciples and the roof of the temple exhibited several female protective deities. This portrayal of female deities on the walls of the main temple is meant to inspire and motivate the young nuns.²¹

Discussion with Ven. Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo on Empowerment of Tibetan Nuns

On 13th December 2017 afternoon, I got the opportunity to conduct my interview of Ven. Jetsunma on several gender-related issues²² concerning Tibetan Buddhism. She focused on addressing the problems in a negation-affirmation style which was quite astonishing, yet wonderful. What I mean here is while answering my questions, she was quite clear of her three-fold role i.e. as a leader of the sangha of nuns, secondly as a social leader and thirdly as a feminist raising her voice against misogyny. On my first question relating to the misogynic nature of the early *Pali* texts and history of female monasticism in Tibetan Buddhism, she replied using a beautiful comparison in which she compared the young nuns with seeds which

¹⁷ See https://www.shambhala.com/snowlion_articles/dongyu-gatsal-ling-nunnery-and-the-yoginī-tradition/ accessed on 28/1/18 at 1:48 P.M. Also see Dongyu Gatsal Ling and the Yoginī Tradition By Tenzin Palmo at <https://www.shambhala.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/61.pdf> accessed on 28/1/2018 at 2:57 P.M. Also see the Winter, 2003 issue of the Snow Lion Newsletter to get a better knowledge of this Historical background and <http://tenzinpalmo.com/dongyu-gatsal-ling-nunnery/togdenma-lineage/> accessed on 28/1/18 at 1:08 P.M

¹⁸ See Ven. Tenzin Palmo, “*Reflections on a mountain lake: Teachings on practical Buddhism*” (Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 2002), 21

¹⁹ I also came to know about this tradition during conversation with Tsunma Aileen Berry, a senior aged nun at DGL.

²⁰ This initiative is very unique because in one of the most prominent anthropological study on Tibetan Nuns of Zangskar region by Kim Gutschow she mentions that she mentions that the wall paintings at the Tabo monastery in Spiti portray women with longish hair and they are not wearing robes (*chos gos*) unlike the fully ordained monks just below the painting of women, who are mentioned as *dgeslons*. The Zangskari imagery deals with depictions of envious wives, female ghouls, witches symbolizing women as a source of lust. who are subdued by tantric siddhas. In Japanese Mahayanist traditions, similar portrayals can be seen in the case of Japanese Kusoju paintings, which depict nine stages of decay in a female body emphasizing intrinsic impurity of the female body. For details see Kim Gutschow, “*Being a Buddhist Nun: The Struggle for Enlightenment in the Himalayas*” (United States of America: Harvard University Press, 2004), 96.

²¹ Gail Chin, “The Gender of Buddhist Truth: The Female Corpse in a Group of Japanese Paintings,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 25, no. 3/4 (1998): 277-317. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30234031> accessed on 18/2/1018 at 10:50 A.M. Kusoju is the illustration of nine stages in decomposition of a female corpse, which was popular in Japanese art from about the 13th to 19th centuries. Japan is a country which follows Mahayana Buddhism.

²² The entire study and the interview is very extensive addressing various gender related issues but for this paper I am sticking to the discussion on Spiritual Empowerment of Tibetan Nuns through Revival of Togdenma lineage.

have not been watered and have not received any sunlight, thereby remaining in the dark, but who are now in the sun and watered. She emphasized the nuns who went for the *yoginī* retreat in the caves of the Himalayas, because this will lead to deep realizations. She said “I want my nuns not just to be learned but also to be accomplished so that the knowledge just does not stay on head but really enters their heart. We are the Kagyu lineage, practice is the most important thing for us”. At DGL Ven. Jetsunma encourages the young nuns to receive both formal and scriptural education.²³ She also encourages her nuns to be social leaders, teachers etc.²⁴

The Need of ‘Togdenma Yoginī practices’ for Spiritual Inner Empowerment – Generation of Inner fire: ‘gtum mo’²⁵

“At one time the previous Khamtrul Rinpoche had formally placed a long silk khata around my neck and said that in Tibet there had been many togdenmas but now the tradition had been broken. Therefore, he prayed that I would re-establish this precious yogini lineage. For me, this has been a sacred commitment”. – **Ven Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo**²⁶

If we reflect deeply on the songs of Milarepa, we can see how he believed in the superior spiritual potential of women. He emphasized the six yogas of Naropa.²⁷ One can truly realize emptiness and the true nature of phenomenon only through the dissolution of the barriers of gender and inner spiritual empowerment.²⁸ In the biography of Milarepa, two of his disciples Gampopa and Rechungpa are addressed as the sun and moon disciples.²⁹ It was, in fact, an indication that they were lineage holders who had mastered inner heat yoga. In 11th -12th century, the practice of inner heat yoga became prominent with *mahasiddha* Milarepa.³⁰ This knowledge was transmitted by Milarepa to Rechungpa, which was further taught by Rechungpa to Dorjé Drak, Repa Zhiwa Ö, Ngandzong Repa, Seban Repa, Khyira Repa, Drigom Repa, Lengom Repa, Repa Sangyé Kyap, Shengom Repa, Dampa Gyakpuwa, and Tönpa Śākyaguṇa.³¹ Some of the realized Togden *yoginīs* who were disciples of Milarepa were Rechungma, Padarbum, Sahle Aui and Tseringma.^{32,33} Unfortunately, the tradition of *yoginīs*

²³ During my visit to DGL I was informed that few of the senior nuns received their Geshema/ Khenmo degree in the year 2016 and many other nuns are also preparing for Khenmo exams. See Summer 2017 edition of “GATSAL” newsletter, Issue 33 page no 10 at <http://tenzinpalmo.com/dongyu-gatsalling-nunnery/gatsal-newsletter/> accessed on 22/2/2018 at 8:00 P.M

²⁴ See Summer 2015 edition of “Gatsal” page no 3 for the details of this at www.tenzinpalmo.com

²⁵ It can be defined as a tantric yogic meditation practice that produces an experience of bliss together with an attendant feeling of warmth throughout the body. The meaning of the word ‘tummo’ is a fierce -lady.

²⁶ <http://tenzinpalmo.com/dongyu-gatsal-ling-nunnery/togdenma-lineage/> accessed on 28/1/18 at 1:08 P.M

²⁷ Lama Thubten Yeshe, “*The Bliss Of Inner Fire: Heart Practice of the Six Yogas of Naropa. A Commentary on Je Tsongkhapa's Having the Three Convictions: A guide to the stages of six yogas of Naropa,*” ed. by Robina Courtin and Ailsa Cameron (United States Of America: Wisdom Publications, 1998), 1-13.

²⁸ See Judith Simmer-Brown, *Dakini's Warm Breath: The Feminine Principle in Tantric Buddhism* (United States Of America: Shambhala Publications, 2002) , 179-177

²⁹ Gtsaṅ-smyon Heruka. *The Life of Milarepa*. Trans. Lobsang P Lhalungpa (United States Of America: Shambhala Publications, 1985), 146-198.

³⁰ See Ani Tenzin Palmo, *Reflections On a Mountain Lake* (Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 2002), 82.

³¹ This tradition has mainly passed from Milarepa's disciple Rechunpa. See Ani Tenzin Palmo, *Reflections On a Mountain Lake* (Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 2002), 21

³² See <http://www.dharmafellowship.org/library/essays/women-buddhas.htm> accessed on 29/1/18 at 12:35 P.M.

³³ See Tsangnyon Heruka, *The Life of Milarepa*. Trans. by Andrew Quintman (United States of America: Penguin Publications, 2010), 44.

does not find much recognition in Tibetan scriptural compositions and was lost with time. Simultaneously, this secret knowledge was transmitted by Milarepa's disciple Gampopa³⁴ to the lineage holders of Drukpa Kagyu tradition. The knowledge passed on from the Gyalwang Drukpas to the Gyalwa Dokhampa Ngawang Khamtrul Rinpoche lineage. The first Khamtrul Rinpoche, inspired by the legacy of Rechungpa, made the attempt to revive the *yoginī* tradition and constructed the Kham monastery Tibet to promote the practice. According to the lineage, the knowledge was transmitted to Eighth Khamtrul Rinpoche, who managed to come to India at Kalimpong, and then Himachal Pradesh with only ten Togden monks after the Cultural Revolution in China.³⁵ He chose Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo as his disciple in 1970s. He aspired to revive the lost *yoginī* tradition under the leadership of Ven. Jetsunma. On the other hand, another disciple Tsoknyi Rinpoche carried on the tradition in Tibet after the 1980s by setting up the Gebchak Gonpa nunnery. Presently, the tradition can be also traced to the Tsoknyi nuns of Nepal.³⁶

Need for the Revival of a Broken Togdenma Lineage

The best possible way to answer this question is to track the Togden tradition back to the developmental phase of the Kagyu lineage. Tilopa received the four transmissions, namely illusionary body or *Guhyasamaja* from Indian masters Nagarjuna and Matangipa, dream yoga from Caryapa, the practice of clear light from Lavapa and the fourth transmission was (bka-babs-bzhi) Hevajra, Cakrasamvara/inner heat yoga 'Tummo' from the *dakinis* Khandra Kalpa Zangma³⁷ and Subhagni.³⁸ These dakinis were inspired by Hevajra Tantra.³⁹ The practice of 'Tummo' became dominant in the 11th century with Milarepa and his chief disciples Gampopa and Rechungpa. Milarepa and Rechungpa were praised for being able to provide the teaching of this unique practice to *yoginīs*.⁴⁰ Though the biography of Milarepa mentions the name of few Togdenmas, the lineage of *yoginī* s seems to have broken after this. Even if there were *yoginīs* practicing the yoga after the time of Milarepa and Rechungpa, their names were not acknowledged because of the patriarchal nature of the Tibetan lineages. A clear understanding can be developed tracing the lineage of Gampopa. It seems that the knowledge of tummo was transmitted by him to Phagmo Drupa and then to Lingchen Repa. Further, he (Lingchen Repa)

³⁴ See Ven. Khnenpo Karthar Rinpoche, *The Instructions of Gampopa: A Precious Garland of the Supreme Path* edited by Laura M. Roth and David N. McCarthy (New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1996) and Jampa Mackenzie Stewart, *The Life of Gampopa: The Incomparable Dharma Lord of Tibet*. (New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1995) for the contribution of Gampopa towards Kagyu Lineage.

³⁵ See Dongyu Gatsal Ling and the Yogini Tradition By Tenzin Palmo at <https://www.shambhala.com/wp/wpcontent/uploads/2017/03/61.pdf> accessed on 28/1/2018 at 2:57 P.M. Also see the Winter, 2003 issue of the Snow Lion Newsletter to get a better knowledge of this Historical background.

³⁶ Tsangyang Gyamtso (his root lama was The First Tsoknyi Rinpoche) founded Gebchak Gonpa in 1892, adapting practices in the Ratna Lingpa tradition to specifically suit the female mind-body experience. For details see <http://gebchakgonpa.org/about/> accessed at 20/3/18 at 4:00 P.M. Also see <https://www.tsoknyinepalnuns.org/nangchen-nuns/> accessed on 15/1/2018 at 9:00 P.M.

³⁷ See "About Tilopa," at http://www.khandro.net/tibbud_tilopa.htm accessed on 27/03/18 at 4:10P.M

³⁸ See Lama Thubten Yeshe, "*The Bliss Of Inner Fire: Heart Practice of the Six Yogas of Naropa. A Commentary on Je Tsongkhapa's Having the Three Convictions: A guide to the stages of six yogas of Naropa*," ed. by Robina Courtin and Ailsa Cameron (United States Of America: Wisdom Publications, 1998), 132 and David B. Gray, "*A study and Translation of The Cakrasamvara Tantra: The Discourse of Sri Heruka*," ed. Thomas F. Yarnall (New York: The American Institute of Buddhist Studies at Columbia University, 2007), 42.

³⁹ John C. Huntington and Dina Bangdel, *The Circle Of Bliss: Buddhist Meditational Art*, (Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2003), 42.

⁴⁰ See "Togdenma Yogini Lineage," at https://www.shambhala.com/snowlion_articles/dongyiv-gatsal-ling-nunnery-and-the-yogini-tradition/ accessed on 28/1/18/at 1:48 P.M

transmitted the knowledge to his disciple Tsangpa Gyare Yeshe Dorje⁴¹ who was the founder of the *Drukpa Kagyu* Lineage (12th Century) which is the lineage of both Tashi Jong Rinpoche and DGL nuns. He is regarded as the first Gyalwang Drukpa.⁴² Eventually, the knowledge passed on to the hands of the Gyalwang Drukpa Rinpoches and from the fourth Gyalwang Drukpa Kunkhyen Pema Karpo, the knowledge passed on to his disciple the first Gyalwa Dokhampa Ngawang Tenphel also known as First Khamtrul Rinpoche. The first Khamtrul Rinpoche was the founder of Khampnagar Monastery at Kham in Tibet, which became a residence for the Togden *yogī* monks.⁴³ Following the lineage, the knowledge was transmitted to the Eighth Khamtrul Rinpoche, who came to India after the Cultural Revolution of China and settled at Tashi Jong Monastery at Palampur. His three prominent disciples are the Ninth Khamtrul Rinpoche Gyalwa Dokhampa Shedrub Nyima, Ven. Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo and The Third Tsoknyi Rinpoche who was declared an emanation of Rechungpa. Presently the Ninth Khamtrul Rinpoche is the head of Tashi Jong monastery, Ven Jetsunma is the head of DGL Nunnery and Tsonkyi Nuns can be found at Gebchak Gonpa nunnery in Tibet and Nepal. The three respectable masters provide a unique opportunity to the Togdenma nuns to be accomplished by following the supreme inner heat yoga.⁴⁴ The aspiring Togdenmas are guided and supervised by Togden Achos⁴⁵ who is the most senior Togden at Tashi Jong monastery.⁴⁶ Milarepa regarded ‘Tummo’ as the most supreme form of *yogīc* practice⁴⁷ as it leads to the union of the three inner channels and the *vidam*⁴⁸ is placed on the heart cakra.⁴⁹ This leads to the generation of ‘inner heat’ but this process is a subjective experience.⁵⁰ Visualizations and realisations differ from practitioner to practitioner.⁵¹

Conclusion

How can one define ‘empowerment’ when it comes to Tibetan nuns? Is it merely the social and religious status of fully ordained *bhikṣuṇīs* or empowerment in terms of inner spiritual capabilities that comes from deep realizations generated out of profound meditative and yogic practices? Gender scholarship on Tibetan Buddhism has always demanded that nuns achieve the fully ordained status to achieve true equality. I do support the full ordination of nuns, which is a pressing concern of our times. However, is it justified to restrict such an important milestone merely based on lack of quorum in dual sangha method? What should be thought about is the situation of the elderly nuns who served the *dharma* throughout with the

⁴¹ See “Drukpa Kagyu.” at <http://www.drukpa.org/en/about-me/60-drukpa-lineage/the-pastreincarnations/286-tsangpa-gyare-yeshe-dorje> accessed at 27/03/18 at 3:34 P.M.

⁴² See “Drukpa Lineages,” at <http://www.drukpa.org/en/about-me/60-drukpa-lineage/the-past-reincarnations/286-tsangpa-gyare-yeshe-dorje> accessed at 27/03/18 at 3:34 P.M.

⁴³ See Sourajit Ghosh, “The Voices of Independence: Reflections On Female Monastic Empowerment In Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery, Himachal Pradesh” (Master’s Thesis., Nālandā University, Rajgir, India, 2018), 42-48

⁴⁴ See “About Gebchak Gonpa,” at <http://gebchakgonpa.org/about/> accessed on 27/03/18 at 12:37 P.M.

⁴⁵ See DGL. “Togdenma Lineage,” at <https://togdens.org/information/togdenmas/> accessed on 27/03/18 at 11:54 P.M.

⁴⁶ <http://tenzinpalmo.com/dongyu-gatsal-ling-nunnery/togdenma-lineage/> accessed on 27/03/2018 at 12:00 P.M.

⁴⁷ See Lama Thubten Yeshe, “*The Bliss Of Inner Fire: Heart Practice of the Six Yogas of Naropa. A Commentary on Je Tsongkhapa’s Having the Three Convictions: A guide to the stages of six yogas of Naropa,*” ed. by Robina Courtin and Ailsa Cameron (United States Of America: Wisdom Publications, 1998), 132

⁴⁸ The worshipped deity.

⁴⁹ See David B. Gray, “*A study and Translation of The Cakramvara Tantra: The Discourse of Sri Heruka,*” ed. Thomas F. Yarnall (New York: The American Institute of Buddhist Studies at Columbia University, 2007), 42

⁵⁰ See Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, *Guide to Dakini Land: The Highest Yoga Tantra practice of Buddha Vajrayogini*, (London: Tharpa Publications, 1991), 213-215

⁵¹ See Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, *Into the Heart Of Life* (New York: Snow Lion Publications, 2011), 106

status of ‘novice nuns’. How can equality be achieved when the monks are well educated, and nuns are not? Even if the full ordination happens in the coming years, it’s an opportunity for young nuns to train and educate themselves. Regarding the importance of the situation, what should be promoted is a healthy balance between scriptural education and yogic practices. On asking the same questions to Tsunma Aileen Berry, she told me that both scriptural and ritualistic/yogic training will bring about a win-win situation. She replied, “How can one have a Ph.D. on Chocolate without having tasted one?”.⁵² This made me think once more that *yoginī* practices should be the ultimate platform for nuns to realize their inner potential and proves one’s spiritual capability in front of the whole world. The revival of the Togdenma *yoginīs* is extremely important for the young nuns of DGL to prove their social and spiritual capabilities and be exceptional among all the nunneries in India and abroad.⁵³

⁵² See Sourajit Ghosh, “The Voices of Independence: Reflections On Female Monastic Empowerment In Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery, Himachal Pradesh” (Master’s Thesis., Nālandā University, Rajgir, India, 2018) , 54-55. Available at Nālandā University Library.

⁵³ See “DGL- The world need yoginis.” At <http://tenzinpalmo.com/the-world-needs-yoginis/> accessed on 29/01/2018 at 12:50PM.

Tran Hong Lien & Nguyen Thi Hong Cuc

Introduction

Buddhism was propagated to Vietnam from India in the 3rd century BCE by two monks, Sona and Uttara.. However, due to various reasons, the sect was disrupted. In 1938, Ho Tong restored the sect himself by transmitting it from Cambodia to South Vietnam. This group survived only in 1017 CE. Since the establishment of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha in 1981, Vietnam has had three sects: the Mahayana, Hinayana and Mendicant sect. Hinayana consists of two groups: the Vietnamese, called Nam tong Kinh; and the Khmer, called Nam tong Khmer.

Today in Vietnam, the ordination only accepts the monks. Nuns are considered as one of them (Bhikkhu, monks, nuns, lay women).

This paper mentions the difficulties and aspirations of the nuns in Vietnam who belong to the King people's Theravada, especially those nuns at Vien Khong monastery. We conducted extensive interviews on 35 (05 Bhikkhuni, 25 Sadini, 05 nuns) people at Vien Khong monastery. The nuns there wish to be fully ordained. This paper also addresses the role of Theravada in Vietnam in catering for these nuns to be fully ordained and recognized.

Summary of Theravada Buddhists in Vietnam and Vien Khong monastery

1) Theravada Buddhists in Vietnam

Theravada Buddhists (also known as Theravāda) means “teaching of the ancients, or doctrine of the elders” (Thera means elders, vāda means doctrine), and is therefore also called “Sect of the Elders”. It emerged from the Sthavira-descending sect Hinayana, especially from the branch of Vibhajyavadin, which was founded by Moggaliputta Tissa, and was transmitted to Sri Lanka 250 years BC.

It was in Sri Lanka that Theravāda was officially founded in the seventh century, and subsequently propagated to South-East Asian countries. Being the only branch of Hinayana until now, Theravāda considers itself the earliest form of Buddhism. Scriptures of Theravāda was written Pali and was believed by its followers to be the true words of Buddha. Theravāda doctrine is based mostly on the Four Noble Truths, Twelve Nidānas and Anatman. Theravāda emphasizes self-redemption: human beings can reach redemption with their own strength, by complying with Shila (moral standards) and living a religious life.¹ Therefore, it can be seen that Theravāda is not totally Hinayana, because “In reality, Theravāda merely emerged from one of the 18 Buddhist sects in India, brought into Sri Lanka in the third century BC, and subsequently developed and was divided into different branches before it was actually named Theravāda in the seventh century (..) The ideology of Theravada is enormous and it was only branches of this ideology that was propagated from India. The collection of all these branches is a transmission system called *Phat giao Nam truyen*. As there was only one branch that was transmitted into Vietnam, it does not suffice to address this branch as ‘system’, and therefore does not suffice to be the representative (..)

¹ Từ điển Minh triết phương Đông 1997, translated by Le Dien from *Dictionnaire de la sagesse orientale*, publisher. KHXH. Hà Nội, pg. 734.

We could conclude that the name “*Phat giao Nam truyen*” is only used to address a certain Buddhist ideology in the Southern region according to the tradition of classifying the Theravada.²

Theravāda was transmitted into the South of Vietnam from Cambodia. The propagation of its doctrine and teaching was thanks to a monk named Le Van Giang. Parallel to his absorption, learning and preaching of Buddhism to the Vietnamese in Cambodia was his enlightenment of the ideology. This was marked by his ordaining event, which was organized with the presence of the vice-supreme patriarch of Cambodia on 1940. Le Van Giang’s Dharma name was “Ho Tong”.

In the early days of when Buddhism was transmitted into Vietnam from Cambodia, Theravada Buddhists were called “*Dao Phat Thich Ca*”, which was still primitive and did not have the characteristics of a religious organization. From 1957 to 1981, the name was changed to “*Giao hoi Tang gia Nguyen Thuy Viet Nam*” and since 1981 again to “*Phat giao Nam tong Kinh*” to distinguish itself from the “*Phat giao Nam tong Khmer*”

After 80 years in operation, Theravada Buddhists in Vietnam has been continuously developed by various monks and patriarch: Hộ Tông (1893-1981); Thiện Luật (1898-1969); Giới Nghiêm; Bửu Chơn (1911-1979); Ấn Lâm; Tối Thắng; Siêu Việt; TT.Kim Quang; Pháp Tri, Pháp Siêu; Thiện Dũng, Giác Minh; Thiện Tâm; Viên Minh; layman Nguyễn văn Hiếu (1896-1979).

Statistically, Theravada in Vietnam had more than 200 monks in 1980 and 824 in 2015 [Report of Central Vietnam Buddhist sangha’s 2015 work report]

The most concentrated areas include Ho Chi Minh city, Dong Nai, Ba Ria – Vung Tau and Hue. Until recently, there have been 106 Theravada organization (for the Kinh / Viet people) nationally including pagodas and monasteries. The grand monastery of Theravada in Vietnam is Buu Quang pagoda located in Thu Duc, founded in 1938 and was put into operation in 1939.

2) Vien Khong monastery

Together with the advent of Theravada within the Kinh (Viet) Buddhist nuns also emerged. Dieu Dang, the first ordained woman in Cambodia, returned to Vietnam and became the supreme Nun of the Vietnamese Theravada. Dieu Dang is the daughter of Le Van Giang, whom carried the Dharma name “Ho Tong” after being ordained and was considered the founder of the Vietnamese Theravada. As the number of Theravada nuns gradually increased, the separation of ordained males from females is necessary and was approved by the Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam. Currently there have been 9 locations dedicated for Buddhist nuns which were recognized by the Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam. Vien Khong monastery is located in Ba Ria – Vung Tau and is under the guidance of a Bhikkuni named Lieu Phap, who is also the vice-dean of Faculty of Dharma English at Vietnam Buddhist Institute in Ho Chi Minh city.

Vien Khong establishes its own regulations and monastic training for nuns. The daily routine consists of 4 sessions. Nuns, Siladhara or Silavatiin Pali, means the rule-keeper. Another term, Silacarini, indicates nuns who dedicate their whole lives to live and practice the Buddhist doctrines. The doctrines do not specify a given Path for the nuns, as both the Noble Eightfold and Tenfold Path do, because of the willingness of the nuns to be ordained and live their lives in the monastery, thus forming the nun community.

Monastic rules for Bhikkhu and nuns of Theravada: 227 rules for a Bhikkhu for monk. There are no Bhikkhuni, but only nuns. Nuns are considered one of the Fourfold disciples

² Thích Thiện Ngộ (2016) *Tìm hiểu về danh xưng “Phật giáo Nam tông” trong hệ thống Phật giáo Việt Nam*. Văn Hóa Phật giáo, volume. 254, dated 1/8/2016.

(Monks, Nuns, Upasaka, Upasika) . When Buddha was still on Earth, Mahapajapati Gotami and 500 other women within the royal family accepted Buddha's disciplines, were ordained and followed the Eight Commandments. This monastery community existed until 1017 CE. "The last evidence for the existence of the original Bhikkhuni Sangha in a country following Theravāda dates from Sri Lanka in the eleventh century"[<https://thubtenchodron.org/2007/09/full-ordination-women-restore>].

The reason for this disruption was because of Portugal's and the Netherland's policies of eradicating Buddhism. Myanmar Buddhists came to restore the monk community, but not the nun community. This was because of the strict rules on ordainment. Nowadays we can still see Bhikkhuni in a few countries (Sri Lanka, Myanmar...), even in Vietnam. Since 1998 there is always an ordainment event for Bhikkhuni in Sri Lanka every year. In Vietnam, the first 4 Bhikkhuni in South Buddhism were recognized in 2002. These four, Ni Liễu Pháp, Dhamma name Viditadhamma; Như Liên, Dhamma name Susanta; Tịnh Nguyễn, Dhamma name Dhammananda và Huệ Minh, Dhamma name Pannabhasa, were ordained in Sri Lanka. They have been all successful, especially Ms. Lieu Pháp, who has acquired her Ph.D.

There are 2 systems within the Theravada Nun Community: nuns and Sadini – Bhikkhuni. There are currently 24 Bhikkhuni within the community³; however, they have not been recognized by the Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam. On the other side, there have been 700 nuns nationally⁴.

Wishes of the nuns at Vien Khong monastery

Having officially been in operation for 80 years in Vietnam, Theravāda made great contributions to the diverse Vietnamese Buddhist culture. While other South-East Asian countries such as Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Lao, Cambodia comply with the pre-sectarian tradition and have made Theravāda their national religion, Vietnam welcomed both sects: Northern and Southern Buddhism. There are also the Viet people and Khmer people within the Southern Buddhism in Vietnam. This unique characteristic has given Vietnamese Buddhists a more comprehensive view about the Buddha's teachings. This also created a generous, easy-to-integrate, non-squeamish view for the Vietnamese Buddhists to further add flexibility to their actions, both in their monastery lives and daily routines. This also helps explain why some of the nuns in Vietnam went to Sri Lanka to be ordained, despite the Vietnamese Buddhism's strict regulations for not allowing Bhikkhuni. In 2002, the first 4 Bhikkhuni went to Sri Lanka for ordainment. The very first Bhikkhuni is Lieu Phap. Together with her Ph.D., after returning to Vietnam, she has provided scientific and modern guidance to the nuns at Vien Khong monastery. The monastery makes use of modern digital means to aid the cultivation of Buddhism effectively. This is one of the many reasons that motivates the nuns to push forward, follow the complete commandments of *ordination* and help others in their cultivation.

According to our conducted survey, the majority of the nuns at the monastery wish to be fully ordained. Below are some of their comments.

B.Tâm: "I would like to become a Bhikkhuni for our journey to enlightenment to be officially recognized (..) I believe in the future there will be more countries, both in the East and the West, that can establish Bhikkhuni communities ⁵"

³ Data provided by Vien Khong monastery on 8/2018.

⁴ Many authors (2016) *Nữ giới Phật giáo Việt Nam. Truyền thống và hiện đại*. Publisher: Vietnam National University HCMC, pg. 11.

⁵ Extensive interview with nun B.Tâm, 19/8/2018. Interviewer : Nguyễn Thị Hồng Cúc.

G.Tĩnh: “Only women understand the psychological and physical aspects of women and thus guide other women. Nuns, therefore, must be fully ordained to become Bhikkhuni”⁶

H.Đức: “I am a woman, I have to study and cultivate Buddhism so that others know that I am not any less than others, that women can also live a monastery life and achieve great things like what monks can do”⁷.

H.Tâm: “I wish to have a Bhikkhuni community recognized by Buddhist Venerables and followers. Besides my time here at the monastery, I still have my family, and they know that I spend the rest of my life at the monastery without ever being ordained, without ever becoming a Bhikkhuni”⁸.

However, due to the Theravada tradition of not restoring Bhikkhuni to the time when Buddha was still on Earth, “inequality is still happening and causing difficulties in the nuns’ practicing of Buddhism when studying in said countries” (...) When studying abroad, if a Sadi or a nun study together with a monk, that is a not a problem, but if this woman is already a Bhikkhuni, teachers and monks will look at them more strictly. It is a shame to study Buddhism and bear these things at the same time. If they are truly strong, they will overcome this”⁹.

The nuns’ mental strength reflect their determination: “If I follow tradition, do nothing wrong and hold on to my chosen path, those eyes looking at me are just outsiders’ opinions; what is important is my own choice and my own path”¹⁰.

As monastery organizer and the first Bhikkhuni to ever go abroad for ordainment, Lieu Phap truly has a generous and righteous view. She said: “I would still like two parallel systems, whoever wants to become a nun can become a nun, and whoever wants to become a Bhikkhuni can be fully ordained (...) As becoming a Bhikkhuni is not easy: keeping 10 disciplines is difficult, let alone 311.”¹¹ She further stated: “At the beginning of 2019, an international Buddhist event will be held in India, 10 nuns at Vien Khong will go there to be fully ordained, plus another 5 from Tinh An Lan Nha monastery. We already have a strong Bhikkhuni community, but it is difficult to expand, as there is a need to find hộ Tăng, công quả, and Bhikkhuni are not allowed to do the farming and cooking. Currently there are about 20 Bhikkhuni in Vietnam, and thus we could organize a big ordainment event, but because we are not officially recognized, we still have to send our nuns abroad for ordainment”¹²[17].

Compared to countries that follow Northern or Southern Buddhism, Southern Buddhism in Vietnam still plays an important part in building the unique characteristics of Buddhism in Vietnam. Textual materials of both Northern and Southern Buddhism have been translated in to Vietnamese and propagated nationally as well as to Vietnamese overseas. Monastery and daily activities have proved the flexibility of integration Buddhism. The practice of Vipassana has helped Buddhists see clearly the relationship between the body and he mind, bringing peace to their lives.

Conclusion

After almost one century of development, Vietnamese Theravada has developed its own unique characteristics, which greatly contributed to the flourishing of Vietnamese Buddhist culture. The interviews conducted with the nuns at Vien Khong monastery shows that

⁶ Extensive interview with nun G.Tĩnh, 19/8/2018. Interviewer : Nguyễn Thị Hồng Cúc.

⁷ Extensive interview with nun H.Đức, 19/8/2018. Interviewer : Nguyễn Thị Hồng Cúc.

⁸ Extensive interview with nun H.Tâm, 19/8/2018. Interviewer : Nguyễn Thị Hồng Cúc.

⁹ Extensive interview with nun Khiết Tâm, 19/8/2018. Interviewer : Nguyễn Thị Hồng Cúc.

¹⁰ Extensive interview with nun Khiết Tâm, 19/8/2018. Interviewer : Nguyễn Thị Hồng Cúc.

¹¹ Extensive interview with nun Bhikkhuni Liễu Pháp, 18/3/2018. Interviewer : Lý Hồng Tuyền

¹² Extensive interview with nun Bhikkhuni Liễu Pháp, 18/3/2018. Interviewer : Lý Hồng Tuyền.

the nuns long for ordainment to become Bhikkhuni in Vietnamese Theravada. We hope this will help leaders in the Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam to take a closer look at the issue of nuns' ordainment. If flexibility has been a prominent feature of Vietnamese Buddhism throughout its history, then it is up to us to show that flexible enough to help the nuns to be fully ordained and officially recognized. This will not only bring strength to the nun community, strength to the practice of Buddhism, but also live up to ideal of “depending on grace, unchanging.” Whatever country Buddhism is transmitted into, its ultimate goal is to bring peace and happiness to the people, and it is needed for the people.

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Panna Theri

Introduction

Myanmar nuns (*thila-shins*) are almswomen who survive through the donations of laity. They are not recognized as *Bhikkhunīs* since the monk community (*Saṅgha*)¹ does not recognize it. Lay devotees pay respect to *thila-shins* differently than monks. They have a tougher monastic life than monks and are not as free as laypeople. Although *thila-shins* have been facing cultural and religious discrimination for many decades, they have stood strong in their faith until now. Their challenges are related to educational and social factors. Even though there are well-learned *thila-shins*, less than ten are regarded as international scholastic authors. They engage in traditional teaching at monastic schools in their mother tongue. According to my experience, *thila-shins* face difficulties in studying Buddhism overseas. The shortage of English-speaking *thila-shins* is an obstacle. *Thila-shins* perform ritual practices at communal celebrations, but they rarely engage in compassionate and spiritual caregiving. In fact, *thila-shins* are in a better position to help lay communities than monks, who have to observe many *vinaya* rules. This paper argues that instead of asking for the position of *Bhikkhunī*, they should instead focus on keeping high moral values, being in-line with international education, and engaging in spiritual and social-responsibility programs would be realistic attempts at advancing their status in Buddhist community.

Who are ‘*thila-shins*’?

The lineage of *thila-shin* started in 3rd Century AD, during *Pyu* period. They were called ‘*Paribbājikā*’. The term ‘*thila-shin*’ was used only in the earlier part of *Konbaung* period (1752-1885 A.D.)². The term *thila* derives from Pāli word *silā*, which refers to ethical conduct and moral practice. In Myanmar language, *shin* means the "possessor" or "owner." Therefore, *thila-shin* means a person who possesses *sīla*. Since *thila-shin* belongs to the lineage of *pabbajja* recluses, they usually observe the eight precepts. Some at meditation centres observe 10 precepts.

During the *Konbaung* period, there were two prominent pioneers, *Me Kinn* and *May Nat Pe*, who introduced monastic education to Buddhist women in Mandalay Palace. They were honored by the King *Mindon*, who encouraged his daughters and girls in the Palace to learn Buddhist literature from these two nuns. There was no *thila-shin-sarthintike*³ during that period. Nuns were invited to the Palace to teach the *Dhamma*. The lineage of these two pioneers continued teaching Buddhist women and nuns, carrying on the tradition of *thila-shin-sarthintike*, which is now well recognized by the government and people in Myanmar.

Monastic status of *thila-shins* in contemporary community

In 1982, the association of *thila-shin* was formed officially. Nun representatives are elected on the basis of their monastic education and qualifications, so all of them are educated

¹ In this paper, I use the terms ‘Monks, *Saṅgha*, *Bhikkhus*.’ They all are in the same meaning and represent for the male monastic.

² Htun, R. (2001), Lwin, S. (tr.). *The Modern Buddhist Nun*. Yangon: Parami Bookshop. pp.5-6.

³ *Thila-shin-Sarthintike*: Nunneries for learning Buddhist literatures.

nuns who are heads of nunnery schools.⁴ The State *Saṅgha Mahā Nāyaka* officially endorsed *Thila-shin Kyintwut*⁵ in 1994, which included specific guidelines for the nuns. Thus, the community of Myanmar nuns stand under the guidance of the monks, *Saṅghas*.

Table (1). Status of *Thila-Shins* in Contemporary Myanmar

Description	<i>Thila-shin</i> in Myanmar'
Social status	<i>Thila-shins</i> in contemporary Myanmar are not regarded as complete female equivalents of the monks, although they renounce the worldly life. On the other hand, people understand that they are not laywomen or householders either.
Civil status	Both monks and <i>thila-shins</i> hold 'religious identity cards' under the same title of 'member of the religious order.'
Alms-round and alms-food	Monks go out for alms-round every early morning and receive cooked food. <i>Thila-shins</i> go out for alms twice a week and receive raw food (eg. rice). They need to cook by themselves.
Ceremony invitation	Monks are invited to preach at events: donation ceremonies for birthday and reception, novice ordinations, housewarming ceremonies and so on. Nuns are normally invited for reciting at the funerals.
Perspective of laities	According to my experience, many male laities are hesitant to bow to <i>thila-shins</i> because they think that they are superior to women. Generally, devotees have more faith in monks. While a monastery is receiving meal donations a few times a week, a nunnery is rarely getting it once a month.
Survival	Monasteries survive with alms-round, food sent by householders nearby, and meal donations of ceremonies done at monastery. However, nunneries survive only with alms-round twice a week and depend on cash received from selling extra raw rice from alms. They usually store alms-dry food (potatoes and beans) for daily meals.
Opportunity for Buddhist studies and Religious Exams (Local)	Nuns are allowed to sit for the canonical exams such as the <i>Pathamabyan</i> and <i>Samanekyaw</i> . However, they are not allowed to sit for the <i>Tipiṭakadhara</i> , <i>Tipiṭakakovida</i> , and <i>Abhivaṃsa</i> exams, which are the highest canonical exams in Myanmar.
Opportunity for Buddhist studies and Religious Exams (International)	Beginning in recent years, nuns started to go out for studies and exams overseas (eg. Sri Lanka, India, and Thailand). They can pursue BA, MA, and PhD degrees. However, few nuns can go out due to high expenses and poor English proficiency.

⁴ Kawanami, H. (2007), 'The Bhikkhunī Ordination Debate: Global Aspirations, Local Concerns, with special emphasis on the views of the monastic community in Burma,' *Buddhist Studies Review*, DOI: 10.1558/bsrv.v24i2.226. p.239.

⁵ *Kyintwut*, Myanmar word, means 'conduct' in English.

Supportive Role	<p>Nuns are pleased to serve monks and regard it as great merit. <i>Daw Esuvadi</i>, at age 85, founder of <i>Esuvadi</i> nunnery mentioned that there is a long <i>samsāra</i> (circle of rebirth) in which we all have been slaves for sons, daughters and husbands. We had to cook, wash, and look after their welfare.⁶</p> <p>This paper proposes that nature of support by nuns should be upgraded. They can advance their status by teaching, and engaging in welfare activities.</p>
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New Challenges

For this paper, I had conversations with nineteen *thila-shins* to find out their current new challenges.

(1) Education

Respondent ‘A’ highlighted education. Most *thila-shins* find difficulty in passing *Pathamabyan* and *Sāmanekyaw* exams. Repeated failures in exams demotivate them and force them to disrobe. On the other hand, there is a big shortage of Pariyatti teachers (especially for *Dhammācariya* exams).

(2) Life security

Respondent ‘B’, a 22-year old, said the life of *thila-shins* is difficult. The one and only chance for a *thila-shins* is to become a teacher at nunneries or *ba-ka* schools. Nowadays, those chances are diminishing and as a result there is no guarantee of earning a living. Since most of them are ordained at young age, they do not know how to earn money. Thus, the life of a disrobed *thila-shins* is risky and uncertain.

(3) English language is essential

Respondent ‘C’ is inspired to improve her skills in English, Computer and other *lokiya* subjects. She believes a well-learned *thila-shins* can rise up to an international level. All respondents agreed that it is important to be fluent in English. Respondents ‘D’ and ‘E’ said that young *thila-shins* are eager to learn English, but some leaders at nunneries do not let the students to learn because they believe learning English may spoil a nun.

(4) Decrease in numbers of *thila-shins*

There are three main causes in the decreasing numbers of *thila-shins*.

1. Shortage in new generation: In the past, parents from countryside encouraged the daughters to become *thila-shins*. At present, both parents and children want to work (some in overseas) and earn money.
2. Older generation is getting smaller: Most of the leading *thila-shins* from well-established nunneries are about 80 years old. Some of them have already passed away.
3. Increase in number of disrobed *thila-shins*: There are many reasons for this. Some give up due to failures in exams, some want to start a householder’s life, and some face difficulty in receiving support from the devotees.

⁶ San, A. T. (2005). *Thila-shin Sayagyi Daw Esuvadi Atthupatti* (Biography of Venerable *Esuvadi*). Yangon: Myathazin publishing house. p.54.

Fitness of Survival

The law of nature will not favor us if we do not have the fitness for survival. My opinions on how *thila-shins* can survive longer and face the new challenges are as follows;

1. Keeping high morals and observing precepts (*sīla*) strictly can raise the role of *thila-shins*.
2. Should be excellent in both Buddhist studies (*Pariyatti*) and practice (*Patipatti*). Having personal experience through practice is also vital.
3. Buddhism should spread to different corners of the world. Therefore, it is an advantage for *thila-shins* to study on the international level, especially English and Pāli.
4. Should engage in society effectively and help devotees by teaching the *Dhamma*. I would recommend to form an organization called 'Buddhist Chaplaincy Service' like in UK. Since laities and monastic people depend on each other, engaging in the area of social welfare would prove the significance existence of *thila-shins* in monastic community.
5. Unity among *thila-shins* and *Saṅghas* is important. Mutual understanding among the two parties can lead to longer propagation of Buddhism.

Conclusion

Once, *Mara*⁷ came to arouse fear *Soma Therī* who was a female *Arahant*. She was not afraid of *Mara* and replied –

“What difference does being a woman make when the mind is well-centered, when the knowledge is progressing and seeing clearly into the *Dhamma*.”⁸

She meant that she was neither a man nor woman in her practice. It can be understood that a woman transcends woman's nature when she becomes an *Arahant*.

That's why my proposal for *thila-shins* is to continue the life in teachings of the Buddha with strong faith. To practice for the development of *Sīla*, *Samādhi* and *Paññā*⁹ and attainment of *Nibbāna* is more important than the status of being a *Bhikkhunis*. In brief, we do not need to fight for the status, and we need to prove that we have our own status.

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Primary Source

Soma sutta: SN 5.2; PTS: S I 129.

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⁷ Mara, in Buddhist literature, is the evil one who always disturb the one who do good deeds.

⁸ *Soma sutta*: SN 5.2; PTS: S I 129.

⁹ *Sīla*: morality, *samādhi*: concentration and *paññā*: wisdom.

Maternal Subjectivity/The Buddhist ‘Self’: A Contradiction or an Invitation?

Dr. Nadine Levy

Upon the birth of my son in December 2016 it became suddenly and acutely clear that my time, my body and my thoughts were no longer ‘my own’. While with hindsight I can see that this represented a profound Buddhist teaching, it also challenged my capacity to engage in formal Buddhist practice, as well as many of the rituals and approaches that I had once thought ‘made’ me a ‘Buddhist’. What emerged was a process that was at once unfamiliar, metamorphosing and raw. This led to a what I would describe as a ‘small death’ of sorts, in which one ‘self’ was dismantled as a ‘new’ more ‘maternal (or even Dharmic) self’ was being born.

This paper applies a poststructuralist perspective to the transition from Buddhist non-mother to Buddhist mother and examines the ways such a transition leads to discursive and experiential conflict, confusion and fruitful darkness. Centrally, it considers the role of maternal *subjectivity* in both contemporary Buddhist discourse and broader Western society in this process and ultimately asks: can these complex constructions provide female practitioners with the opportunity for spiritual growth and if so in what ways? Thus, this paper represents invitation to converse in a more nuanced and explicit way about the constraints, angst and opportunities that arise when one becomes a mother on the Path. There is no doubt that more research and more sophisticated accounts of this process are required.

Subjectivity forms the focus of this paper for two main reasons: first, it is considered a site of contestation and creative possibility and second, as Luhrmann (2006) puts it, the study of subjectivity, and particularly one’s emotions and internal structures, “gives us more evidence to argue that power is inscribed upon our bodies and that moral judgement is a visceral act” (p. 359). Power in this context is linked to discourse and the ways it can shape, yet simultaneously constrain individuals and groups. In this paper, however, I also embrace the view that individuals have some degree of agency in creating and shaping discourse and power itself. In this sense, the containing changing subject is not entirely determined by discourse but rather can be engaged in a two-way relationship. According to Giddens (1998), it is reflexivity (or in Buddhist terms ‘awareness’) that can lead to the challenging and recrafting of discourse, as well as creating new possibilities for liberation from social structures and constraint.

Having offered some of the theoretical and conceptual background informing this paper I now offer some reflections from my own experience of motherhood¹⁰ and draw some preliminary conclusions about the discursive subject positions available to Western Buddhist mothers. I wish to stress that this paper is not about the historical constructions of motherhood in the Buddhist Canon but rather the ways in which discourse arising from Western representations of Buddhism as they intertwine with broader contemporary ideas about how to be a mother.

The process of becoming a mother starts long before one births a child. Notions of motherhood, as well as one’s prior experience of being a daughter, shape the maternal subject in multiple ways throughout the course of her life journey. According to Alison Stone (2012),

¹⁰ As a feminist researcher, I hold the view that one’s own accumulation of experience at least in part determines one’s scholarly conclusions, particularly in respect to highly personal topics like maternal relations. Thus, some personal background is necessary. I came to Buddhism at the age of 13 (20 years ago) and since then have practised in varying traditions. Over the last ten years my primary teachers have been the US Insight teachers, Jack Kornfield, Joseph Goldstein and James Baraz. I was raised by a single mother and my maternal grandmother. While I was offered a significant amount of love and connection in my childhood my memory was that it was also underpinned by fear and a type of enmeshed parenting style, which caused some psychological unease in my later years.

author of the illuminating book, *Feminism, Psychoanalysis and Maternal Subjectivity*, maternity can be described as the temporal point where past and present converge and a mother's own past body relations with her own mother come to the fore as she interacts with a different uniquely constituted child. She states:

This return takes place because the mother's relation to a new baby and young child is (perhaps uniquely) immediately corporeal, sensuous, tactile, and non-verbal, suffused with scarcely articulable emotional depth. The sensory experiences unique to this relation – its special smells (milk, spit-up, poo), sounds (cries, gurgles, giggles), feels (the softness of the baby's skin and hair) – arouse in the mother varying levels of memory of her pre-verbal bodily past (p. 120).

Hence, nurturing and relating to a newborn, particularly for a new mother, represents a profoundly unique and oftentimes unravelling experience in a woman's life. Put another way, whilst preverbal memory - or the unconscious as it is referred to in psychoanalysis - does shape one's consciousness continually, it infrequently carries with it such overwhelming intensity. It follows that as emotions and perceptions emerge from a mother's preverbal memory, she can experience powerful and unintelligible waves of affect whose quality is more somatic than cognitive or linguistic in nature. Thus, it is no surprise that mothers often struggle to find a clear language to frame their experience. My suggestion is that the frame of 'post-natal depression/anxiety' is too simplistic, generalised and medical. Something more sophisticated and phenomenological is needed.

This was certainly the case for me. Following the birth of my son, I experienced a kind of overwhelmingly euphoric affect that propelled me further and further away from my own body. It was unlike anything I had experienced before and was too strong in its intensity to tame. At other times, I doubled over in extreme shock at having produced another human being whose life relied on my actions. As the euphoria wore off, however, my predominant experience became that of fear. Having practised the Dharma for some time I was not satisfied with the mere label 'post-natal anxiety', rather I was interested in examining the boundaries, dimensions and guises of this fear. I wanted to understand its origins and its texture. Initially Dharma practice helped soothe my affect: by focusing on the rising and falling of my abdomen as my son slept my nervous system began to calm. However, my mindfulness was rarely strong enough to provide me with clear insights in this respect.

Later, as I read Stone's (2012) work that draws on psychoanalysis that I began to understand that this fear likely had in part some preverbal origins. It was likely the manifestation of what I can imagine was an ambivalent relationship with my mother as a baby. As I practised mindfulness, I could also identify another source of my distress: certain discourses about who I should be and how I should be as a mother appeared incessantly as mental-talk. While it is almost impossible to capture the mind's continual discursiveness accurately, one pattern became clear which presented itself in this sequence: a type of primal fear of enmeshment arose in my mind, then a sense of self-hatred and shame for not enjoying motherhood unequivocally arose. This was underpinned by an unwillingness to acknowledge my own needs and/or preferences.

In untangling this pattern, I began to see my own preverbal relations with my own mother comingled with Western ideas of motherhood and Buddhist discourse (amongst many other causes and conditions!) in some surprising ways. According to Stone (2012), a pervasive social expectation in the West is that mothers be *completely* absorbed in the child's needs and dismissive of their own. She states:

Having formerly been seen as agents of their own lives and treated by others as centers of agency, suddenly they find themselves perceived as largely subservient to the child(ren) for whom they care. The child is at least seen as a potential subject; the mother is seen merely as the background and nourishing soil of her child's subjectivity-to-be (p2).

This is compounded by the notion that mother ought not experience negative feelings in relation to her children for any such feelings could undermine her capacity to mother. This approach can be found in both contemporary public health messaging as well as the broader parenting industry which pressures mothers to be engaged 'intensively' with their children, stimulating their brains with frequent play, and continual interaction and responsiveness (Faircloth, 2014). Indeed, Winnicott's notion of the 'good enough mother' and the rising popularity of 'attachment theory' (Holmes, 2014) has contributed to this discourse. This was made very clear through my various interactions with health professionals, many of which made me feel surveilled and examined as a mother, as though any glimpse of ambivalence was indication of my lack of capacity in relation to the job at hand.

I could track that the shame was linked to the moments of aversion or indeed hatred toward my son. Not only did this sit outside of discourses of intensive parenting but it also ran counter to the romanticised notions of selfless maternal love that can be found in both early Buddhist discourse and contemporary approaches (Ohnuma, 2012, p12). For example, the archetypal image of Kwan Yin represents the mother as 'strong' enough to focus squarely on the needs of others in a way that is skillful and generous. This image formed an unachievable ideal in my mind.

As I struggled to let go of my 'old self', another discourse circulated within my consciousness: that according to many dominant interpretations of Buddhism, attachment and desire, "mother-love is incompatible with the idealised state of enlightened detachment, and the particularistic love of the mother stands in contrast to the highest good: rejection of worldly life" (Ohnuma, 2012, p3). Had I made a huge mistake channeling all of my energies into what some might view as profane, attached and exclusionary?

The answer, happily, was no. In fact, the gift of hindsight revealed that mothering was actually a gateway into something deeply Dharmic. First, it was the catalyst that encouraged much of my early relational grief and fear to surface. I would suggest that solitary practice would not have provided such a direct route to this buried pain. I continue to attempt to meet such material with awareness, so that it no longer remains latent with the covert potential to determine my actions in the future. Second, my experience of mothering led to another significant revelation that, as Stone (2012) argues, ambivalence is potentially a creative force. Indeed, this insight is not too far removed from the oft-cited idea that 'just enough' suffering is needed to motivate one to embark on the Eightfold path.

Lastly and perhaps most strikingly, the contours of my inner experience were transformed through motherhood. My psychic structure expanded to include the continual presence of a new 'love object', someone who remains in my mind regardless of physical proximity. The love I feel for my son over into other parts of my mind, confirming that Metta travels.

As I sat with grief and fear and breastfed my son I began to get the sense that it was my task to 'mother' both of us: the tender stroking of my son's head became the tender voice I used as I experienced my own negative emotions, paradoxically, toward him. This was a teaching on interdependence: I was never alone in my own mind, even though I had thought otherwise. Ohnuma (2012) suggests that one of the reasons this uniquely female experience has been under-theorised in the early Buddhist literature is because most discourses were

written by sons of mothers rather than their daughters. I agree. Thus, what is critically needed is further theorising around the both ambivalent and transformative potential of the inter-psychic space that emerges co-creatively between mother and child.

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Roundtable Session

Resolving Conflicts:
Buddhist Approaches to
Peace and Reconciliation

Thursday 27th June, Morning

Meheni: Term for Reconciliation among Buddhist Female Monastics in Sri Lanka?

Gihani De Silva

Introduction

This paper explores the politics behind “*mehenī*” the nomenclature proposed by *silmātās* recently. It will look at diverse views on the proposed nomenclature instead of providing a lengthy, detailed account of the origin, history, and *Vinaya* rules implied by the diverse nomenclatures used to refer to Buddhist female monastics in present Sri Lanka.

Politics of Nomenclatures

Scholars and even Buddhists generally find it difficult to apply a common terminology for Buddhist female monastics in Sri Lanka. The lack of a universal nomenclature reflects the complexity of female monastic practices and their ambiguous social status. Scholars have suggested various terms, including ‘ten precept mothers’ or *dasasilmātās* (Bloss 1987), lay nuns (Bartholomeusz 1994), nuns (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988; Tsomo: 2000), and Buddhist nuns (Salgado 2013). According to Salgado, these terminologies do not reflect the complexity that emerges in the Sinhalese nomenclature used for nuns.

“Today nuns are referred to in spoken Sinhalese variously as “lay woman”; “Mother” (*māṇiyo*); its honorific, “Venerable Mother” (*māṇiyanvahanse*); “Precept Mother” (*sil mātā*); “ordained woman” (*mehenī*); or its honorific, “Venerable ordained woman” (*meheninvahanse*). It is noteworthy that in Sinhala the terms for “Venerable Mother” and “Venerable ordained woman” sound very similar and might, therefore, be confused or used interchangeably. Newspaper articles often refer to a nun as a “Precept Mother” (*sil mātā*, *sil māṇi*), sometimes preceded by the word ten (*dasa*) (2004: 946-947).”

Salgado (2004) further traces the problem of terminology to issues of training precepts and renunciant attire, which this paper didn’t probe. The two terms, “venerable mother” (*māṇiyan vahanse*) and “venerable ordained woman” (*mehenin vahanse/ mehenī*), sound very similar but are significantly different and vital within this discussion. Generally, *silmātās* are designated with “venerable mother” (*māṇiyō/ māṇiyanvahanse*) or *upāsaka mānivarū, sil amṃā*, all of which have the connoted meaning of having lay status rather than monastic status in spoken Sinhalese (there can be some other terms too). Some of the *silmātās*, whom I have interviewed, expressed their displeasure at these terms. Instead, they prefer using *mehenī/ mehenin vahanse* in general spoken language and in official documentations. These *silmātās* have proposed using ‘*mehenī*’ as a collective term to refer to Buddhist female monastics in Sri Lanka in a very recently drafted document. On the one hand, one could argue that there is no reason to reject such a request since as the oldest alternative group of female monastics they certainly deserve it. On the other hand one could further presume, using this term could eventually reconcile the issues prevalent so far among the diverse female monastic groups.

However, *mehenī* is a controversial term, which is equivalent to *bhikkhunī* (fully ordained nun), which some *bhikkhunīs* believe should only be used for Buddhist nuns with higher ordination. Technically, designating all female monastics with the term *mehenī* could give rise to disputes over the recognition of different statuses and stages of renunciation amongst the *anagārikā* (homeless nuns), *silmātā* (precept mother), *samanērī* (female novice), *bhikkhunī* (fully ordained woman), *thēri* (after 10 years in monastic life), and *mahā thēri* (from 20 years as a *bhikkhunī*). Female monastics in Sri Lanka are still registered by the Department for the Registration of Persons (DRP) as *silmātā*, and it has been stopped by issuing any other

designation to Buddhist female monastics. Ven. Inamaluwe Sumangala and Ven. Welimada Dhammadinna *bhikkhunī* filed a fundamental rights petition to the Supreme Court for refusing to include *bhikkhunī* in the ID by the DRP (see more in Schonathal 2017: 18).

It is interesting to learn some of the likely reasons behind the demand for such a controversial term at this point. The procrastination over the bill regarding *śilmātā* and their hermitages could be one possible reason. The bill was proposed by the parliament in the Sri Sambuddha Jayanti celebration in 2011, which marked the 2600th year since the Enlightenment of Buddha. The bill is still said to be under revision, though the *Mahānāyaka Thera* of three sects has already given their permission to the bill. According to state officers at the Department of Buddhist Affairs, there are still some definitional disagreements that must be amended further. It is not surprising even that there are disagreements over a collective terminology. However, if the bill gave legal status to the *śilmātā* religious vocation, it would be a blow to the *bhikkhunī* movement. *Bhikkhunī* Kusuma, in an interview with the Victoria Buddhist Society in Australia, believed that this was the case, “I feel sad for the next generation..... If they make litigation and forces the government to make illegal... Yes, then they can disrobe *bhikkhunīs*... (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_yeu6RrJ2g). Although there is no sign of such an act, the presence of *bhikkhunī* in Theravada Sri Lanka is publicly denounced (Interviews with state officers).

Conclusion

The proposed term could be a response to the government's procrastination over giving the female monastics legal recognition. In other words, these *śilmātās* might be searching for alternative ways to enhance the status of female monastics. Meanwhile, it is interesting to learn how these *śilmātās* are adapting to gradually changing circumstances and representing diverse groups and interests, even though they had tried to keep their distance from those issues in the past. For instance, some of these nuns who firmly refused any *bhikkhunī* in Theravada Sri Lanka (De Silva 2015) are seeking *samaneri* ordination, claiming that they follow *pabbajja/pāvidi dasasīla* (ten renunciant training precept) elsewhere (Samadhi 2013: 110). All these suggest that the majority of *śilmātās* do not discard the higher ordination, but instead reject how the current revival is being accomplished. They seek instead to raise their monastic status through the strict surveillance of *sangha* authorities, where they do not merely perform subordination. Although this demand (*meheni*) could easily be dismissed, I argue that this issue has positive implications for Buddhist female monasticism in Sri Lanka.

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The Immense Promise of the Dharma in War-Torn Middle East - Applying ancient wisdom and timely methods to create lasting peace

Lama Dvora

Everyone in Israel and its surrounding region has either lost a loved one to war or is personally related to someone who did. The region is awash in mourning, suppressed freedoms, and conflict. As a young girl in Israel, my heart broke again and again upon hearing of lives that were lost to violence, and I resolved to devote my life to stop that massive loss and suffering. Not being drawn to power or politics, I just didn't know how.

I moved to the U.S., and it is there that I had the amazing good fortune to meet the dharma and some extraordinary teachers. While raising a family, completing a Ph.D. and working in research labs, I plunged with enormous curiosity and inspiration into the study and practice of the holy dharma.

Encouraged by my kind teachers, I started translating Tibetan scriptures into Hebrew and teaching them in a way that speaks to women and men in modern-time Israel, while rigorously adhering to the original intent and meaning of the scriptures and with emphasis on a beautiful and attractive presentation. The teachings attracted hundreds of students: people who knew suffering firsthand, and who were strongly motivated to find genuine happiness, for themselves and for others.

After completing a 3-year retreat in the U.S., I returned to Israel to be met by hundreds of enthusiastic students, many of whom were by now also spreading the dharma in their own circles.

And so, with the blessing of my teachers, I **became the first Lama in the entire region**.

Over its 71 years of existence, Israel and its neighbors in the Middle East have experienced multiple devastating wars and violent acts, alongside numerous political attempts at creating peace. As of today, a real, lasting peace still seems out of reach, and the region is ravaged by bloody encounters, and incredible suffering.

Armed by the power of the Buddha's infallible wisdom, and joined by hundreds of kind-hearted students, I realized that the opportunity has finally arisen to try and fulfil in a meaningful way my long-time dream of peace, without resorting to the use of violent means or political struggle.

Embracing the principle that **outer peace begins with inner peace in the hearts of individuals**, our group is working on realizing the vision of *Ehvam – an International Center for Peace*.

The word Ehvam is composed of two Sanskrit syllables: *eh* which symbolizes the world we live in, and *vam* - the beings that reside in this world. Together, *Ehvam* is the idea of creating a perfect, blissful world, whose residents too are happy and peaceful.

The roots of our vision for Ehvam lie in the Buddhist wisdom of emptiness and dependent origination, and the understanding that neither war nor peace exist from their own

side, and both arise in dependence on their causes and conditions; Both are projected by way of the mental imprints that each one of us carries in his or her mind.

The implications are quite straightforward, and of enormous significance:

-as long as we have active seeds of violence in our mind, we must experience violence in our world, and

-if we wish to live in a peaceful and harmonious world, we must learn how to plant the seeds of peace within our own hearts; when our mind is at peace, it will be impossible to not see peace on the outside.

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Based on that understanding, *Ehvam* focuses on two main types of activities:

-Work on the outside, in our currently existing environment, and plant the seeds for lasting peace: engaging in a variety of projects to promote harmony, bridge divides, bringing together people from different segments of society and different nationalities and faiths to create genuine friendships, mutual appreciation and work together to realize our common quest for peace and happiness,

-Work on the inside, to purify our minds, understand the nature of reality, reduce, or even completely eliminate our negative emotions etc., this through the study of dharma and correct view, the development of noble attitudes such as loving kindness, compassion, equanimity, bodhichitta, the practice of meditation and practice in deep retreats.

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When practiced together, these two aspects are capable of creating a magnificent upward spiral, ever widening as it is rising, and it is hard to fathom its enormous potential.

*The deeper the transformation on the inside,
the more profound the transformation in the world
that we are experiencing on the outside.*

By immersing ourselves in this work, we gradually become high spiritual beings, and as we work towards our own enlightenment, we pull-up with us ever growing groups of people, to create a world of peace and harmony.

We have already begun implementing *Ehvam*'s vision in our unique, vibrant spiritual center in Israel, (currently in a temporary, leased location), that is already benefitting the causes of peace in our region in a meaningful way. In our center,

-We study and practice the dharma, seriously and happily; about a 130 dedicated sangha members who are supporting each other on the path, and take great efforts to maintain harmony within the sangha; they are joined by hundreds of students in the periphery, who are also actively studying and supporting our causes;

-Dozens of courses and workshops are now available online, free of charge, all in Hebrew, attracting over a 100,000 users in Israel;

-We have a thriving monastic sangha, first of its kind in our region, who are devoting their lives to practice and service;

-Every member in our sangha is engaged in projects that benefit the larger community, through the practice of giving and generosity, based on the principles of right view and compassion, taking care of people who are in need, lonely or sick, all on a regular basis;

-Together we plant karmic seeds for peace by initiating contacts, collaborations and peace conventions with our Arab neighbors, and interact with peace leaders from

various traditions, faiths and nationalities in our region, all infused with attitudes of love and joy;

-We host many guest teachers, including great Buddhist masters but also university professors and sages from other authentic traditions, to enrich our knowledge and expand our reach;

-We cultivate mutually respectful and supportive relationships with the local communities in our current desert location;

-We provide conditions and support to sangha members who go into deep retreats, to reach their own temporary and ultimate goals, all the way up to the enlightenment of the Buddha. During the last 3 years, more than a 100 sangha members have performed 3 or more month-long retreats!

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Thus, Ehvam is already making a meaningful impact. Certainly as a truly powerful center for spiritual growth, but also as a vehicle to demonstrate the many ways through which the experience of inner peace creates new opportunities – to serve one another, to cooperate and resolve issues and address the many problems that weigh heavy on this region.

We all long to help humankind. If we stop to reflect for a moment, we will realize that all of us carry, deep in our hearts, a longing to be spiritual giants, capable of benefitting the people around us, care for them and help them, exactly as we care for ourselves.

When the insights of Buddhist wisdom take root in the heart of a serious practitioner, they can generate a total transformation of his or her consciousness. This is a change of inconceivable dimensions, way above and beyond the good that many people are currently doing in our world.

This mode of thinking and functioning implies an exalted level of spirituality, with obliteration and even complete erasure of the line separating "me" from "the other", and allows us to truly care for the other as much as we would care for ourselves. Leaders who have transformed their consciousness deeply in this manner, can become initiators of change at a global level.

In Ehvam, we aim to train such enormously powerful future spiritual and peace leaders. People that are able to function in our world at such a lofty, powerful level, and who are prepared to devote their entire lives to this goal. In *The Diamond Cutter*, Geshe Michael Roach says:

Leaders who have broadened their definitions of themselves to include everybody around them; leaders who function in the world not for others, but as if there is no "other"; leaders who consciously attempt to labor for the well-being of people around them to the same extent that they labor for their own well-being; who no longer perceive a real distinction between themselves and the other person.

Such people are rare in our world. A transformation of this magnitude requires that we devote our lives to its achievement, through extensive study, intensive practice, and deep internal work. A person who has reached this spiritual level is motivated by the great compassion and unconditional love in his or her heart, and operates in the world with deep understanding and wisdom, thereby affecting change.

The aim of Ehvam is to create the appropriate conditions for training generations of such leaders, lighting up and blessing our world.

***Ehvam* represents hope, transformation, peace, freedom, meaning and love.**

Ultimately, *Ehvam* not only offers an opportunity for personal enlightenment, which itself has meaning almost beyond comprehension; but also generates unfathomable possibilities for a deep and lasting peace in the world.

Please join us in this holy effort!

We would like to extend an invitation to each one of you to join us; we will be thrilled to count you among our partners and supporters, in any way you see fit, to help us fulfil this noble dream of peace in our region and our world, and to fill it with love.

Transforming Tensions: Buddhist Principles and Practice

Karma Lekshe Tsomo

The world's Buddhist traditions offer many principles and practices to prevent violence and create peace. The Buddha taught his followers to observe certain moral principles that serve as a foundation for mental cultivation. The first principle is to cultivate an ethical sensibility that avoids harm to any sentient being. With these basic principles in place, the Buddha taught his followers certain contemplative practices to engender thoughts of love and compassion that function as antidotes to anger and hatred.

This paper reviews the fundamental principles for creating peace that the Buddhist traditions have preserved and developed over 2,500 years.¹ Further, it explores methods for transforming violence and how they can be practically applied to resolve longstanding conflicts and prevent further misunderstandings. The objective of this paper is to present Buddhist solutions that can contribute to resolving tensions between contending ideologies and powerful economic interests that currently exist in the world, with the hope of bolstering peace.

Cultivating an Ethical Sensibility

To avoid contributing to violence in the world, it is obvious that individuals need to learn how to refrain from becoming violent. Few people walk out the door intending to do harm, but human beings, like other animals, are vulnerable to anger when things do not go our way. In a careless moment, anger can suddenly overcome us and we may lash out, causing harm to someone. Most people have become angry at some point in their life and experienced a thought of wishing to harm the person who has harmed us. Because each of us has the potential for violence within us, we need to find ways to prevent ourselves from acting out in anger. To serve as a safeguard against violence, the Buddha taught his followers to abide by the principle of nonharm (ahimsa).

The principle of nonharm is enshrined in the first of the five moral precepts (śīla) that the Buddha set forth for lay followers. Taking this precept means making a commitment to refrain from harming any living being. The most serious breach of the precept is to intentionally kill a human being. By extension, it means to refrain from killing any sentient being, including an animal or even an insect. The Vietnamese monk, scholar, and poet Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh extends the scope of this precept to avoid harming any sentient being through actions of body, speech, or mind. Further, he teaches that actions detrimental to the environment contribute to harming sentient beings and therefore should be avoided. Because eating meat contributes both to violence against animals and to the destruction of the environment, he considers eating meat to be a violation of the first precept and asks his followers to be vegetarian. Many Hindus claim that eating meat increases a person's instinctive tendency to violence. Whether or not there is evidence to support this claim, there is certainly a link between eating meat and the killing of animals. To refrain from eating meat definitely decreases the number of animals killed. Consequently, reducing the consumption of meat naturally reduces violence in the world. One can conclude that being vegetarian, or eating less meat, contributes to creating a more peaceful world. Depending on where a person lives, helping decrease the incidence of violence in that place will naturally contribute to creating peace there. In this very concrete way, each person has the potential to promote peace.

¹ The perspectives of several Buddhist traditions are discussed in the *International Handbook of the Cultures of Peace*, edited by Wolfgang Dietrich, et al. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), including Johan Galtung's chapter on "Buddhism and World Peace" and Karma Lekshe Tsomo on "Peace in Vajrayana."

For Buddhists, loving kindness and compassion are integral to building an ethical foundation for the practice of nonharm (ahimsa). The reasoning for this is two-fold. First, no living creature wants to suffer, and second, all actions have consequences. We can easily observe that no living creature wishes to suffer, whether it be human beings, animals, birds, or insects. The fact that they scurry away when attacked shows that they want to avoid suffering and death. Second, an understanding of the law of cause and effect can also prevent harm. All actions (karma) have consequences, including all mental, verbal, and physical actions. The wholesome actions we create result in pleasant consequences for ourselves and others; conversely, the unwholesome actions we create, such as harming sentient beings, result in suffering both for that being and for oneself. If we understand these principles, we will naturally develop compassion for others and wish to spare them suffering. When we reflect on the law of cause and effect, we will understand that we are harming ourselves by harming others. Out of compassion for ourselves, then, we generate a commitment to refrain from harming others. Thus, the principles of loving kindness and compassion not only help to prevent suffering for ourselves and others, but also help create peace for ourselves and others. In this way, loving kindness and compassion directly contribute to peace in the world.

The principle of nonharm is fundamental to escaping from the cycle of violence. For example, if we harbor feelings of hatred and jealousy toward someone, then it is possible that we may act on those feelings one day, in a moment of weakness or fear. If we do, we may harm someone and experience unpleasant consequences, such as losing a friend, losing our job, or physical violence. The same risk of negative consequences pertains if we harbor negative thoughts or ill will toward people of a particular race, ethnicity, gender, or nationality.² Learning how to transform these negative feelings is therefore critical to our own well-being. To refrain from harming others is not just a moral commandment, it is also a matter of concern for the well-being of ourselves and our communities. We may not all agree with each other, but if we understand these basic principles, we can all get along, resolve our differences nonviolently, and live together in peace. To be effective, it is also vital to consider potential responses in situations in which theoretical ideals and fundamental principles conducive to peace are tested in the context of political realities.³

Creating Peace and Well-being

Human beings have the capacity to transform harmful patterns of thinking and behavior, but this transformation does not happen overnight. Due to habitual tendencies, shaped by our actions in the past, we tend to act out of desire, ill will, jealousy, or confusion, and often harm others in the process. When we do not get what we want, or get what we do not want, we may become angry and engage in harmful words or deeds. Unless we have totally overcome greed, anger, and ignorance, it is possible that we may respond with violence in a challenging situation. To prevent that, it is necessary to cultivate wholesome states of mind such as loving kindness and compassion. By cultivating these wholesome mental states, we can transform and purify our minds of unwholesome tendencies. By purifying our mind of unwholesome tendencies to anger and aversion, we can avoid reacting in unwholesome or aggressive ways.

² The potential for peacebuilding implicit in creating more equitable opportunities for women is discussed in Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "Buddhist Women in the Global Community: Women as Peacemakers," *Buddhist Peacework: Creating Cultures of Peace*, edited by David W. Chappell (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1999), 53–60.

³ See Peter N. Stearns, *Peace in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2014), especially Chapter 3, "Peace in the Buddhist Tradition," 35–46.

The Buddha taught innumerable methods for purifying and transforming our minds. Through these practices, it is possible to learn how to control frustration and other destructive emotions. These methods of practice do not require that we believe in anything other than our own capacity for transformation. These methods are freely available to everyone who wants to create peace in their heart and peace in the world.

Loving kindness and compassion can be practiced by all human beings, regardless of nationality, cultural background, religion, or philosophical orientation. The practice involves consciously generating loving kindness and compassion from one's heart, visualized in the form of light, to all sentient beings without exception. Generating kind and compassionate thoughts to others has the effect of purifying the seeds of anger and hatred in one's own heart. The practice of generating kind and compassionate thoughts to all beings transcends all the boundaries that people construct to separate themselves from one another. Generating love and compassion for one's enemies or those who have harmed us is a powerful way to get over grudges we may have been keeping in our hearts. The virtues of love and compassion have many practical applications and benefits, both for creating inner peace and for creating peace around us – in the family, workspace, community, nation, and ultimately the whole world.⁴

The practice of loving kindness and compassion does not come naturally to everyone, especially those who may have been abused when they were young or feel deep fear or aversion for specific people or groups. In that case, the practice can be introduced slowly, beginning by generating loving kindness and compassion for oneself. Generating these wholesome attitudes is very healing and can be a powerful way to transform animosities and fears. The Buddha taught that, with practice, even hardened criminals can learn to generate loving kindness and compassion, helping to remove hatred and anger from their hearts. A story tells how the Buddha was able to soften the heart of a serial killer named Angulimala by generating loving kindness toward him. Angulimala was so moved by the power of the Buddha's compassion that he became a monk and completely transformed his life and thinking.⁵ If even serial killers are able to overcome the destructive emotions of their minds, then it stands to reason that others are also be able to do so. The more people practice loving kindness and compassion, consciously generating loving and compassionate thoughts to others, the sooner human society will be able to eliminate conflicts and violence.⁶ For Buddhists, peace is possible. All human beings are capable of transforming destructive habits and emotions.

Love and compassion are qualities that unite all human beings, animals, and other living creatures. Human beings have a special capacity to develop these qualities, because they can see the logic behind them. People who are kind and gentle are well-loved and have many friends. Those who are mean and nasty are shunned and despised. People who are selfless and openhearted are generally relaxed and peaceful. Those who are selfish and narrowminded are generally tense and angry. Therefore, if we want to be happy, it is in our own best interest to cultivate the qualities of love and compassion. These qualities go hand in hand with the practices of the Noble Eightfold Path: right understanding, right intention, right speech, right action, right effort, right livelihood, right mindfulness, and right concentration.⁷ Following this

⁴ The connections between inner peace, social engagement, and world peace are explored from a range of perspectives in Kenneth Kraft, ed., *Inner Peace, World Peace: Essays on Buddhism and Nonviolence* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992).

⁵ See Satish Kumar and Allan Hunt Badiner, *The Buddha and the Terrorist: The Story Of Angulimala* (Cambridge, UK: Green Books, 2005); and W. Stede, "Angulimala and Liberation," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 20(1957) 533–535.

⁶ Buddhist approaches to social justice and social transformation are discussed in David Loy, *The Great Awakening: A Buddhist Social Theory* (Boston: Wisdom Publication, 2007); and Sulak Sivaraksa, *Seeds of Peace: A Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1992).

⁷ Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddhist Taught* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 45–50.

path with a heart of kindness and compassion creates peace and happiness, both for oneself and for others, and avoids many problems, both now and in the future. Another set of guidelines for avoiding problems is to refrain from the ten unwholesome actions (or nonvirtuous karmic paths): three of body (taking life, taking what is not given, sexual misconduct), four of speech (harsh speech, divisive speech, untruthful speech, idle gossip), and three of mind (wrong view, covetousness, and malice).⁸ Other guidelines for ethical conduct include the five precepts for laypeople: to refrain from taking life, taking what is not given, sexual misconduct, untruthful speech, and intoxicants. Love and compassion are universally valued qualities that bring people of all backgrounds together and enables them to live in peace and harmony.

Cultivating Wisdom and Understanding

Wisdom is also a universally valued quality, but it is interpreted in vastly different ways in different cultures and communities. For Buddhists, wisdom means insight: to see the true nature of things, “as they are,” not as we may wish them to be. With wisdom, we make skillful decisions that have positive results. Without wisdom, we take what is unsatisfying to be satisfying, what is impermanent to be permanent, and what is insubstantial to be substantial. Without wisdom, we misread situations and react with anger or violence. Without wisdom, we make foolish decisions that cause problems for ourselves and those around us.

Wisdom is a quality that is developed over time, through a process of mental cultivation. With wisdom, we can understand the true nature of situations and come up with good solutions. Wisdom develops along with right intention and right mindfulness. If our intentions are pure, our actions are likely to be skillful, since we have the benefit of others in mind. Instead of thinking only of our own welfare, we consider the situation impartially and determine the response that will be most beneficial for all. If we are mindful, we will be fully aware of the present moment and will be able to understand the situation clearly. Even if someone has offended us or harmed us in some way, we can be mindful and not allow anger to overtake us. Instead of regarding the offender as evil, we can remain calm and handle the situation skillfully, without creating greater harm. Wisdom, coupled with right intention and right mindfulness, prevent potentially violent situations from spiraling out of control. The virtue of wisdom is not developed solely through contemplation, but in relation to peacebuilding, also through a thorough understanding based on the accumulation of knowledge and insight into topics such as national identity, and nationalism, human rights, the global refugee crisis, cultural preservation, and political resistance.⁹

Mindfulness enables us to be aware of our surroundings, our intentions, the causes and conditions of suffering, and the needs of others.¹⁰ If we are practiced in mindfulness, we can avoid harmful actions and their unpleasant consequences. With mindfulness, we can avoid responding instinctively, based on habitual tendencies and self-interest. If we are not mindful, we may instinctively react with anger or hatred and may even harm someone. If we react with anger, the aggressor may become even angrier and lash out to strike us, potentially leading to great harm. If someone attacks us and we remain calm, however, there is a chance we can avert disaster. If we remain mindful, we can be aware of the potential danger and respond with compassion rather than with anger and hatred.

⁸ For a detailed explanation, see Lhundub Sopa with David Patt, *Steps on the Path to Enlightenment: A Commentary on Tsongkhapa's Lamrim*, vol. 2 (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2005), 45–72.

⁹ See, for example, the Dalai Lama, with Franz Alt, *An Appeal to the World: The Way to Peace in a Time of Division* (New York: William Morrow, 2017).

¹⁰ Thich Nhat Hanh introduces a variety of mindfulness practices in books such as *Peace is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1992).

For example, if someone tries to cut us off while driving on the highway, rather than get angry and speed ahead to retaliate, we can wisely and mindfully slow down and let the other person go first. We may also compassionately reflect that the other driver may not be feeling well or is trying to reach home quickly to care for a child or aging parent. This combination of mindfulness, wisdom, and compassion is not only a good way to prevent a traffic accident, but also becomes part of our daily spiritual practice. With wisdom, it is easy to understand that the impulse to harm generally arises from fear. With practice, we can learn to transform these unhelpful reactions and reverse habitual reactive patterns that can lead to harm and suffering. A person does not need to be a Buddhist to practice mindfulness, wisdom, and compassion; everyone is capable of translating these virtues into action.

Applying Buddhist Principles in Situations of Conflict

Differences of opinion and conflicting perspectives do not necessarily escalate into violent conflicts. Unacknowledged conflicts may exist under the surface, however, and simmer there if we do not pay attention to them. These underlying tensions need to be managed carefully to avoid allowing them to erupt into violence. Reflecting on examples from our own lives, we can understand that our responses to situations of conflict differ markedly, depending on the circumstances and depending on our frame of mind at the time. Responding skillfully to specific situations does not mean that we relinquish our ethical principles just to be well-liked. We can be flexible and congenial and also maintain high ethical standards. We cannot always control the circumstances, but we can learn to control our mental state and responses. Buddhist teachers recommend daily meditation and the practice of mindfulness throughout the day to help us cultivate the basic clarity and stability of mind we need to meet situations more skillfully. The Buddha taught that all actions proceed from the mind, so if we can consciously cultivate a peaceful state of mind, we will be in a better position to speak and act skillfully.

The implicit tension between maintaining good relationships with others and also handling situations honestly and equitably is often a matter of keeping things in perspective. Instead of assuming that we are the center of the universe, which is our default perspective, we can remind ourselves that there are 7.5 billion other human beings and countless other living creatures whose interests should also be considered. No matter how challenging a situation may be, with practice, we can learn to step back and assess the bigger picture, rather than simply prioritizing our own individual benefit. By observing situations from a dispassionate, global perspective, we will be able to bracket our own personal interests and allow space for considering the interests of all involved. Sometimes we will find that our own preferences and aversions lose significance in comparison with the pressing needs and overall well-being of the community as a whole. Viewing events in this larger context helps keep things in proportion. Over time, we can learn to foster peace in everyday activities and prevent tensions from becoming violent or unpleasant.

One very useful skill is mindful listening. Sometimes called attentive listening, skillful listening, or compassionate listening, the practice of mindful listening expands our knowledge and understanding. This skill is especially useful in dealing with situations of potential harm or conflict. When we listen attentively to others' stories and ideas, their joys and sorrows, we also express respect. By listening respectfully, others feel that we care about their concerns and aspirations. By considering each other's point of view, we can work out mutually beneficial solutions, without resorting to violence. Similar to the Buddha's teaching on the middle way, we can work toward finding compromises that are acceptable to all concerned.

The challenge comes when the other person's perspective is totally different from our own or is morally questionable. How can we work out a compromise if the other person's point

of view is completely unacceptable to us? The point is, even though others may have totally different views, we cannot understand them unless we learn to listen. So the first step is to open our minds and give our adversary a chance to express how they see things. We may think we know how they think and feel, but once we take the time to listen carefully, we may find that our assumptions were completely off. One thing is sure: if we have preconceptions about people's views, it can be very difficult to have an open dialogue. Mindful listening helps us open our hearts and respectfully hear what the other person has to say. With an openminded attitude, we may discover that their viewpoint is not completely at odds with our own. If we can find points of commonality between our perspectives, we can build on those points of agreement to craft skillful, mutually satisfactory solutions. We do not need to adopt their point of view, but to build a peaceful world and ensure the survival of human society, we need to learn to get along. This is the Buddha's way of peace and compassion.

Controversies Over Reviving Theravāda *Bhikkhunī* Orders: A Case Study in the Difficulties of Globalization

Liz Wilson

In 2009, a controversial ordination ceremony was performed in Perth by the American-born preceptor-nun Ayyā Tathālokā Mahātherī and the British-born Abbot Ajahn Brahmavamso Mahāthera (known to many as Ajahn Brahm). Ajahn Brahm is a key figure in the Australian forest tradition of Theravāda monasticism. After Ayyā Tathālokā led novice nuns in the rituals that make them fully ordained nuns, Ajahn Brahm led the monks in silent assent, giving the imprimatur of the sangha. This ceremony was a major step in a movement to revive lost ordination lines for Theravāda *bhikkhunīs*, a movement that began in the early 20th century but reached a new level of seriousness in the 1980s. There was, for example, the ordination of ten Sri Lankan women as Theravāda *bhikkhunīs* in 1996 in Sarnath, India. Coming some thirteen years later, the ceremony in Australia added impetus to this movement to ensure that no woman practicing Theravada Buddhism would be barred from enjoying all of the privileges of monastic ordination. Prior ceremonies had been controversial, with local sanghas denying the legitimacy of the ordinations. But this one was particularly fraught. For his role in the ordination ceremony, Brahm was punished by his ecclesiastical superiors. They released a statement indicating that Brahm had not informed them of his intentions, stating that he deliberately concealed his plans knowing that he would not be granted permission. There were repercussions outside the monastery also. When people in Thailand who were opposed to the *bhikkhunī* revival movement heard about the ceremony in Perth, there was grumbling about Westerners meddling in the time-honored ways of the Thai Forest Tradition.

Today I would like to find practical solutions to some of the problems associated with the nuns revival movement. Scholarly critics of the movement (such as Kawanami, Salgado, Mroziak, De Silva, and Battaglia) have objected to unilateral moves by movement supporters. They have pointed out problems on the ground that result from the movement, negative consequences for Asian girls and women whose local situations are complicated. Scholars have reported opposition from the very women meant to benefit. Lisa Battaglia interviewed women leading monastic lives in Thailand who show skepticism about gender equality and unwillingness to change their white robes out for saffron robes. Movement critics assert that many women who live disciplined, ascetic lifestyles in places like Thailand are rendered invisible by global discourses and transnational institutions and stand to lose both social capital and financial backing if the movement to revive lost ordination lines succeeds. I'll present some of the negative repercussions that critics have pointed out. But while I am critical of heavy-handed efforts on the part of movement supporters, I think that there are appropriate ways to move forward. Movement critics can also learn from supporters. Using discourse analysis, I will point out how the framing assumptions on both sides yield a polemical situation. During the time I have today, I'd like to use our collective wisdom to consider some of the movement's problems and generate solutions. Who better than a multinational gathering like ours to do the kind of brainstorming needed to ensure that a transnational movement remains sensitive to local concerns? And what better place to discern a way forward on the important goal of saffron robes for Buddhist girls and women than the country where one of the movement's more controversial ordinations took place?

After ordination lines lapsed in Theravada-dominant places, girls and women continued to live monastic lives. For many centuries, girls and women have practiced renunciation by following additional precepts beyond the norm for laypeople. Thus in Sri Lanka, *dasa sil* nuns follow ten precepts. In Thailand, *mae chee* nuns follow eight or ten

precepts. Clearly, many precept nuns have taken the saffron robes of bhikkhunīs since the movement to revive lost lineages began. But some have held back.

Why is this so? Why have some precept nuns held back from seeking the saffron robe with all its entitlements? There are practical reasons why some have held back. In Thailand, many of the large meditation centers that cater to foreign tourists who come for meditation training are run by precept nuns. Because they have not taken the precept that prevents them from handling money, they can buy supplies and arrange for the day to day operation of these meditation centers in ways that monks cannot. So there is reluctance about getting a level of ordination that would prevent these women from handling money and doing the vital work that they do at major institutions. Another reason for reluctance has to do with knowledge of English. Evidently some of the materials used to train for bhikkhunī ordination are in English, and thus those with limited or no English language skills are at a disadvantage. Another factor is seniority. Within the sangha, the number of years one has lived by the precepts is an important indicator of respectability and power. If a precept nun should take higher ordination, she gets no credit for all the years she's been observing the precepts. Another cause for reluctance is fear of abandoning teachers. Some teachers rely on junior precept nuns to provide care as old age and infirmity set in. Older nuns may be reluctant to attempt bhikkunī ordination on account of language – English proficiency being far less widespread in the older generation of precept nuns. And younger nuns may hold back to ensure that their teachers are cared for. Another factor that prevents precept nuns from seeking ordination as bhikkunīs is the perception that it is unseemly to go to battle for this kind of recognition. Lisa Battaglia heard this sentiment from a number of mae chi nuns she interviewed in Thailand in 2006. One said this about bhikkhunī ordination: “[To fight for this status] —this is not for me; because Buddha teaches people to recognize their duty instead of asking for their right. If you are good at your duty, people around you respect you.” Others told Battaglia that seeking the saffron robe is tantamount to competing with monks. Many mae chi that Battaglia interviewed see their self-interests aligned with Thai monks and the monastic establishment. Some think the pursuit of saffron robes is unpatriotic, or that it suggests skepticism about the wisdom of Buddhist leaders in Thailand. Critics of the bhikkhunī revival movement have pointed out that the interests of precept nuns are often aligned with those of monks. So if local sanghas are opposed, this can pose problems for the well being of precept nuns.

A recent publication by Amy Paris Langenberg offers an elegantly stated sketch of the different assumptions that movement supporters and movement critics operate from and a vision of how to move forward. Invoking Judith Butler's critique of liberal feminism and Anne Blackburn's concept of “textual communities” that understand political agency partly in obedience to community-based norms, Langenberg offers thoughtful advice on building coalitions. We must be informed about the epistemic and geopolitical bases of contemporary conflicts over how female renunciation is conceived in contemporary Buddhism. We may not have the same assumptions about the nature of the self and the nature of agency: these epistemic disjunctures can make alliance building difficult. Movement critics and movement supporters often just don't understand where the other side is coming from. Langenberg suggests that to movement critics who come to the table with secular liberal feminist assumptions about individual autonomy and agency, “female and pro-female monastics occupy a hierarchical, norm-driven, non-secular space that, to the unreformed liberal secular feminist eye, may appear unliberatory (Langenberg, 21).” We need to keep looking across the divides that limit our ability to effect change. We need to be thoughtful about our differences and move past those differences to build coalitions across conceptual divides. One crucial aspect of the epistemic-legal divide between movement advocates and movement critics is how the self is construed. Many movement advocates assume the truth of a liberal concept of the autonomous individual.

The model of self that such liberal feminists operate from construes the self as independent. Many movement critics view the liberal concept of the autonomous individual as a human construct. Some critics take the view that this Enlightenment-era human construct of the autonomous individual needs to be examined before it is used as a litmus test for what it means to be liberated from oppression in cultures where the self is construed as an interdependent, not independent entity. Cultures and religious communities that construe the self to be interdependent tend to operate from a communal, collectivist concept of self-identity. We should examine the assumptions that we take as givens and stop calling each other names. This will help liberal feminists to see that allegiance to community is a legitimate way to think about rights, virtues, and to plan a course of action in the world. Liberal feminists should reflect on the epistemic-legal divide of how the self is construed and should pause to ask if the assumptions that go into their “quasi-spiritual belief in an unfettered transcendent Self (Langenberg, 21)” are contestable assumptions. Precept nuns who are aligned with national sanghas should also reflect on the epistemic-legal divide of how the self is construed. This will help precept nuns with interdependent concepts of self and collectivist ideas about agency see that acting in the world by assuming the reality of an abstract universal created by the quill pens of early modern European philosophers is also a legitimate way to think about virtue and to act in the world. It may be difficult to embrace the other’s concept of who/what is the source of virtue and how a virtuous being acts in the world. But act we must, and acting in concert for the good of girls and women requires coalitions that get us past epistemic divides such as those that Langenberg describes.

I’ll conclude with some questions.

1. If the bhikkhunī revival movement encounters opposition in places like Thailand and monastic officials there complain of interference from transnational Buddhists, how can the desire for national autonomy and ecclesiastical self-rule be honored without compromising the aims of the revival movement?

2. One of the reasons cited by senior monastic officials in censoring Ajahn Brahm is the fear of schism within the sangha. In places where there is opposition to reviving bhikkhunī ordination, what is the best way to allay worries about creating schism? How can we ensure that local traditions are given their due?

3. How can we open up new possibilities for girls and women without disrupting forms of power that they enjoy that might not be immediately obvious to outsiders? Are there ways that we can support precept nuns and enhance the informal networks that may already be in place for them in their local contexts? How can we help to build up the social capital they hold?

4. When precept nuns are aligned with monks who oppose bhikkhunī ordination, how can we best help them? What do we say to those who think it unpatriotic to desire saffron robes?

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Paper Session 4

Feminine Wisdom in the Past, Present & Future

Thursday 27th June, Afternoon

BODHI, the Bahujan Hitay Pune Project, and the Ongoing Work of Dr Ambedkar

Maxine Ross, Karunadeepa, Emilia Della Torre; Colin D. Butler

This paper starts by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land this conference is held on, the Gundungurra, the Indigenous people who have thrived on this continent for 65,000 years. The authors of this paper are all apprentices of dharma. We do not pretend to understand the intricacies of the law of karma; or the caste system in India; let alone the best way to apply the teachings with wisdom and compassion. Really, what we are trying to do with BODHI (Benevolent Organisation for Development, Health and Insight) is create the karmic conditions to start to alleviate the immediate suffering of a small number of people in this world. Through our path of engaged Buddhism we reject the principle that hereditarily transmitted inequality is legitimate. We reject any notion that women are inferior to men. We act (in the words of Shantideva) with the knowledge that "All beings have similar suffering." We are all the same. We are connected by our suffering. And we are one."

The main purpose of this presentation is to provide information about the work of the Bahujan Hitay Pune Project, run by a group of women in Pune, India. This work has been directly inspired by Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, who lived in India from 1891 until 1956. Dr Ambedkar, born Hindu, converted to Buddhism in October 1956 (1), in Nagpur, Maharashtra, in central India. This was in a mass gathering attended by over 300,000 people, one of whom was the grandfather of the second author of this paper, Karunadeepa, the only one of us born Buddhist.

This rise to prominence of Dr Ambedkar had several causal factors. As well as a vigorous and courageous intellect, he had opportunities as a child that were highly unusual for an "untouchable" in India. These opportunities arose from his descent from several generations of soldiers, including his father who rose to be an officer, in an army whose British leaders were far less caste-conscious than most Indians. The historical context of Ambedkar's life was also remarkable. He gained an international education, in both America and Britain, completely unique for an untouchable at that time, and possibly unique for any Indian. His adult life coincided with the final struggle for Indian independence from Britain, in which he was a major participant. He consequently became a leading public figure, serving as Law Minister in the first Indian government in 1947. Ambedkar chaired the committee that drafted the Indian constitution. Ambedkar is credited with placing the ancient Buddhist image of roaring lions, symbolizing the conquest of Law, on the Indian currency and adding the traditional Buddhist dharma wheel, representing interdependence and liberation, to the Indian national flag. Dr Ambedkar's death coincided with the celebration, held in India and elsewhere of Buddhism's 2500th year.

As a member of the Mahar caste, Dr Ambedkar was born untouchable, meaning that close contact with him (even if indirect) was considered, by orthodox Hindus, to pollute or contaminate those who were conditioned, usually since birth, to consider themselves "higher born", such as Brahmins.

Dr Ambedkar, in his autobiographical sketches "Waiting for a Visa" describes some firsthand experience of this discrimination. At school Ambedkar not only had to sit in a separate section of the classroom (sometimes outside) but could not touch the tap if he was thirsty. In order to drink, a peon considered "touchable" had to be found to turn on the tap (2).

One experience was especially formative. While travelling to visit his father, Ambedkar, aged nine, along with an older brother and two young nephews, all children, were stranded for over an hour at the station (following their first ever train ride), waiting for a servant who never arrived. The stationmaster was at first sympathetic to the four well-dressed

children, until he discovered their lowly caste. Eventually, however, he helped them to find, with difficulty, a bullock cart driver, who agreed to take them to their destination, for twice the normal fee. But this was on condition that the children acted as drivers while the driver walked, for fear of caste “pollution”. En route (on an overnight journey), as part of a harrowing ordeal, they were refused water.

Reflecting on this, Ambedkar wrote: “It left an indelible impression before this incident occurred, I knew that I was an untouchable, and that untouchables were subjected to certain indignities and discriminations. All this I knew. But this incident gave me a shock such as I had never received before, and it made me think about untouchability--which, before this incident happened, was with me a matter of course, as it is with many touchables as well as the untouchables.”

Today, in India, the injustice of caste is milder, especially in urban areas, than in Dr Ambedkar’s time. This is partly due to Dr Ambedkar, partly to increased Westernisation of affluent Indians, and partly the work of liberal Hindus, such as the Ramakrishna mission. But chiefly, it is as a result of the struggle and inspiration of tens of millions of people (sometimes called Dalits, meaning “broken” or “crushed”) who have rejected the legitimacy of caste as a concept. We believe injustice based on interpretations of karma is still common. In India, karma can no longer be unquestioningly interpreted as meaning that parental status and income completely determines people’s life course. Naturally, though, the culture that children are reared in has a powerful effect.

Many injustices still exist, in India and elsewhere, including for millions of “tribal” people. One group, seeking to reduce this injustice, and inspired by the teaching and legacy of Dr Ambedkar, is led by Karunadeepa, who, in 2017, with colleagues, almost all of whom are women, started to develop a new non-government organization (NGO), called the Bahujan Hitay Pune Project (<http://bhpuneproject.org.in/>). Since 1982, this work has been undertaken under the umbrella of a larger NGO, the Trailokya Baudha Maha Sangh Gana, but the time has come for a new, legally distinct group.

Bahujan refers to the people in the majority, meaning in India, “Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes”. Bahujan Hitay roughly translates as “for the welfare of many”. The work of the Bahujan Hitay Pune Project is principally with disadvantaged slum dwellers (scheduled castes and scheduled tribes) in this city of about six million, in the sprawling state of Maharashtra, parts of which are afflicted by drought and accompanying desperation, including farmer suicide. Consequently, many people migrate to Pune, seeking better conditions.

A major aim of the BHPP is the empowerment of women. Indian women can successfully better their own lives and those of their families given the opportunity. Yet today nearly half the women in India not have bank or savings accounts; mobile phones or internet access - let alone property, a statistic that cuts across caste and class (4). BHPP does this through vocational training (e.g. teaching sewing, fashion designing, beauty parlour, bag making, henna and jewelry making) and holding workshops on the rights of women. They also provide leadership training and counselling.

BODHI Australia supports two projects overseen by the BHPP. One project is a crèche in the Hadaspar slum, Pune, currently benefiting 28 children. A teacher (Mrs Chaya Kate) and her assistant (Mrs Rubina Khan) take care of the children, each day from Monday to Saturday from 9.30 am to 1 pm. This gives the children’s very poor, hard-working parents a chance to earn money. In the morning the teacher leads prayer, then teaches songs, as well as basic literacy and numeracy. Mrs Khan prepares nutritious food for the children. Sometimes the children receive fruit; every week they are given eggs. Every month there is an evening meeting,

involving staff and the parents, to discuss the progress of students and to invite suggestions and any queries about the crèche. The teacher also discusses hygiene and health with the students.

Topics discussed with the mothers at these and other meetings include parental awareness of health, nutritious foods available at home, and meal preparation. Although there is insufficient space in the slum to grow vegetables, people do plant trees, such as mango, guava, chikoo, tamarind, lime, custard apple, papaya and curry leaves. The risk of early childhood marriage is also discussed, as are the benefits of family planning. Women are also taught about relevant government schemes, including the availability of free contraceptives from the nurse at the primary health centre.

The children also receive a monthly medical check, recording their height and weight, with additional advice and medicine to children, especially for those who are underweight. Every year the children and staff go on an outing together, to a garden.

All the activities of Hadapsar crèche, including the awareness program, are running successfully. BODHI also supports the costs of a clinic (elsewhere in Pune) which provides a doctor, nurse and means subsidized health care is available for many people.

This work in Pune has, since 1982, been supported by the Karuna Trust (<https://www.karuna.org/>) a British charity founded by the late Ven Sangharakshita. As a young man, Ven Sangharakshita resided in Kalimpong, in the Himalayan foothills. Seeking to work for the good of Buddhism, Ven. Sangharakshita met Dr Ambedkar three times, including shortly before his conversion (4).

Since 2005, this work led by Karunadeepa has also been supported by two NGOs with an Australian connection. These NGOs (BODHI and BODHI Australia) were co-founded by Colin Butler and his late wife Susan (see <https://www.bodhi-australia.com/>). BODHI's founding patron, since 1989, is His Holiness the XIVth Dalai Lama. Since 1989, these groups have raised and distributed about A\$0.5M to partners in six countries in Asia, mostly in India. BODHI Australia also helps to support the Aryaloka Education Society, a Dalit-led NGO, based in Nagpur, which teaches basic computing skills, mostly to young women from poor villages (<https://www.bodhi-australia.com/aryaloka-education-society-nagpur.html>). This work is also inspired by Buddhist values.

In the three decades of BODHI's work partner organizations have faced worsening barriers to receiving foreign funds. This steepens the challenge to reach the poorest people and to promote genuinely long-lasting development. But there is still a great need. We ask for your support, either directly, or in many other ways.

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The Role of Won-Buddhist Women in North-South Korean Relations: Past, Present and Future - *Sakyadhita Buddhist Women's* future role in Korean Peninsula-

Sangwon Hwang

Introduction

Political tensions between the US and the two Koreas has increased in recent years. The US-DPRK (the Democratic People's Republic of Korea) Summit in Singapore in June 2018, attracted attention to the Korean Peninsula.¹ A new U.N. approach to human rights has placed trade sanctions on the DPRK² because of their human rights violations toward both their own citizens, and others within their borders.³ In addition, the DPRK's nuclear ambitions created a crisis between the US and the two Koreas, increasing international tension. Although the Singapore summit brought a short breather to the region, additional concessions are necessary. In addition to political approaches, grassroots approaches must be continued and strengthened to achieve peaceful resolutions. One of these has been the humanitarian aid Won Buddhism has brought to North Korea, mainly through female leaders' collaborative and cooperative efforts.

Sakyadhita Buddhist International Women could possibly establish and encourage female Buddhists' gathering, to promote peace on the Korean Peninsula, relieving suffering from hunger and poverty.

This goal of this paper is to reflect and focus on past Won Buddhist female leaders' humanitarian challenges in helping North Korean refugees and to suggest a future frame for female Buddhists' role with the North Koreans.

History of Female Won-Buddhists in DPRK

From 1930 to 1936, the Founding Master Sotaesan of Won Buddhism travelled to what is now the DPRK, the Diamond Mountain and Gaesung City area with 6 female leaders.⁴ At that time, under Japanese occupation, a railroad was built from Seoul to several cities in North Korea. In 1938, a Won Buddhist Gaesung temple opened in Gaesung City, North Korea, sponsored by female Won Buddhist donors, and approximately 653 participants and Buddhist believers⁵ joined the service before the Korean War began in 1950.⁶

The Korean War (1950-1953) limited communication between the two Koreas, and disrupted religious and humanitarian aid.⁷ But in 1995, when the DPRK experienced severe floods, the Won Buddhism minister Mother Park (Rev. Chungsu Park)⁸ took action to help North Koreans, sending rice, fertilizer, medicine, soap, shoes, toys, food, clothing, and

¹ Er-Win Tan, *Is North Korea Serious About Denuclearization as a Costly Signal?: A Reality Check on the Pyongyang Thaw* of 2018, p. 2, Keimyung University in South Korea.

² Roberta Cohen, *A New UN Approach to Human Rights in North Korea: The 2017 Special Rapporteur's Report*, December 7, 2017, https://www.38north.org/2017/12/rcohen120717/#_ftn2.

³ United Nations, General Assembly, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK*, A/72/394, 19 September 2017.

⁴ Chongram (Historical organizational biography), *One people and one life* NGO association of Won Buddhism in South Korea, Won Publication, 2005.

⁵ Insung Jung, Deputy of Director General of Korean Unification Affairs, Administration of Won Buddhism, *Nomad Gaesung temple opening ceremony, Inauguration speech* in Seoul Won Buddhist temple, 2016.

⁶ *Nomad Gaesung temple Reporting Documents*, accessed on December 22, 2018, Won Buddhist Department of Cultural Affairs.

⁷ Donald Baker, "Peace Building-Candle light Revolution and Korean Spirituality", p.24. *Parliament or the World religious' seminar*, Nov. 3, 2018.

⁸ Won Buddhist Female clergy, assigned as Director, Pyongyang Regional District of Won-Buddhism, 1994.

materials specifically for women such as diapers, female sanitary pads, and nutritional medication for pregnant women. This was supported by Won Buddhist Female Committee members and domestic temple members,⁹ and was successful and welcomed by the DPRK government. When Rev. Park participated in the two Korea's meeting with North and South's female unification community on October 2002, she was highly welcomed,¹⁰ and she later sent additional aid, including in collaboration with Catholic nuns. Over 10 years, the donations to North Korea reached 7 tons, amounting to \$766,000.¹¹

Other Won Buddhist women have played a role in North-South Korean relations. Rev. Kyangyeon Choi was a representative at the National Unification Advisory Council¹² for 10 years from Andong and Busan city, and Bulkwangdong in Seoul¹³, and lectured on Korean unification at schools and community centers. Won Buddhist female clergy are also successfully running schools for North Korean refugees, at the Hangeore middle and high schools in Kyonggi province.¹⁴ These activities give hope for the future role of International Female Buddhist leaders.

International Buddhist Women's future role in DPRK

Currently, humanitarian aid in the DPRK has come up against obstacles with respect to the U.S. and U.N. human rights standards.¹⁵ However, communication and interaction between the South and North still exists. A Buddhist site restoration project was launched by the South Buddhists' Jogye order¹⁶. In 2011, the Prime Minister of the Jogye order visited Bohyeonsa (Mt. Myohangsan).¹⁷ Projects related to historical sites can help in the process of healing and peace-building.

Women have a role to play in the political sphere as well. Currently, there are four Workers' Unions¹⁸ in DPRK. One is the female labor union¹⁹, which could help establish a female Buddhist gathering between the North Korean and International female Buddhist communities.

I offer a proposal: Establishing a sanitary products factory for women in DPRK with the Sakyadhita International Buddhist women's help. There is an essential community female leader's union in North Korea called '*Chosun Democratic Women's Alliance*'²⁰. Women in the DPRK have suffered due to the limited number of sanitary items. There is a possibility of

⁹ Chungsu Park, "Brightening Mind Sight will guide you a Great Life", p. 85, Yeobaek Media, 2007.

¹⁰ Chungsu Park, "Brightening Mind Sight will guide you a Great Life", p. 91, Yeobaek Media, 2007.

¹¹ Chungsu Park, "Brightening Mind Sight will guide you a Great Life", p. 99, Yeobaek Media, 2007.

¹² "Minju Pyonghwatongil Jamunwiwon" in Korean, organized by Korean Ministry of Unification.

¹³ Personal Interview with Rev. Kyangyeon Choi, Dharma title Cheoltawon, September.12.2018.

¹⁴ Personal Interview, Rev. Myungsun Chung (Hangeore Principle) and Rev. Kwangjo Won, Won Buddhist minister who came from India, September.13.2018 at Hangeore school, South Korea.

¹⁵ Ven. Pomnyun, Peace Building in the Korean Peninsula, what should be done and what can be done, p.20, Parliament of World religion, Nov. 3, 2018.

¹⁶ Accessed December 21 2018, <http://www.bulkyo21.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=41691>.

¹⁷ Accessed December 22 2018, <http://www.bulkyo21.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=17585>.

¹⁸ Called "Chosun Geunro Danche" in Korean,

Accessed Nov 21.2018, <https://terms.naver.com/entry.nhn?docId=548690&cid=46629&categoryId=46629>.

¹⁹ Personal Interview, Insung Jung, Deputy Director of Korean Unification Affairs, Administration of Won Buddhism, August.28th.2018.

²⁰ '*North Korea Democratic Women's Alliance*'s name changed to '*Chosun Democratic Women's Alliance*', called *ChoSun Democracy Women's Federation (CDWF)* in 1951, '*Chosun MinjuYeosungDongmang*' in Korean.

Accessed on Aug 25 http://www.kci.go.kr/kciportal/landing/article.kci?arti_id=ART001474045, resources from Korea's National Dictionary, <http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/>.

re-establishing the project of creating a sanitary products factory, as seen by the fact the Won Buddhist community sent 2 tons of sanitary products through Mother Park and established a bread factory in Pyongyang District, North Korea with the help of the *Chosun Buddhist Association*²¹. This process could be done in cooperation with the South Korean Ministry of Unification Department and the North Korean women's union.²²

My second proposal is to invite North Korean refugee women to the upcoming Sakyadhita International Buddhist women's conference and listen to their life stories and future dreams. The Hanawon²³ women's connection is one of the best ways to sponsor their experience of the International Buddhist Women's group and broaden their views while meeting Buddhist groups and experiences. Some of them live apart from their families in the DPRK, and their lives in South Korea are not easy. Once they experience a global Buddhist Women's connection and return to their country, we can encourage them to organize Buddhist study groups on their own.

How can we go forward? I would like to propose four steps of action: Preparation, Interaction, Adaptation and Implementation. First, Preparation needs to be checked on a yearly basis. To actualize this idea, we need not only financial support but also a connection with the *female leader's union* in DPRK. Won Buddhism is planning to host the International Interfaith Leader's Conference on July, 2019 in South Korea, focusing on the topics of global climate change and Korea unification. Once Sakyadhita representatives participate in these annual activities and create collaborative efforts with unification projects, unification workers can establish better connection and communication. Adaptation calls for cooperation needs in Hanawon for North Korean female refugee communities in South Korea. Connecting with them, we can create more realistic plans based on their current needs. I would like to propose the implementation of these steps in conjunction with the GGGI²⁴ global group and Sakyadhita's group in South Korea. They support realistic action to establish environmental building project in developing countries globally. If this sanitary factory can benefit the environment in DPRK, we can achieve two things at once.

Interfaith movements' role in North Korea

The International Interfaith peace-building approach is another innovative approach. In 1991(Wongi²⁵ 76), the May 3rd Korea Interfaith leaders' treaty meeting was held to support unification.²⁶ In 1999,²⁷ the Chosun Asia Pacific committee from North Korea invited several religious leaders to participate in humanitarian aid in agriculture, book exchanges, and domesticated stocks. At that time, not only NGO communities such as South Korean People's

²¹ Chongram (Historical and Organizational Biography), One people and One life NGO association of Won Buddhism in South Korea, p.5, Won Publication, 2005.

From 2003 to 2005, daily produced 28,000 breads were distributed to the 5 boros of Pyongyang District kindergarten and elementary school. Won Buddhists Headquarter team had site visit in 2004.

²² Personal Interview, Female visiting researcher and scholar in Yoenbyeon University in China, Dr. Noh Gwinam, December.16th.2018.

²³ North Korea refugee community in South Korea.

²⁴ The Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI) is a treaty-based international organization headquartered in Seoul, South Korea. The organization aims to promote green growth, a growth paradigm that is characterized by a balance of economic growth and environmental sustainability. GGGI provides research and stakeholder engagement for green growth plans, especially in developing countries, aiming to replace the more typical paradigm based on industrial development. <http://gggi.org/> (accessed on August 30 2018).

²⁵ Won Buddhist year, starting in 1916 as Wongi 1.

²⁶ "Edification in helping Unification of Korea", Collections of North Korea Edification, p. 16, Won Buddhism publication, 1991.

²⁷ Chungsu Park, Brightening Mind sight will guide you a great life", p.87, Yeobaek Media, 2007.

Aid Committee²⁸, but also Myunghyeok Kim, Kyeongsoek Seo as Protestant minister, Changwha Choi as Catholic priest, and Namsu Park were sent as representative from Chondokyo²⁹ to North Korea. Afterwards, Interfaith leaders in South Korea launched several meetings on humanitarian aid in North Korea. Now, Won Buddhism of International Department in Korea, in collaboration with the Religious Research Institute, and the Hawaii Won Buddhist International Retreat Center, will initiate the International Interfaith conference on July 2019 in South Korea, and sign a treaty for protecting North Korea's environment. This new approach will bring groups together in a critically important way. Barriers to overcome include the US's insistence on completing the denuclearization process in North Korea and its allies' military exercises, which block economic aid for North Korea.³⁰ Furthermore, among South Korea's domestic parties, different approaches to unification pose another barrier. South Korea's conservative party hopes to maintain a strong relationship with the US and sees the North as a dictatorship, blocking unification and communication between two Koreas.³¹

Hopefully, 2019's conjunction with two Korea's *modus vivendi*³² will lead a new approach. As followers of the Buddha's great teaching of compassion and loving kindness toward all sentient beings, we need to work consistently to reach our goals step by step. As Ven. Tsomo mentioned³³, there needs to be a first step to escape the cycle of violence. All wholesome and unwholesome actions will bring consequences to the people in the DPRK and all others who suffer because of the ideology that divides different political regimes. Our actions could build a bridge for releasing tensions and actualizing the teachings of Buddha Dharma beyond borders.

Conclusion

The significance of this project cannot be emphasized enough. Regarding the Buddha's teachings of delivering all sentient beings from suffering, the people suffering in DPRK hold the highest priority, specifically women who lost their family in their country and experienced hardships while crossing the border to China. If we reflect on past humanitarian aid from the Won Buddhist community and further extend its aid to North Korean women, both inside and outside DPRK, it could be a future challenge for female Buddhists. Internationally, there is growing interest in North Korea in the U.S. and other regions. How can we, as Buddhists, cooperate and collaborate together to help resolve serious issues for female refugees in the borders of North Korea? It may be a profound challenge for the women of the Buddhist community, but this could contribute to a prolonged peace between the US and the two Koreas and help establish permanent security. Moving forward, Buddhist women will have more opportunities to affect the change of Korean relationships and even more profoundly impact the humanitarian conditions in North Korea. It is all up to the willingness of religious

²⁸ Uriminjokseorodopgi in Korean.

²⁹ Korea born indigenous religion, accessed on December 21, 2018.
<http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Cheondogyo>

³⁰ Er-Win Tan, Is North Korea Serious About Denuclearization as a Costly Signal? : A Reality Check on the Pyongyang Thaw of 2018, p. 147, Keimyung University in South Korea.

³¹ Jaebong Kim, the Inter-Korea Summit- the Peace of Unification, p.4, Won Kwang University, 2018.

³² James Person, Research Institute of Korean department at Johns Hopkins SAIS, Interview in Won Buddhismnewspaper, "Human Blossoming", accessed on October. 14.2018. *Modus vivendi* is a Latin phrase that means "mode of living" or "way of life". It is often used to mean an arrangement or agreement that allows conflicting parties to coexist in peace. Accessed on Oct.27th.2018 at
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modus_vivendi.

³³ Ven. Prof. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "Buddhist principles for Peace and Conflict Transformation, p.33, Parliament of World's Religions seminar, Nov. 3.2018.

organizations and women's groups to cooperate moving forward and create a movement for peace.

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Appendix

Personal Interview Questionnaires

1. In the past before the Korean War in 1950, what are Won Buddhists' female role in Northern part of Korea? Among them, what would be the female Buddhist's supporting role?
2. In 1930, if female Won Buddhists have played an important role in this region, what they do? And why do you think what they did is important?
3. In the future, if the Sakyadhita International female would gather to help the people who live in North Korea or female refugees, what kind of role can we offer for them? And, what kind of approach this female's association could follow?
4. If Inter-faith group is willing to help the North Korean citizens, are there any suggestions for us to collaborate?
5. Is there any ideas of the Union of religious groups which could possibly establish in North Korea? If it is possible, how feasible do you think it is and share any plans for the future? If not, why do you think so?

Upasikas of Nepal in Theravada Buddhism: Their Practice, Contribution and Leadership

Reena Tuladhar

Upasaka and *upasika* are Pali words. These are titles given to laypeople who are followers of Buddhism. They are not monks, nuns, or novices in the Buddhist order, but they undertake certain vows. They vow to follow the *Trisharan* (three Refuges) and the *Panchsila* (Five Precepts) and particularly the *Astasila* (Eight Precepts) on *Upasath* days. An important duty of a layperson is to provide the basic necessities, *catupratya* (the four requisites), to monks and nuns.

The Buddha was aware that if laypeople remain content with being providers, the Buddhist community would be severely imbalanced and incomplete. The Buddha expected his sincere lay disciples to practise the Noble Eightfold Path. The Buddha had said, "I shall not pass into final Nirvana until the laymen and laywomen are accomplished and well-trained, learned and knowers of the Dhamma, living by Dhamma and walking on the path of Dhamma, not until they pass on to others what they have received from their teacher and teach it, proclaim it, establish it, explain it, promote it, and clarify it, not until they are able to use it to refute false teachings and impart this wondrous Dhamma". (Bajracharya, 2000).

Elsewhere the Buddha said, "The highest honor and veneration any monk, nun, layman or laywoman can show me is to live according to the Dhamma and perfectly fulfill it. (Bajracharya, 2000).

For over 2,500 years, *catuparishad* (the four-fold assembly of Buddhist monks, nuns, laywomen and laymen) have closely supported each other on the Buddha's path to liberation. Therefore, it is relevant here to study and trace the role of laywomen from Nepal in the past up to the present day.

In the context of Nepal

The Kathmandu valley is one of the main areas of the country where Buddhists practise Theravada Buddhism. There has been a continuous, ideal relationship between laypeople and monastic disciples since the period of renaissance of Theravada in Nepal during the 1920's till today, laypeople providing monastics with their material needs and monastics providing laypeople with spiritual guidance. Among laypeople, laywomen make up around 80% of the laypeople of fourfold assembly (*catuparisad*) of the Buddhist community in Nepal. (Source: Viharas under survey)

Looking back into history

Influenced by Bhikkhu Pragyananda's dhamma discourses, Laxminani became the first woman to become an *Upasika* in the 1930's. (Lakaul, B., 1985)

Crushed by tragedies in her life, Laxminani spent more time in Kimdol Bahal, the historic place in Kathmandu valley, where Theravada renaissance originated in the 1920's. As an *Upasika*, Laxminani started to teach her friends what she learnt and soon began to assemble a group of female students. She gave instructions to laypeople and to laywomen in particular on core Buddhist beliefs and practices. This was the beginning of *Upasika's* tradition in Theravada Buddhism in modern Nepal.

The activities of Kimdol Bahal attracted the attention of the autocratic Rana rulers who ruled Nepal before the establishment of democracy in 1950. Laxminani, along with other social

activists of the day, were summoned to the district office in Kathmandu. After long hours of pleading, she was freed with a warning not to continue her activities in public. (Tuladhar, 2007)

After seeing Buddhism in a new light, Laxminani questioned many traditional and superstitious beliefs. She succeeded in persuading her family elders to give up their barbaric practices. Realizing that she needed to become a Bhikkhuni to propagate Buddhism more effectively, she left all her family property to relatives and left for Kushinagar. After completing her studies and training, she was ordained as Bhikkhuni Dharmachari in Kushinagar in the year 1934 A.D. She was the person who built the first nunnery, Nirvanmurti Upasikaram in Theravada tradition in Nepal. (Tuladhar, 2007)

For over three decades, Dharmachari became the most prominent Theravada nun in Nepal. She was later followed by a charismatic new female leader named Bhikkhuni Dhammavati.

Bhikkhuni Dhammavati, whose original name was Ganesh Kumari, was the only daughter of Harsha Man Shakya and his wife Hera Thakun. Hera Thakun, Ganesh Kumari's mother, was one of the earliest laywomen of Theravada. At the age of thirteen, Ganesh Kumari was brought to Sumangal Vihara in Lalitpur by her mother, where Bhikkhu Buddhaghosha was holding daily classes on Buddhism and Pali language. Although her husband preferred traditional Newar Buddhism, Hera Thakun followed Theravada Buddhism.

Ganesh Kumari's determination to study Theravada Buddhism is largely due to her mother's influence. Ganesh Kumari's ardent desire to study the Dhamma and to go to Burma for Buddhist studies was possible only due to her mother's support, while Ganesh Kumari's father and eldest brother tried hard to prevent her from going abroad. With the help of her mother and second eldest brother, Ganesh Kumari evaded her father's resistance, and made her way across the Mahabharat mountains and down to Chandramani Mahasthavi's vihara in Kushinagara where she got ordained. (Levi and Gellner, 2005)

Other contemporary notable laywomen are Laxmi Maya, mother of Bhikkhu Ashwaghosha, the current Sangha Nayak of Nepal, and Bhikkhuni Madhavi, Ratna Devi, mother of Bhikkhuni Dhammadina, and Beti Maya, mother of Bhikkhuni Uppalvanna. These women stood against their husbands, families and society in support of their children's desire to live an ordained life. These laywomen were brave and courageous, and their faith towards Buddhism was very praiseworthy. The story of their courage and persistence in overcoming the resistance of their husbands, families and a backward conservative society is remarkable. How they fought against their families and society and succeeded in ordaining their children for acquiring a monastic education are noteworthy.

Laywomen today

However, within the general context of Nepal today, *upasikas*, or those who visit viharas, and those who are residing in viharas to serve *Bhikkhus*, are considered as common people. The general public do not see them as representative women trying to lead a religious life. Society, therefore, neither acknowledges their contributions nor their meritorious work. In the public and academic sphere, Buddhist laywomen are often incorrectly seen as a marginalized group. They are not widely seen as practitioners. Their contributions and potential leadership in various forms are simply avoided. In fact, they are a group applying *veyavacca punya karma*, one of the ten meritorious deeds (*Dasa Punyakriya*). They remain crucial in the Buddhist community.

This paper is therefore an attempt to present laywomen of Nepal as true practitioners of Buddha's *dhamma* and their contribution and leadership in monastic functions.

A small primary survey was conducted covering five major viharas located in the valley. Questions were administered to Buddhist laywomen who are regular visitors of monasteries and nunneries. The study covered by this paper is limited to the Theravada Buddhist tradition in Kathmandu valley.

The primary survey showed the following functions and activities in the monasteries:

1. *Buddha puja* (worshipping Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha) and *paritran path* (reciting *paritran*).
2. *Maha Paritran Path* (reciting Paritran in big volume)
3. *Dan* (generosity) to monastics.
4. Pariyatti education
5. Buddhist classes for the elderly
6. Buddhist classes for children
6. Dhamma discourses
7. *Kathin chivara* and *Asta pariskar dan*
8. Meditation retreats
9. Buddhist classes for the youth
10. Serving Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis
11. Welcome and felicitation programmes.
12. Visits to Buddhist pilgrimages and heritage sites
13. Publication of Buddhist texts and periodicals
14. Organization of seminars and conferences
15. Temporary ordination programmes
16. Gyanmala bhajan
17. Construction and maintenance of viharas
18. Social service activities

Roughly more than 80% of the participants of these monastic functions are laywomen. They are continuously providing services to monasteries physically as well as financially. (Source: Information provided by viharas)

Laywomen belong to age groups spanning from their late twenties to seventies. Most of them are married. Their education level ranges from simply literate to higher education. Regarding their occupation, most of them are householders.

They have a scientific system of management. Laywomen are grouped in different names, mostly named after the group leader who is selected among themselves. The group leader leads the members of her group and manages activities with the help of members. They participate in all the activities of viharas. Thus, they are the main workforce who run the activities of viharas. Their service ranges from minor elementary work to important decision-making. Those who are less educated are seen mostly in elementary works such as cooking, cleaning and serving monastics etc. It is very noteworthy that they actually perform *veyavacca punya kriya* of *Das Punya kriya*. Regarding *dan punya kriya*, laywomen tend to lead more than laymen. Many of the laywomen somehow manage to give *dana* to monastics, even though they lack a source of income.

On the other hand, those who are educated and relatively more capable engage in coordinating and managing major programmes organized by viharas. The executive members are involved in work related to administration, legal registrations, accounts, and construction and maintenance of vihara buildings.

Suitable to title given to them, laywomen in Nepal are committed to following the **Three Refuges and Five Precepts, and particularly, the Eight Precepts on *Uposath* days.**

Besides providing the basic necessities and the four requisites to monks and nuns, they successfully attain Pariyatti education. According to the records provided by Nepal Bouddha Pariyatti Education Board, which is being run by All Nepal Boudha Bhikkhu Association, the number of laywomen who achieved Pariyatti Saddhamma Kobid, the highest degree of Pariyatti education in Nepal, until 2017 is 59, whereas the number is 24 for laymen.

According to the data provided by the International Buddhist Meditation Centre and Ratna Vipassana Vihar, two main meditation centres located in the valley, female *yogis* account for more than eighty percent of the total regular *yogis*. Laywomen commonly express a consistent view that they have developed the mental strength to face difficult situations in their family and social life.

Conclusion

Throughout the Theravada monasteries in Nepal, laywomen play important roles that are often overlooked in popular discourse. Historically, even since the time of renaissance of Theravada in Nepal, laywomen were crucial patrons of the Buddhist *Sangha*, funding the foundation of monastic institutions. Laywomen play a leading role in the performance of monastic functions, physically and financially. They also play an important role in the composition and publication of Buddhist texts. Laywomen act as Pariyatti teachers. Laywomen represent more than 80% of the *yogis* in meditation retreats conducted in viharas. These examples demonstrate the potential of Buddhist laywomen for leadership within the Buddhist community at in various forms.

Annex

Questions used in Questionnaire:

1. Age 2. Marital status 3. Education 4. Occupation 5. Pariyatti education 6. Meditation retreats 7. Daily meditation practice 8. Daily worshipping and paritran path 9. Visit to monasteries 10. Attendance in Dhamma discourses 11. Appearance in exams 12. Involvement in different activities of vihara. 13. Positive impact of Dhamma practice in life.

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Source of information

1. Dharmakirti Vihar 2. Padmakirti Vihar 3. Bishwa Shanti Vihar 4. Ratna Vipassana Vihar (Meditation Centre) 5. International Buddhist Meditation Centre 6. Nepal Bouddha Pariyatti Education Board

Welcoming the Stranger: Cultivating Hospitality

Malia Dominica Wong, O.P., D.Min.

Introduction

One crisp morning as I was attending a church service, I heard the agonizing sounds of someone moaning and wailing. It was quite disturbing. As I tried to focus on the liturgy, a voice in my head kept wondering “Who was that? Was it a new homeless person in the congregation sitting behind me? Was it a natural wail (like from a chronic discomfort), or did the person need medical attention?”

The sounds painfully chipped away at my core. Somehow, the thought of Father Damien and Mother Marianne on the island of Kalaupapa in Hawaii popped into my mind and how they must have endured the constant sound of wailing and gnashing of teeth 24/7 as those afflicted with Hansen’s disease cried out in pain from the disease, or from the distraught of being torn away from their families or children never to see them again, or facing their own mortality as death claimed another outcast.

Then I heard a voice say, “It’s okay. I’m here for you.” The groaning continued, followed by a sound as if one were holding another and patting the other on the back.

The Persian poet and Sufi mystic Mawlana Jalal-al-Din Rumi said, “Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.” “Beyond right and wrong there is a field. I will meet you there.”

Some people see hospitality as an obligation, a mechanical welcome. True hospitality is a spiritual practice, a religious practice that transcends the ordinary self. The best reason to reach out isn't to help another person, it is to make ourselves whole. Have we come to the point of welcoming without a “Why?” where pure hospitality equates with a radical “yes” to welcoming the stranger?

“Who is the Stranger?” What would Buddha do?

We live in a time of increased divisiveness in our world. We know all too well the destructive effects of war, prejudice, refugee displacement and territoriality that keep removing us one step further away from humanity. How can we become more effective and practical agents of institutional and systemic change, in order to create peace and sustainability? *What would the Buddha do?*

We are divided - even from ourselves. Whom among us has not given into anger (or road rage) by a car cutting us off? How dare they mix up my order at Starbucks? Or, “Who do they think they are, cutting the line in front of me?” We may feel entitled, tired and see the problem, but feel helpless or hopeless asking, “What difference will it make if I change, but others do not?”

Where did the days go when we did not have to lock our doors? How do we know whom to trust? What if there is an intention to harm me, the temple, others? When there is a knock on the door, how do we know whether the person behind it is a monster or a messiah?

When was the last time you might have ducked around the corner to avoid someone from hurting you? Are we still mad or angry now? We are struggling. We do struggle, struggling on how to continue to be kind when the bulldog other is not. Silence kills. Are “thank you,” and “I am sorry” still a part of our vocabulary? *What would Buddha do?*

How can cultivation of the heart and mind of the Tathagata’s great wisdom and compassion help nurture the sangha - welcome the stranger? In the Catholic tradition, we are

encouraged to put on the mind of Christ, to act more like Jesus, to have a more magnanimous heart. Being mindful that all living beings having Buddha-nature, we also strive to open our hearts in compassion and care. How do we get there? Practice. Cultivate the mind and heart of the Buddha, of Jesus. Pause. See the face of Buddha or Jesus in each person you meet. Ask. “What would Buddha do?” “What would Jesus do?”

The purpose of cultivation is to pull out from the roots those traits undesirable to more purely following the Bodhisattva path. In the Dhammapada, the Buddha said that experiences are preceded by mind, produced by mind and led by mind.

The American Buddhist, Tina Turner, has worked with the Swiss interfaith project “Children’s Beyond,” to help create cross-cultural understanding, awareness, dialogue, and respect through music. Imagine, if we were all that welcoming what our institutions, sanghas, churches, schools, and neighborhoods would be like? What would the world be like? How can we make this welcome our mission here and now?

Cultivation

In The 37 Practices of All Buddha’s Sons we find a guide of right behavior for bodhisattvas on the path to Buddhahood. The first practice says:

This sound human body endowed with full leisure —
An excellent vessel rare to be found —
Since now we’ve obtained one in no way deficient,
Let’s work night and day without veering off course
To take across the ocean and free from samsara,
Not only ourselves, but all others as well.
First listen, think hard, then do much meditation.
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.¹

It is as difficult to reincarnate as a human being as it is for a turtle in the vast sea to poke its head up into a lone jade ring floating above. The Sufi mystic Rumi asked, “If you are irritated by every rub, how will your mirror be polished?” And, again: “Stop acting so small. You are the universe in ecstatic motion.” We are challenged to open wide the lotus of our being. By doing so, we help ourselves by helping others.

After the Buddha’s enlightenment experience, it is said that he had a vision of the world as being like a lake full of lotuses in all stages of growth. Some remained closed beneath the water. Others had risked to bud and peek above the water. Some had already attained half-openness. And, yet others had reached full awakening, unfolding above the mud of the earth to give selflessly of their all. Which stage of the path do you find yourself?

As Catholic devotees, we were taught during our formative years uniform ways to walk and talk, to pray with certain postures, etc. These were all good as externals as we learned to slow down and not run. In the mission fields we were taught to smile, keep an even tone and to enunciate our words clearly. But, if after several tries and the other person is still not able to understand your words, wouldn’t frustration arise?

Beyond the externals of our sometimes masked smile are the internals. I remember during one Vipassana retreat my teacher pointed out different levels to generosity. The lowest level could be equated with seeing someone calling for help and not doing anything. Above

¹ Zangpo, Thogme. “The Thirty-Seven Practices of All Buddhas’ Sons.” Accessed January 31, 2019. <http://pannavati.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Lesson-2.pdf>

that level is when we see someone calling for help, and we assist with conditions (seeking honor or recognition). Higher than that level is when we see a need and respond to it before being asked. The highest level of generosity is altruistic. It is when we spontaneously give and anticipate needs like the generosity of a mother to her child. It is motivated by metta.

So, what kind of actions should we be cultivating in order to practice religious hospitality not only to some, but to even the stranger at our door? Bishop Eric Matsumoto of Hongpa Honwanji of Hawaii prescribed the following guidelines for his community in order to build up harmony in the sangha through increasing sympathy and trust.

Externally:

Do not ask for too many things.

Remove all self-centered desires and attachments.

Do not argue.

Know when to be silent.

Maintain a balanced mind.

Be generous.

Offer your service.

Offer your ear. Listen to others.

Offer a warm and welcoming look.

Offer your smile.

Offer kind words.

Internally:

Are my words kind and supportive or are they sarcastic, angry and intimidating?

What is my real motivation?

Does my behavior reflect sincere compassion for others?

Does my ego get in the way?

Am I overbearing? Do I talk too much? Do I repeat myself?

Am I patient?

Do I listen?

Do I treat others courteously?

Do I seek feedback about my behavior?²

In addition, there is also the concept of tiou xing, the Chinese word for cultivation. This religious practice encompasses:

1. Shen xing jing, Calm, clear body. We may have heard the phrase “Charity begins at home.” How hospitable are we to ourselves? I don’t mean pampering ourselves to the extent that we become detached from the balanced real. But seriously, what parts of ourselves might we be estranged from, like for example, the pain in your knee that is crying out for attention? How do you take care of yourself? Do you eat healthfully at regular times, take appropriate rest, get regular exercise, etc.?

2. Kou xing jing, Calm, clear speech. Sometimes too much stress can burn us out. How hospitable are we when we are maxed out? Can we let go of having to be right, of asking “Why?” amidst anger or blame as opposed to generously allowing others their opinion?

² Matsumoto, Bishop Eric. “Becoming a More Dharma-centered Organization.” March 21, 2017. Accessed January 31, 2019. <https://hongwanjihawaii.com/message/becoming-a-more-dharma-centered-organization/>

How do we welcome the uncomfortable, de-program ourselves to be less reactive, dualistic? What practices do we use, e.g. chanting the name of the bodhisattva Kuan Yin, or Namo myoho renge kyo, Om mani padme hum, or Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me? That, our speech may not lend itself to causing others pain?

3. Yi xing jing, Calm, clear mind. How do I practice hospitality towards the world? How did Musashi constantly win over his opponent in sword fighting? No fear. No dualism. Because even if for one split second, one thinks of the other- one is defeated.

Thich Nhat Hanh created the Order of Interbeing. He said, “In the Buddhist tradition, our connections are real; our separations are an illusion. When we believe in the illusion of separation, not only do we deceive ourselves but we follow a path that will bring us great suffering. If you and I are ultimately connected, you cannot be other. You cannot be an alien, a foreigner. If I do not know you I do not yet know a part of my self. When you and I are separated, neither of us is whole.”³

In his article *Religious Hospitality: A Spiritual Practice for Congregations*, Peter Morales said:

“The hunger for true religious community, for connection and commitment, is pervasive in our time. Our future depends on whether we can connect with people at the level of their deepest longings and highest aspirations. We are called to feed the spiritually hungry and to offer a home to the religiously homeless. And in the process, we are enriched in spirit. May you and I be there, with anticipation in our hearts, warm smiles on our faces, our eyes ready to truly meet the eyes of another, and our arms extended, saying, ‘Welcome, welcome.’”⁴

Back in the ‘80’s when I was missioned in the Philippines, I was handed 50 fifth-graders to teach. Aside from never having taught before, I didn’t know the local language and was unfamiliar with the culture. Stressed, one day I somehow made my way to a nearby Buddhist temple. As I walked around the grounds, a nun cutting sugar cane spied me. She offered me a piece. I couldn’t understand her Taiwanese, nor she my broken Mandarin. Nonetheless, she kept smiling and we kept eating, and I felt at peace. Although we couldn’t speak the same language, our hearts spoke...and, we are still friends today.

Through your welcome of the stranger, may more not be afraid of...Buddhists! And, through my continuing to cultivate my practice of hospitality and opening my heart- may more not be afraid of Christians and those of other traditions.

³ Morales, Peter. “Religious Hospitality, A Spiritual Practice for Congregations,” p. 2. Accessed January 31, 2019<https://www.uuabookstore.org/Assets/PDFs/3101.pdf>

⁴ Ibid., p. 3

Women of the Dakini's Heart

Pema Khandro

One of the most distinctive elements of Tibet's *Seminal Heart* literature is its inclusivity.¹ Women appear in the literature from its inception. Female adepts are featured in *The Seminal Heart* in roles as disciples, teachers, guides, mothers, consorts and more. This is the literature of non-monastic, non-celibate communities, outside monastic institutions, communities of Yogis and Yoginis. They are not lay people, nor are they monastics, instead Tibet's Buddhist Yogis represent a third type of religious life in Tibet. Their lifestyle is inclusive of sexuality, family, and body positive practices. Their lifestyle is varied, to be integrated with ordinary society, to practice in solitude, or to practice in itinerant groups. Although they are falsely stereotyped as ritual specialists, their curriculum is often the same or parallel to their monastic counterparts or has more emphasis on contemplation. While gender inclusivity in these communities does not necessarily represent actualization of gender equality, it is a significant resource for investigating the function of female figures in historical literature. Furthermore, it does also document significant empowerment of a few female leaders. This paper seeks to offer a brief analysis of female roles as they are portrayed in this literature through a statistical analysis of one-hundred-sixty figures.

The Seminal Heart is a tradition which came to define Tibet's *Great Perfection* (rdzogs chen) movement in the fourteenth century. This was due to the synthesis of the literature by the scholar-yogi, Longchenpa (1308-1363). Further revelations and commentaries continued to develop through the modern period.

The Seminal Heart corpus includes philosophical, narrative, ritual and contemplative texts. It is known for having two major bodies - *The Seminal Heart of Vimalamitra* and *The Seminal Heart of the Dākinī*, which is attributed to Padmasambhava. This paper introduces a small selection of the research being developed for a dissertation on the history of *The Seminal Heart of the Dākinī*. Here the source of focus is the history of *The Seminal Heart* lineage as recorded by Nyoshul Khenpo (1932-1999) in English and Tibetan Manuscripts. These are, *The Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, *Biographies of Masters of Awareness in the Dzogchen Lineage*, and in Tibetan, *The Natural Great Perfection's History as Biographies of the Lineage of Awareness Holders which are a Marvelous Garland of Lapis Lazuli Jewels*. The genre of the texts is the History of the Origins of Dharma (*chos 'byung*), a history as told through a collection of narratives.

The first students of *The Seminal Heart* are female according to the narrative history. In *The Seminal Heart of Vimalamitra*, female figures known as *Dākinīs*, were the first students of the Great Perfection, taught by the first human lineage holder, Garab Dorje. He not only taught to them, many hundred thousand of these *Dākinīs* attained enlightenment.² Even though their identity is not individuated, it portrays a sense of a massive female presence representing the first students. The narrative of the origins of *The Seminal Heart of the Dākinī* also begins with the first transmission being given to female figures. It was given to two human, female students.

The Seminal Heart of the Dākinī begins with the transmission from Padmasambhava, Tibet's Tantric Buddha, to his female disciple, Yeshe Tsogyal. However, the key transmission

¹ A point brought to my attention by David Germano upon his lecture about his extensive research into the relationship between *The Seminal Heart of Vimalamitra* and *Seminal Heart of the Dakini* in their early history and the predominance of female figures in the latter. Germano, David. "The Rise of the Lotus." Tibetan Renaissance and Dzogchen Course, December 12, 2018, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia. Class Lecture.

² Dorje, Garland. 38

which ensures the continuation of the cycle is said to take place when Padmasambhava and Yeshe Tsogyal transmit the corpus to an eight-year old girl, Pema Sal (8th century). Pema Sal was the young daughter of the King of Tibet, Trisong Detsen (8th century). It is notable that *The Marvelous Garland* only presents a brief mention of Pema Sal's life, while *The Seminal Heart of the Ḍākinī*'s text entitled, "*Pema Ledre Tsal's Prophecies and Life Stories*,"³ records her life story in further detail, as the crucial point of the origin narrative of the lineage. The story begins when young Princess Pema Sal has died due to a bee sting. The King begs Padmasambhava to revive her. He does indeed revive her, but only for a moment, long enough to give her *The Seminal Heart of the Ḍākinī*, along with a prophecy that she will reveal the text in a future incarnation. The narrative of the princess is the backstory behind the revelation of *The Seminal Heart of the Ḍākinī*, which is later revealed by the fourteenth century figure, a male treasure revealer Pema Ledresal.

Both Pema Sal and Yeshe Tsogyal were aristocratic figures. Another example of a common challenge to the study of women in Tibet is that it predominantly featured women whose status does not necessarily represent their less privileged contemporaries. However, in my survey of the early transmission of *The Seminal Heart*, of the one-hundred-sixty female figures who are mentioned, only seven are aristocratic.

The next major woman depicted as a lineage holder of is the seventeenth century woman, Mingyur Paldron (1699-1769). Paldron became a lineage holder after the death of her father, Nyingma hierarch, Terdak Lingpa and the murder her brother and uncle. She is credited with restoring the Mindroling Monastery in central Tibet after it had been destroyed, ensuring the continuity of the lineage. She not only teaches *The Seminal Heart* but also furthers its development as an author of a commentary based on the *The Seminal Heart of the Ḍākinī* and its landmark commentary by Longchenpa, *The Seminal Quintessence of the Ḍākinī*.

The history also includes Jetsunma Trinle Chodron (18th-19th century), who was another female lineage holder. Her narrative is notable because she is described as an accomplished practitioner of *The Great Perfection*'s elite contemplative program. In addition, she is credited with teaching 'multitudes' of students, including the influential master, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (1829-1870).⁴

Another lineage holder of *The Seminal Heart* is Shuksep Jetsunma Chonyi Zangmo (1865-1953). She has the longest narrative of a female adept in the collection. Jetsunma is a renowned master of the modern period. After growing up in poverty and as a victim of domestic violence, her biography describes achievements that span through a range of religious roles. She was monastic - since she was ordained as a nun. She was a yogini - since she practiced Severance (chod) in one hundred charnel grounds. She was an adept - since miracles are attributed to her such as crossing a huge river and passing through solid cliffs.⁵ Her role was also institutional, she founded Shuksep Nunnery, and taught *The Seminal Heart* cycles there. She was also an oracle, since she was renowned as a Delok ('*das log*'). Jetsunma is a therefore described in terms of the wide range of roles attributed to women.

However, despite these remarkable women, there is a gap in naming of major female figures between the ninth century and pre-modern period in this text, which leads to the question - what other women were involved in between? Therefore, I will now turn to an analysis of the early transmission from the 10th to the 14th century - up to through the life of Longchenpa.

³ See the major early source for the history of this corpus in Longchenpa's collected works: 'od zer, dri med. "pad ma las 'brel rtsal gi skyas rab dang lung bstan," gsung 'bum dri med 'od zer. Vol 6. Beijing, krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2009.

⁴ Dorje, Garland. 383

⁵ Dorje, Garland. 349

What stands out in this era are the types of female figures depicted. Human woman in the early transmission included guides, mothers, lineage holders, consorts and students. However, there were many more *Ḍākinīs* featured as pivotal females in the early history. Fifty human women are identified and one group of women. However, even more *Ḍākinīs* are identified than human women. Fifty-seven individual *Ḍākinīs* and an additional thirty-five descriptions are of hordes of *Ḍākinīs*, or groups of *Ḍākinīs* are named.

The topic of *Ḍākinī* raises the issue of the challenge underlying historical investigation of women in Tibetan history, namely assumptions about what “woman” and “female” meant for these contexts. Far from being universal, these categories are socially constructed and contingent terms. It is a mistake to assume that the notion of female is a monolithic status across all times and all contexts in Tibet (or anywhere), complexity and diversity need to be considered in specific contexts, or in this case, in a single corpus of literature tailored to a non-celibate context. The construct which stands out in this context is the use of *Ḍākinī*.

Ḍākinīs in the literature present a challenge to historical investigation due to the conflation of divine and human subjects. However, the activities and functions of *Ḍākinīs* in this literature can still be accounted for in order to illuminate the views of female roles within the transmissions. In many cases, the transmission of *The Seminal Heart* in the human lineage, that transmission is said to be first initiated by a *Ḍākinī* - crediting female agents as the catalysts for the crucial events of the inception of the cycle’s history. For example, the progenitor of this literature, Vimalamitra, is told by a *Ḍākinī* where to go to receive the teachings in the first place. Likewise, the key figures in the history, Padmasambhava, Yeshe Tsogyal, Zhangton Tashi Dorje and Longchenpa, the other major figures credited with the inception of *The Seminal Heart* are all told by *Ḍākinīs* to look for the teachings and where to go look for the teachings. Therefore, *The Seminal Heart* literature is said to originate through the agency of *Ḍākinīs*. Though such agency is not articulated by human women in these instance, it is an expression of the agency of female figures which may be seen as a setting a precedence for the agency of human women which follow. More importantly, it sets the precedence for positive male and female connections.

Generally in Tibetan narrative literature, *Ḍākinīs* are enlightened or powerful female figures. They may be divine goddesses or highly accomplished female adepts or women with wisdom. Some modern scholars equate *Ḍākinīs* with consorts, however in this text, although sometimes the term *Ḍākinī* refers to consorts, this is only one of the *Ḍākinī*’s many possible roles. Of the fifty-seven individual *Ḍākinīs* mentioned and the thirty-five groups of *Ḍākinīs* - only once was a female figure described as *Ḍākinī and consort*. That was in the story of Padmasambhava. Therefore, in this literature, the term *Ḍākinī* does not equate with consort. Another interesting finding in this research is that although in Tibetan narratives, there are also another class of *Ḍākinīs*, flesh eating ones, who are threatening forces,⁶ these types of malevolent *Ḍākinīs* do not figure prominently in this period of the literature either. Out of one-hundred-sixty female figures, only twice were female figures opposing forces to be subjugated in this history of origins. Scholars have focused on themes of misogyny and deification in the issue of *Ḍākinīs*, still other functions of *Ḍākinī* in the literature maybe be useful to uncover.⁷ In this case, *Ḍākinīs* in the early transmission of *The Seminal Heart* are depicted most often as guides or students. Fifty-one percent of the individual *Ḍākinī* figures mentioned were such guides, a category which includes prophets, teachers and ritual masters. Additionally, *Ḍākinī* described female students nine occasions in the text, which includes at times hundreds of thousands of students.

⁶ Gyatso, Apparitions. 247

⁷ Take for example Gyatso, Apparitions, in which the *Ḍākinī* is interpreted as a voice of the autobiographer.

Even when women's names and roles are largely omitted from history of origins texts such as this, this paper suggests that it may be useful to some glean important information by analyzing the roles and functions of female characters which are named. Following Foucault's notion of an archaeology, it may be impossible to accurately reconstruct or recapture what the term meant by those who wrote these texts, but instead we can seek to define the rules of the discourse about women and *Ḍākinī*, by observing how and when the terms were utilized. Setting *The Seminal Heart* in contrast to early Buddhist literature which frames women as demonic temptresses, or formulates them according to the horrific⁸ such positive representations of female agents may not always name individual women in particular while still functioning to promote inclusivity. Indeed, these references may be operating under a more important overall agenda of setting a supportive tone for the relationships between men and women in *The Seminal Heart*'s non-celibate subculture. In this case, where most often the term *Ḍākinī* is used to refer to agents that involved in the transmissions, as catalyzers, guides and students, such literature is notable because it portrays positive benefits to the propagation of the lineage when men related to female figures.

⁸ See Liz Wilson, *Charming Cadavers: Horrific Figurations of the Feminine in Indian Buddhist Hagiographic Literature*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Stepping Lightly into the Future

Sister Candasiri

Firstly, I need to acknowledge our Siladhara Sangha, the English Sangha Trust and all the organisers who have enabled our attendance at this Conference.

My introduction to the Thai Forest Tradition of Buddhism was in 1977, shortly after Ajahn Sumedho had arrived in London. Ven. Ajahn Chah, his teacher in N.E. Thailand had asked him to continue his practice in England. Originally from the U.S.A., Ajahn Sumedho had been a monk for over ten years.

At that time, I had no interest whatsoever in being a nun, but I was impressed by the simplicity and directness of the teaching of the Four Noble Truths. Suffering needs to be understood: its cause is attachment to desire; it ceases when we let go of desire, and there is a path to freedom from suffering that we can develop.

Years before when I was about 14 years old and a devout Christian, I had made a vow to dedicate my life to God. Later on, I turned to meditation hoping that this would help me in living out this ideal. By the time I met Ajahn Sumedho I had been practising within a number of different traditions but I was still struggling. There was fear, anxiety, irritation and – worst of all jealousy. Outwardly happy with a rewarding job, plenty of money and good friends and family – inwardly, I was still searching.

Towards the end of my first ten day retreat, Ajahn Sumedho spoke about a new monastery – Chithurst – and the possibility of a training for nuns, and it was clear: I needed and wanted to live with others whose lives were totally dedicated to following these remarkable teachings. I had no idea how it would unfold – there was just a great sense of joy, and confidence that this monastic life could support the dedication and service that I had envisioned all those years before.

I valued greatly that there were monks who were sincere in their aspiration to live according to an impeccable training; for whom I felt a natural respect; who inspired and welcomed me. At that time there were no nuns; however three other women – later known as Sisters Rocana, Sundara and Thanissara - soon arrived at Chithurst, and on 28th October 1979 Ajahn Sumedho gave us the Eight Anagarikaa Precepts.

From the start there were challenges. The living conditions were basic, we worked hard and the days were long. Also, getting along together was not easy. We had not chosen each other as companions, and we each had a strong character. In the midst of it all, Ajahn Sumedho exuded a pioneering spirit and humour that encouraged us all ‘to let go’ and to ‘not make problems’, either about our own or each other’s shortcomings, or about the physical conditions we were dealing with. Over time, we learned to love and care for each other – not allowing the conflicts that naturally arose to linger in our minds; letting go, and beginning again – and again. It was an exciting and joyful time.

Then other challenges emerged that required different tools and understanding. At the beginning we were definitely ‘junior’, so it wasn’t difficult to show respect to the bhikkhus, they were obviously more experienced in the monastic form than we were. I could do this, even although it went directly counter to how I had grown up; my father and brother would always treat me and all women with utmost respect. Also, as the first-born in my family, and the first granddaughter after six grandsons, I felt I was welcome – as a girl. I think this was important in instilling a kind of confidence that sustained me even when, decades on, things were at their darkest. I knew I belonged and had a respected place.

The offering of *pabbajja*, the Ten Precept ordination, by Ajahn Sumedho in 1983 was a significant and affirming step. It was met with a mixture of joy and relief by everyone. It had

seemed that there would be no equivalent mendicant form for us as women monastics within our tradition, and our friends and supporters were – naturally – concerned. In our Western culture there is the expectation that women should have an equivalent status to their male counterparts; it was painful to me our public presence was so obviously different. We came second, we sat behind; it appeared to many people that, as women, we were considered lesser. Such concerns have been difficult to address and over the years, the changes in our community relationships have happened slowly: sometimes moving towards a greater sense of equivalence, sometimes away from it. Much courage, patience and understanding has been needed to weather these difficulties - particularly when many of the nuns decided to leave our communities. There have been times when, sitting in our severely reduced group of nuns, I would imagine myself a very large and powerful presence in order to feel some sense of balance with the much larger monks' community sitting opposite.

I would like to turn now to our monastic training, which was devised by Ajahn Sucitto. For six and a half years he guided us in establishing suitable rules and procedures for community living, based on the Ten Precepts and on the Bhikkhu and Bhikkhuni Patimokkhas. We had no 'senior nuns', so when he 'retired' we were left to find our own way of supporting the juniors in their practice. At first we tended to imitate what we had observed of the training within the monks' community. This often seemed a bit 'macho', and I was glad when I realised that we could be free to find our own way; nurturing and empowering, or 'being alongside', as a Christian nun friend put it. It took a while, and many mistakes. Indeed, we are still learning....

It is a training that enables women of many different nationalities and backgrounds to live together, supporting each other in their spiritual practice. It is certainly not easy, and yet it is most joyous. Each day we have opportunities to experience suffering: the pain of holding on – to an idea, a position or a view; and to experience also the lightness and freedom that arises when we let go. Gradually, we come to see that 'my way' is not necessarily the best, or the 'only way'. We learn to relax and let go of our fixed ways of seeing and doing things. It's always a relief.

Many years ago, there was a time when, paying respects to an Elder, I had deliberately bowed slightly out of time with the other Sisters. I received some strong feedback, so the next time we were together and ready to bow, I knew I had a choice: to hold on to my need to be different – or to bow with the others. I didn't know what would happen; there was an inner rebellion: '*I'm not going to do it!*' – and yet, I did. I bowed with everyone. The mind went quiet.

Another time, my mind was filled with thoughts of ill-will towards someone who had treated me in a way that I found extremely painful. I really wanted that person to suffer – a lot. Then I found myself thinking: '*Candasiri, this is not what the Buddha encourages; this is not the way of a samana. You need to let this go.*' So I decided to stop thinking in that way (even though I was rather enjoying it). I was amazed what happened next. My heart felt so light and joyful!

Another difficulty I would like to speak a little about is jealousy - an emotion that can be very painful to acknowledge. Nobody *wants* to be jealous. It takes humility to recognise the inclination to mock or belittle someone, when we think or fear that they may be better than us in some way. But failing to curb the impulse to act or speak in a harmful way benefits no one; so now I try to meet jealousy with compassion, curiosity - and a wise caution. Mudita, often translated as 'gladness at others' success', does not always come easily. I've found it more helpful to bring to mind the beauty and blessings of my own life first - then gladness for the good fortune of others arises naturally.

In the face of the many injustices of life, this practice may sound rather passive: 'just let go....' However, usually this is just the first step. There are concerns that need to be

addressed – in our families, in our communities, in the world. There are situations where it can be helpful to say or do something. Our training as nuns is an outer discipline, and also an inner discipline. The inner discipline of letting go of our ego-centered views allows the wisdom of the heart to speak. We may have wonderful, clear ideas – and yet they may be quite out of step with the reality of a situation. A poem arose for me at a time when our community was in a state of crisis some years ago:

*Never trust black and white.
'They're so wrong, we're so right.'
When we hear what people say,
What we find are shades of grey.*

Being right in the middle of it, this was the heart's way of making some sort of sense of a difficult and complex situation.

So what can the female voice offer in meeting the challenges of this time – globally, socially and in our own practice?

Firstly: the capacity to remain present – to acknowledge our sense of helplessness and vulnerability, bringing forth courage, patience, and wise discernment, instead of simply reacting to difficult situations with aversion or fear.

Secondly: nurturing, empowering and encouraging others; we learn how to cooperate, rather than allowing ourselves to be seduced by a sense of competition or jealousy.

Thirdly: a willingness to serve, yet to remain attuned to our own needs of body and mind. We make the heart big, so as to hold all beings with tender concern.

It is faith that keeps us practicing, that enables us to continue as true servants of Dhamma, responding to the inevitable challenges of this human realm stepping lightly and joyously into the future.

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Liz Wilson is Professor of Comparative Religion at Miami University of Ohio (US). She earned her doctorate at the University of Chicago Divinity School, specializing in pre-modern Indian Buddhism, especially Gupta-era narrative literatures. Her primary analytical lenses are gender, sexuality, gerontology, and family-formation. Wilson has done research in India, Nepal, Malaysia, Singapore, China, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkey. She is author of *Charming Cadavers: Horrific Figurations of the Feminine in Indian Buddhist Hagiographic Literature* (University of Chicago Press, 1996). Wilson has edited two collections of essays: *The Living and the Dead: Social Dimensions of Death in South Asian Religion* (SUNY Press, 2003) and *Family in Buddhism: Buddhist Vows and Family Ties* (SUNY Press, 2013). Next year Routledge will release a textbook that Wilson co-authored with Dr. Melissa Wilcox and Dr. Nina Hoel: *Religion, The Body, and Sexuality*.

Maxine Ross is a mother, nurse and Midwife and has been a health volunteer in India. Currently she works with Aboriginal communities in NSW. In 1992 she cofounded Vajraling Retreat. Karunadeepa chairs the Bahujan Hitay Pune Project, based in India. Emilia Della Torre is a retired international human rights. Her main teachers are Her Eminence Jetsen Kushok Luding Rinpoche and Acharya Zasep Tulku Rinpoche. Colin Butler co-founded the NGO BODHI Australia; Maxine and Emilia are board members.

Rev. Sangwon HWANG (South Korea / United States) is a Won Buddhist minister who has worked widely with interfaith groups across the United States and in Korea to promote peace-building and youth development through education and dialogue. Ms. Hwang received her MA in Applied Meditation from the Won Institute of Graduate Studies in Philadelphia and her MA in Won Buddhist studies from the Won Buddhism Graduate School in South Korea. She recently completed the East-West Center's Asia-Pacific Leadership Program and is now working to develop a new approach for solving sensitive international issues using the principles of harmony and balance.

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Sister Malia Dominica Wong, O.P., D.Min. is a Catholic religious and Senior Lecturer in the Religious Studies Department of Chaminade University of Honolulu. As a third-generation English-only speaking Chinese, she was intrigued by her grandparents and great grandmother's observances of rituals she much later learned were Buddhist. She began Zen practice under Robert Aitken Roshi in 1982. Since then, she has been involved with various Buddhist organizations working to build bridges of harmony and understanding among peoples of all faiths and denominations locally and internationally.

Pema Khandro is a Tibetan Buddhist teacher, scholar and humanitarian, specializing in the philosophy and practice of Tibet's Buddhist Yogis and their Dzogchen teachings. Ordained in the Nyingma lineage, enthroned as a tulku, and trained as an academic, her teachings celebrate the dynamic coalescence of tradition and the modern context. Pema Khandro is the founder of Ngakpa International, the Yogic Medicine Institute, and three residential centers including Dakini Mountain, in Northern California. She is currently completing her Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies at the University of Virginia.

Ajan/Sister Candasiri was born in Edinburgh in 1947, and raised within a Christian family. She has been a Buddhist nun within the Thai Theravada Forest Tradition of Luang Por Chah since 1979, when she became one of the first four anagarikaas at Chithurst Monastery in West Sussex in the UK. In 1983 she received pabbajja and, since then, has been active in the evolution of a training for siladhara nuns of our tradition. Until 2012 I lived in the double monastic communities at Amaravati and Chithurst Monasteries. She now lives in Perthshire in Scotland, at Milntuim - a hermitage which has been established for nuns and novices of our Tradition.