



Sakyadhita
AUSTRALIA

Sakyadhita Australia

*A national organisation representing Buddhist women
in Australia across all traditions*

Newsletter September 2019

Issue Number 8

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Editorial

Greetings to all members and friends – and welcome to the 8th Sakyadhita Australia newsletter.

We celebrate the success of the recent International Conference in the Blue Mountains. Thanks must go to all Australians who contributed to this success – whether fund raising, sorting and editing the academic papers, presenting papers, moderating sessions, organising and giving workshops, Lynn Bain at Bodhi Events and all those who pulled the whole thing together.

The Conference was titled ‘New Horizons in Buddhism’ and it certainly covered new ground - in particular we were shocked by revelations of abuse within parts of the Buddhist community. From this the Alliance for Buddhist Ethics has been created - read more about that below

Another theme running through the Conference was care for the environment. Keynote speaker Roshi Susan Murphy spoke eloquently of our need to drastically rethink society to overcome the problems leading to environmental degradation. Roshi Susan is a thought provoking speaker and we are delighted that she has agreed to join us for our next Webinar scheduled for 16 October. Be ready to log-in to this exciting occasion.

There were papers detailing the history of Buddhism in this country – particularly Buddhist women – see an edited version below.

Our Annual General Meeting was held during the Conference; we bid farewell to many of our Committee members but now have a new and enthusiastic Committee.

We would particularly like to welcome all new members who joined us at this time.

The afternoon workshops at the Conference were great fun and well attended – covering everything from Tai Chi, Korean cooking to Buddhist economics. We had the opportunity over lunch and dinner to make new friends – and if things ever got too much there was always the option of a walk in beautiful Blue Mountains bushland nearby. Some participants prolonged the experience with a cruise on Sydney harbour and a trip to the Nan Tien Temple in Woollongong.

All-in-all a thought provoking yet rewarding experience.

May all beings be well and happy!

Helen Richardson,
President, Sakyadhita Australia





International Conference June 2021

It is planned to hold the next International Conference in Borneo in June 2021 – details to be confirmed.

Diary Dates : AGM and Mini Conference : 5-8 June 2020

We're planning an exciting event next year - a Mini Conference and, as part of this, our next Annual General Meeting. It will be held in June 2020 at the Chenrezig Institute at Eudlo, in the beautiful Sunshine Coast hinterland of Queensland. This promises to be a most exciting event, with talks, papers, meditation, videos, a chance to contribute ideas for the future and even a Garden of Enlightenment. Further details to come.

The 2019 Annual General Meeting

The AGM was held at the Conference with good attendance.

We bid farewell to outgoing Committee members and thank them for all they have done—particularly those who worked towards the Conference, fundraising to provide scholarships; and for the editing and organisation of the Academic papers which was such a major undertaking. Our thanks to outgoing President Suzanne Franzway, Ven Lozang Drolkar, Rani Hughes, Meg Adam and Lydia Brown – whose work helped establish Sakyadhita as a significant presence in the Australian Buddhist community.

Here are some excerpts from outgoing President Suzanne Franzway's report : *'I have been on the Committee for 3 years since our inception, with 2 years as president so I shall not be renominating for a Committee role as it's time to step aside. . . I hope that we can grow to be a virtual and sometimes physical space for engagement and discussion to grow our Sanghas of all our members and advocacy for social justice and the Dharma.*

Overall, Sakyadhita Australia is on the path to becoming a flourishing organisation which can support (including material support) and encourage women Buddhists. As we know, we are yet to achieve real equality in all our diverse Buddhist communities. In the coming year/s, I am hoping that we can become a place for growth and discussion of issues and ideas that arise from the challenges facing us. This can include finding ways to engage across the country, perhaps with webinars, or seminars or online discussions

Thank you for your work Suzanne.

Our New Committee

President : Helen Richardson

Vice President : Jo Murphy

Treasurer : Sharon Thrupp

Secretary : Sirini Kularatne-Samarapathi

Committee Members : Carol Khan, Dr Anna Halafoff, Ven Chikwang Sunim, Ai Kien Dang and Dr Jack Wicks.



This is an enthusiastic and energetic committee who come with ideas and vision for Sakyadhita, so it should be a terrific year ahead.

Feedback from our Scholarship Winners



Sakyadhita Australia was able to give sponsorship to help five nuns and four laywomen to attend the conference – here are some of their responses.

"Thank you so much for the opportunity . . . how amazing it was to see the opening and

*closing ceremony and all in between with so many people from different countries but with the same intention. **Rubie Reents***

*Thank you so much for the sponsorship, we had an amazing time! It was our first Sakyadhita conference and we learnt so much but even more so felt truly connected to our fellow practitioners and monastics. It was such a warm and unique experience! **Vens Pema and Choden.***

*So much to listen to and be inspired by everyday of the Sakyadhita conference! I was particularly captured by the speakers who addressed the role for Buddhists in taking action for the environment. I'm excited that we're bringing this critical issue into our Dharma discourse. **Amelia Douglas.***

And an impression from one of our new Committee members, Carol Khan :

I had wanted to attend the Buddhist conference for women for some years. When it was as close as the Blue Mountains I couldn't find an excuse not to go.

Contact with a group of spiritually charged beings always holds challenge and ecstasy. 800 women, the majority of whom were ordained, from 27 countries in Asia Pacific streams of Buddhism. There were also lay women, teachers, carers, supporters, activists, researchers and men who worked for equality and with women's causes.

There is in my heart a particular surge of kinship and pride to be included in such a gathering where women are the key players and represent the predominant presence. It allows a certain freedom of movement and thought, that autonomous. It was a great joy to see so many women enjoying the Blue Mountains in the wonderful setting of the retreat. The conference talks were powerful and the workshops also very relevant.

Alliance for Buddhist Ethics

Few of us were aware of the extent of the problem of abuse within Buddhism before the Conference. As Roshi Joan Halifax (Zen nun and teacher) said : "I have to say, I have been to maybe hundreds of conferences in my life and this one meant more to me than any other gathering of people that I have ever experienced...It was brave. And when I say brave, I mean brave..... Presentation after presentation brought to the attention of this nearly 1,000 women how important it is that we understand the nature of our personal suffering, of our interpersonal suffering, and get over it, and become social movers. And work for the transformation of Buddhism in our time."

From these revelations came one of the important outcomes of the Sakyadhita Conference, the formation of the Alliance for Buddhist Ethics (insert hyperlink allianceforbuddhistethics.com). This has been created to foster a more ethical approach to the teaching Buddhism in lay contexts and also in monastic settings, so that so that practitioners can safely practice the dharma for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Please consider joining the email list by going to allianceforbuddhistethics.com

The group aims to reach a very broad consensus of what the women of Sakyadhita, across countries and Buddhist traditions, expect as a bare minimum of ethical standards for both individuals and organisations.

We will let you about more specific goals as they are developed.

Roshi Susan Murphy – our next Webinar guest.



Wednesday 16 October at 7pm

We are delighted that Roshi Susan Murphy, who was the keynote speaker at the Conference, has agreed to join us for our next Webinar.

Roshi Susan is passionate about the environment; saying we can no longer ignore the earth, that as women in dharma we must work to save our vulnerable planet. Her speech also touched on themes of duality, patriarchy and reconciliation so there will be lots of ground to cover.

Here are some excerpts:

'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. . . . this patriarchal mind-set has been wielded for centuries as a weapon to exclude women from full religious participation and expression. . .

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.

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 . . .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.

....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 “

After her talk there will be a chance for questions from the Webinar audience. You can book for this event here: <https://www.trybooking.com/book/event?eid=552288>

‘Being a Buddhist Nun Today’ : On ABC Radio National (a preview of the Sakyadhita Conference <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/soul-search/being-a-buddhist-nun-today/11298770>)

Are you a Member of Sakyadhita Australia?

We urge you to join us and support the organisation that supports and links Buddhist women and nuns : Membership is free for ordained sangha residing in Australia, and for laypeople costs \$30 (\$20 concession) until 31 December 2019, or \$40 (\$25 concession) until 31 December 2020. <https://www.sakyadhitaoz.org/become-a-member>

Brief Interviews with Australian Buddhists - a continuing series.



Dr Jack Wicks is a Committee Member and a former research academic with a PhD in mathematical sciences and MA in linguistics. She is a Buddhist chaplain and co-founder of the [Alliance for Buddhist Ethics](#). She is also interested in the teaching of Buddhism to young people

1 What experiences brought you to Buddhism?

From a young age I had a curiosity and a yearning for religion of some kind. I very much enjoyed the new age spirituality of my step-mother and a big hearted aunt who was the quintessential Northern Rivers hippy. I imbibed things like astrology and numerology, and although I wasn't really sure I actually 'believed' any of it, I was exploring and learning. In high school my best friend said I always looked like I was working away on something, trying to solve some kind of all-consuming mystery.

So I guess it was a convergence of curiosity and trying to figure out the ultimate question of life, the universe, and everything, that led me to Buddhism. And I was suffering so much! I first heard teachings at the Chenrezig Institute from Venerable Tenzin Tsepal in my late 30s. It wasn't until I attended my first retreat at the Queensland Vipassana Centre at the age of 42 that it got real for me. I've practiced a lot since then, vipassana and zen too, and have come to appreciate that there is a lot more to 'reality' than my background in science would have led me to believe.

2 What do you think are the most fundamental aspects of Buddhism?

I think at the heart of Buddhism is an optimisation problem: "How can I be the best person I can be?" I think being happy, content, and peaceful, come from that. Being the best person I can be means, in conventional Buddhist-speak, embodying wisdom and compassion - as much as I am able to given where I'm at right now. As long as we do our best, there's no need for self-reproach.

3 What is your favourite teaching of the Buddha?

My favourite teaching at present is the verse from the Dhammapada: "Do no harm; do good; train the mind. This is the teaching of all the Buddhas". I like it because it encapsulates the Buddhist path succinctly and strikes the right balance between ethics, the development of good qualities, and the practice of meditation. And the last line emphasises its timeless quality. This simple formula is how we become the best people we can be.

4 What is your favourite Buddhist Book?

My favourite book at present is 'The Leap' by Steve Taylor because it's a very practical look at spiritual awakening based on real-life case studies (it's not really a Buddhist book). Past favourites include 'Everyday Zen' by Charlotte Joko Beck; 'no self no problem' by Anam Thubten; 'That is that' by Nirmala. I don't read a lot of books actually.

5 What do you think is the biggest or most exciting issue facing contemporary Australian Buddhist nuns?

It seems to me that it's very challenging for them financially. Some Buddhist traditions which have been brought to Australia by migrants from Asia continue the tradition where the community supports the ordained Sangha. I'm thinking here of, for example, the Sri Lankan community in Brisbane. However, for many or the majority of nuns, there is very little financial support except from their own resources or families.

Buddhist Women in Australia : A History **Anna Halafoff, Deakin University**



This is an edited version of the paper Anna gave at the Conference.

Women have played a significant role in the history of Buddhism in Australia, from the 1850s onwards. Our research team has thus far recorded 17 digital oral histories of prominent Australian Buddhists, for our [Buddhist Life Stories of Australia](#) (BLSA) project. At the 2019 Sakyadhita Conference, we shared a video we made for the event drawing on these oral histories focused on [Buddhism and Buddhist Women in Australia](#).

The BLSA Project was developed in consultation with the Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils (FABC) and the Australian Sangha Association (ASA). 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. One of the main themes raised in the BLSA digital oral histories was gender and Buddhism.

Briefly, the earliest mentions of women in the history of Buddhism in Australia are statues of Kuan Yin in Chinese Joss Houses built during the mid-late 19th Century Gold Rush period, all around Australia. There were a number of women who migrated from Asia, mainly from China, Japan and Sri Lanka at this time who worked in the goldfields, sugar cane fields, pearling, and in associated industries such as market gardens and prostitution. These early workers and/or immigrants from Asia's main religious traditions were Taoism, Confucianism and/or Buddhism, while some were Christian. They lived and worked closely with indigenous Australians, and had close relationships, including marriages, and children together. We are currently conducting more research on these first Buddhists in Australia.

The next wave of Buddhists were theosophists, including American Emma Harding Britten and Elise Pickett, Australia's first "White Buddhist" who founded the Melbourne Theosophical Society in the late 1800s. We are also further investigating their stories. 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.

The digital oral histories of the BLSA project reveal that many women helped bring Buddhism to and to plant it firmly in Australia from the 1850s to the 1980s. Women, such as Marie Byles (1900–1979), Natasha Jackson (1902–1990), Ayya Khema (1923–1997), Elizabeth Bell (1911–2007), Beatrice Ribush (1913–2008) and Venerable Chi Kwang Sunim played prominent roles in establishing Buddhist Societies and communities in Sydney and Melbourne. Sister Dhammadinna (1881–1968), the first visiting Buddhist nun and controversial figure first came to Australia in the 1950s, and the first Vesak Day celebration in Australia took place in 1953, which both Dhammadinna and Byles played a part in organising. Ayya Khema also played an important role in the origins of Sakyadhita in the late 1980s.

These women all had and/or have strong personalities, and many of them, including Yeshe Khadro and Ayya Nirodha Bhikkhuni have 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, such as Australian Venerable Robina Courtin have also become well-known Buddhist teachers internationally. This has all 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, and in the bhikkhuni ordinations conducted in the Thai forest tradition in Australia.

Buddhism continues to grow and flourish in this country. We intend to continue to document more digital oral histories and conduct more research related to the Buddhist Boom period of the 1970s onwards with Buddhist leaders, including notable women, from the many Buddhist traditions from Asia that are now flourishing in Australia.

anna.halafoff@deakin.edu.au

NOTE: Our research has drawn heavily on Paul Croucher's (1989) *Buddhism in Australia: 1848–1988* (1989, New South Wales University Press), preliminary fieldwork in the far north of Australia, and on the data collected for the BLSA project. For more details please see our article on [Women and Ultramodern Buddhism in Australia](#) in the open-access *Journal Religions*.

An Exciting Opportunity : Join Sakyadhita Australia's Pilgrimage to South Korea.



South Korea, with its temples and festivals and long Buddhist history is a fascinating place. Now there is an opportunity to join one of Australia's most senior nuns (and Sakyadhita Australia committee member, Ven Chikwang Sunim) on her Pilgrimage to South Korea. There will be many highlights including visiting her home temple at Songgwangsa and also the opportunity to :

- Attend the Lotus Lantern Festival and explore the traditional and new cultures of Seoul
- Visit the significant temples of Jogye-sa, Unmunsa, Tongdosa, Seokguram and Bulguksa
- Explore the ancient city of Gyeongju with its tombs, temples, rock carvings and pagodas
- Experience a temple stay at Songgwangsa

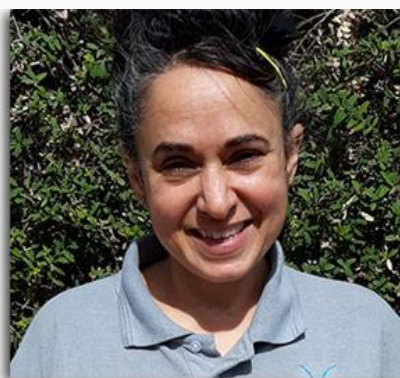
- Visit Jiri Mountain and the heart of the Korean tea tradition
- Explore beautiful Busan city

Committee Member Sharon Thrupp, an experienced tour guide, will be your leader on this very special tour.

For more details and bookings : <http://pilgrimagepaths.com.au/tour-item/pilgrimage-to-south-korea/>.

Cooking with a Pure Heart

For many years Abigail Pope has cooked meals on residential retreats. She was often asked for the recipes, so it was decided to produce a cookbook as a fundraiser which now available.



Abi said : “I just love cooking for Buddhist retreats - this feeling of being of service to other people, that good food will support the meditation. It becomes a cycle of goodness - of giving out and getting back. Before the Retreat I make sure my mind is clear - without negativity - so as to keep the whole focus on the food. It’s not just about throwing together ingredients; you need the right intention - loving kindness and good will towards others. You also need mindfulness – to be 100% ‘right there’.

It’s hard work and not many people want to do it, but when you cook with a pure heart cooking becomes an extension of spiritual practice, which is the purpose of my life. It enhances my meditation, it helps let go that feeling of self

It’s a good way to serve as it gets to people’s hearts and their stomachs. I just love to nurture people and I get so much out of this; I find an amazing energy comes from somewhere.

This cookbook was not my idea but I hope it inspires people and adds value to their lives”. If you would like to purchase a copy of the vegetarian cookbook “Cooks on Retreat” which Abi has written with her partner Kuo Yong Koo, please email office@bsv.net.au for further

information. The cost is \$25. All the proceeds go to the Newbury Monastery in Victoria (which supports both monks and nuns).

A Sydney Residence for Women Monastics 2018 was the 2,600th Anniversary of the First Bhikkhuni Ordination



Ven BomHyon Sunim

Mahaprajapati Gotami was the first woman ordained by the Buddha. Her sister, Queen Maya, gave birth to the child Gautama who later became the Buddha. Sadly, Queen Maya died seven days after the baby's birth. Mahaprajapati then took baby Gautama and nursed him as her own, later marrying his father. After her husband died and her children were all grown, Mahaprajāpatī approached the Buddha and requested to be ordained into the Sangha Order. On this and a second occasion, the Buddha refused her request but Mahaprajāpatī did not give up. It was only after Ananda, out of great compassion interceded with the Buddha on Mahaprajapati's behalf, that the Buddha agreed to ordain women.

At that time, Ananda respectfully questioned the Buddha:

'Lord, are women capable of realising the various stages of sainthood as nuns?'

'They are, Ananda,' said the Buddha.

Encouraged by the Buddha's reply Ananda asked, *'If that is so, Lord, then it would be good if women could be ordained as nuns?'*

The Buddha replied, *'If, Ananda, Mahaprajāpatī Gotami would accept the Eight Conditions, it would be regarded that she has been ordained already as a nun.'*

[From "[The Life of the Buddha: Pt 2. The Order of Nuns](#)"]

It is with deep gratitude for our Elder bhikkhuni sisters, that we can now offer refuge for ordained women Sangha, in a Sydney-based non-sectarian residence. This is a much-needed facility as there are few opportunities for ordained women to live in community in Australia.

The centre is called Therimettarama and offers monastics short or long term accommodation

For further information : therimettarama.nunsresidence@gmail.com

SYDNEY THERIMETTARAMA, Non-Sectarian Residence for Women Monastics



SHELTER FOR NUNS OF ALL TRADITIONS

Ordained Sangha living and practicing together enriches the whole community. Food, shelter, robes, medicine are offered to the Sangha and in return, Sangha care for the community, offering teachings and sharing merit.

SUPPORTED PERSONAL RETREAT FOR LAY WOMEN

Women are welcome to come for a personal retreat,

MAKE A DONATION

to help with rental & utility costs

Direct Deposit/Transfer

BSB: 303-547

Account No: 0018356

Account Name: Gabriele Rose

By Post (cheques/money orders)

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OR contact the Metta Centre

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MONASTICS SHORT OR LONG ACCOMMODATION LAY PRACTITIONERS SHORT STAY

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