

SAKYADHITA NEWSLETTER

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PRAJNAPARAMITA: THE GREAT MOTHER

[Editors Note: Sakyadhita would like to thank Ven. Geshe Lobsang Tsephel, a respected Tibetan scholar/practitioner who is spiritual director of Ganden Buddha Norling in San Diego, California, for explaining the symbology of Prajnparamita.]

The wisdom understanding emptiness is known as "the mother" because practitioners of all three vehicles--the Sravaka, Pratyekabuddha, and Mahayana vehicle"I achieve the state of a Foe Destroyer (Sanskrit: Arhat, Pali: Arahant) on the basis of wisdom. Bodhicitta (the altruistic intention of achieving perfect Buddhahood in order to liberate an sentient beings from suffering) is known as "the father" because it is only due to this specific altruistic intention that beings achieve Buddhahood. Practitioners of the Sravaka and Pratyekabuddha vehicles do not aspire to the achievement of Buddhahood, but engage in the three trainings (in morality, concentration and wisdom) with the thought of renunciation, and aim for the achievement of liberation. In this case the method, or "father," of the achievement is renunciation.

For example, if a woman mates with a king, she has a king's child. If she...mates with a brahmin, she has a brahmin's child, and with a warrior, a warrior's child. Yet she is the mother of all three children.

Similarly, if we meditate on the wisdom understanding emptiness together with the altruistic intention, we will achieve the state of a Buddha. If we meditate on the wisdom understanding emptiness with the thought of renunciation, we will achieve the state of either a Sravaka or Pratyekabuddha FoeDestroyer. The wisdom understanding emptiness is the same, but the result is different, since the father, which is method, differs. Thus Prajanaparamita is said to be "the Great Mother," since it is on the basis of the wisdom understanding emptiness that we can achieve the results of all three vehicles Prajanaparamita literally means "wisdom gone beyond" and refers to going beyond cyclic existence, beyond the process of circling repeatedly in the wheel of birth and death. It also refers to going beyond the complacency of achieving liberation for the benefit of oneself alone. Wisdom "goes beyond," like a boat that takes us to the other shore, beyond suffering. It is also that which has already reached the other shore.

Prajanaparamita is also known as "the Great Mother" because this wisdom pervades to all phenomena. The object of the wisdom understanding emptiness is emptiness: the lack of inherent existence of all phenomena. Thus wisdom is awareness, an understanding of the empty nature of all things. Together with the altruistic intention and great compassion, we practice the six perfections: the five causal perfections (generosity, morality, patience, perseverance, and concentration) and the sixth, the resultant perfection of wisdom, which knows all things as they are.

In the Secret Mantra (or Vajrayana) vehicle, women are said to be in the nature of wisdom. Therefore, one should not point out their faults. Despising or disparaging women constitutes transgression of one of the fourteen secondary tantric precepts. There is no mention of disparaging men.

England

An autumn meeting of Sakyadhita members was held in London on September 29, 1990. After tea, a discussion was held on the topic of "Buddhism and the Environment," the content of which appears in this issue. Next came a video presentation called "Three Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries," produced by Meridian Trust in London. After more tea and biscuits, Ven. Ayya Khema spoke on "Less Thinking, More Loving;" and led a loving kindness meditation. The audience included six supportive men, as well as Anne Bancroft, author of a well-received anthology on women's spiritual insights called *Weavers of Wisdom* (Arkana Penguin, 1989).

Wendy Barzetovic, organizer of the event and national representative for England, has graciously agreed to serve on the international executive committee of Sakyadhita .

Italy

Ven. Tenzin Palmo, an English bhiksuni who received full ordination in Hong Kong in 1972, has written that the nuns of Istituto Lama Tsongkhapa in Pomaia. are in the process of obtaining a small piece of property where they can live the monastic life. Monastic discipline may not be embraced by large numbers in this era of cinema, television, and similar pleasures, but still attracts those of contemplative inclination. Italy, with its long tradition of monasticism, may be an ideal environment for Buddhist renunciates.

Sri Lanka

Sr. Nyanasiri, an American ten-precept nun, writes that many positive changes are occurring for Buddhist women in Sri Lanka. The new government of the country is really keen to promote the welfare of nuns, and the laypeople offer their full support to women in robes. There is still much to be done to improve their housing, education, status, meditation centers and social services, but nuns have become much more visible, teaching meditation, Dhamma classes, and Sunday schools.

The Singalese nuns recently organized a March for Peace from Colombo to Kandy, which received the wholehearted support of the community, as well as daily newspaper and television coverage. They are planning for a symposium on death and dying which will prepare nuns to visit hospitals, old age homes, and dying patients in private homes. In a country where people normally die at home, the nuns will provide an invaluable service in their own country and inspire Buddhist women in other countries to begin working in the field of death and dying.

Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, an American monk residing at the Forest Hermitage in Kandy, writes that Sanghan-dtta Day has become an even grander celebration than ever, perhaps reflecting the greater visibility and improved position of nuns in recent years. The day commemorates the arrival of Ven. Sanghamitta, daughter of the great Indian King Ashoka, who presided over the full ordination of five hundred noble women, thus establishing the Bhiksuni Sangha in Sri Lanka, where it existed until the eleventh century A.D. It was from Sri Lanka that the bhiksuni lineage was transmitted to China in 432 A.D., where it has continued until the present day.

Thailand

An International Conference on Buddhist Women will be held Oct. 25 to 29, 1991, at the Japanese Studies Center on the Rangsit Campus of Tharrunasat University in Bangkok, Thailand.

The conference will be sponsored by NIBWA (the Newsletter on International Buddhist Women's Activities), Sakyadhita (Thailand), and the Women's Studies Program (Thammasat University).

The objectives of the conference are to help strengthen Sakyadhita (the International Association of Buddhist Women), to heighten awareness of the diversity of the Buddhist traditions and their approaches to women's issues, to provide a forum for concerned Buddhist women from various parts of the world, to foster Buddhist education for women, and to discover new and effective means to deal with problems that Buddhist women face in their practice.

Among the topics to be addressed at the conference are: the importance of social cultural factors in determining the future role of Buddhist women; awareness of other traditions; the lay monastic relationship among Buddhist women; women and the environment; understanding Buddhist texts from a woman's perspective, Buddhist education for women as students and teachers, and the relevance of Vinaya in modern circumstances. A special tour of temples around Bangkok will also be offered.

Accommodations and vegetarian meals for the duration of the conference are being provided very reasonably. Rates are \$40 per person for a double room with private bath and \$10 per person for a four-person room with common bath, for the six days. The registration fee for participants is \$50 and meals are \$35. Please send registration with payment at your earliest convenience to:

Dr. Chatsumarm Kabilsingh
Faculty of Liberal Arts
Tharnmasat University
Bangkok 10200 Thailand

United States.

A Sakyadhita Retreat was held from August 20 to 26 at the secluded St. Mary's Seminary in the Montecito Hills above Santa Barbara, California. More than 40 women ranging in age from 19 to 77 gathered in this beautiful spot for five days of meditation, workshops, chanting, presentations, and discussions focused on a variety of topics. The goal was to foster a deep level of communication among the participants and encourage them to share their experiences as women on the spiritual path.

The retreat began with a picnic in the sunshine and, later in the evening, a sharing of ideas and experiences on Linking Buddhist Women. The next day began with early morning guided meditations and chi-gong, a Chinese system of meditative movement. Michelle Levey presented a workshop on Everyday Dharma that emphasized the interrelatedness of all beings and introduced techniques for appreciating that interrelatedness. This was followed by a group discussion on the topic Working with Feminine Energy, chanting from the Japanese Shingon

tradition, and in the evening, a slide show by China Galland of the experiences described in her book *Longing for Darkness*, the story of her 12-year spiritual quest.

On the third day, Tsering Everest led the group in the Bodhisattva Peace Training, an experiential approach to the teaching on the Four Immeasurables-love, compassion, joy, and equanimity. In the afternoon five people shared with the group their experiences of monastic life, after which there was chanting of the Tara mantra and two Elda Hartley films: "In Search of a Holy Man" and "Buddhism Comes to America."

The fourth day, Jacqueline Mandell shared her experience of integrating Buddhist practice and family life in a talk called "Balanced Awareness: Teaching Meditation, Mothering, Writing." There was a group discussion on appropriate social action for Buddhists, chanting of the Heart Sutra, a video on the training of women priests at Mount Koya in Japan, and a slide show on Tibetan nuns by Karma Lekshe Tsomo.

The fifth day included a Shingon ritual practice led by Eko Susan Tanaka, and talks on "The Buddhist Approach to Relationship" by Gesshin Prabhasa Dharma and Dr. Karuna Dharma. In the evening, the group participated in a ceremonial Offering to the Dakinis, and was then led through the stages of the after-death process explained in the Tibetan Book of the Dead, accompanied by Katherine Wersen on the Tibetan bells.

The closing ceremony on the final day included expressions of thanks, rejoicing, and dedication of the merits accumulated through our days of practicing and discussing the Dharma. A flower symbolizing each other's enlightenment potential was passed from person to person with the words "A lotus for you, Buddha-to-be!"-a custom taken from the Vietnamese tradition. After chants from the Japanese Zen tradition, there was recitation of the Om Mani Padme Hum mantra so treasured in the Tibetan tradition. Each person made a sincere, personal vow before the group, inspired by her retreat experience. The harmonious intermingling of the various Buddhist traditions was an auspicious beginning for Sakyadhita in North America.

Sakyadhita is not a new order of Buddhism. Rather, it is an international communications network that links women of the various Buddhist traditions and promotes their welfare. Established in 1987 in Bodhgaya, India, this association seeks to help Buddhist women develop their meditation practice and their understanding of Buddhist teachings. National branches exist in countries throughout the world to facilitate these objectives, and Dharma Women's Forums are forming in different cities as meditation support groups.

Membership in Sakyadhita is growing steadily. New ideas are being presented on how we can become more effective in our attempts to be of benefit to Buddhist women. We appreciate the show of support from friends in many countries, both new and experienced practitioners, junior and senior, near and far.

Due to the high costs of postage and printing the newsletter, we urge all readers to please send in your memberships for 1991 without delay. Those with generous hearts are encouraged to send a

bit extra as a donation, to provide copies for sisters and brothers in Asia who are unable to afford the membership. Sakyadhita is a non-profit organization so all donations are tax-exempt.

MAHA-PRAJNAPARAMITA

...The Great Perfection of Wisdom

This extraordinary calligraphy, which reads "Great Perfection of Wisdom", was sent to Sakyadhita by a well-wisher, Ven. Il Ta Sunim from Haein-sa, one of the largest and most beautiful monasteries in Korea.

Ven. Il Ta Sunim, belonging to the Chogye order, is a leading expert in Vinaya (monastic discipline) and is renowned as a master calligrapher. He has not only distinguished himself through excellent practice and scholarship, but has also shown exceptional kindness to Buddhist nuns

In 1982, in response to an inquiry from an American nun, he was instrumental in reinstating the ancient dual-ordination procedure for bhiksunis (fully ordained nuns) and rewrote in modern language the commentary to the ordination manual used for the ceremony. In the dual ordination procedure, nuns (who in Korea have already received strict training as novices for a minimum of five or six years) undertake the bhiksuni precepts in the presence of ten eminent bhiksuni precept masters in the morning and then go before ten highly-regarded bhiksu precept masters in the afternoon for confirmation of their ordination. This procedure, detailed in the Vinaya texts of ancient times, accords authority to bhiksuni masters, and thus provides for the direct involvement of women in the bhiksuni ordination process.

We are grateful to Ven. Il Ta Sunim both for the kind gift of his valuable calligraphy honoring the wisdom potential of Buddhist women and for his work on behalf of bhiksunis.

In Memory of Anagarika Dhamma-Dinna

Anna B. was born in Austria on January 2, 1913. She had three brothers and four sisters. During the War years she spent her time in England, then in 1951 she and her young son Walter immigrated to Canada. Upon her arrival in British Columbia, she worked as a nurse and also taught art and sculpture at the Vancouver School of Art. She had a great passion for swimming and trained extensively so that she could swim the Straits of Juan de Fuca.

In 1960, after Walter had graduated as a Chartered Accountant, she departed for India. She had had many spiritual questions throughout her life and now she had the opportunity to travel to the East in search of the answers. Anna, traveling by herself, visited many ashrams, temples and hermitages throughout India, encountering many difficulties and hardships, but still not getting the answers to her questions.

In 1964, while traveling in India, she became extremely ill. After riding a third-class train for hours, she arrived at a Buddhist monastery-Kolatenna Hermitage in Banderawela-where medical assistance was said to be available. Some months later she was to leave and return home to Canada as a Theravadin Buddhist nun. She had found her answers!

Anna B. was now Anagarika Dhamma-Dinna. While in India, she studied extensively with a Vipassana master, the late Sumatipala Nyaka Mahathera, and an Abhidharma teacher, the late Venerable Nyanasatta Mahathera at Nalanda. Her ordination was conducted in Banderawela by a Czechoslovakian monk, the late Venerable C. Nyanasatta Thera.

Upon returning to British Columbia, she settled in the Kootenays and later moved to the Sunshine Coast. Her son was married, with two young boys, and living in Vancouver. Although Anagarika lived on her own, there was always someone knocking on the

door asking her to teach meditation. As a Western woman who had studied extensively in the East, her forte was in making the Teachings practical for Westerners. She gave individual instruction and also led many intensive retreats in both British Columbia and Alberta. Students would come from all across Canada and the United States seeking her guidance. Her life experience, her knowledge of the Abhidharma, and her Vipassana training were invaluable, as was her skill in understanding the needs of Westerners and helping meditators apply their experiences to daily living. She taught by example and this was a great inspiration to all her students. Her method of combining Vipassana and Abhidharma teachings during intensive retreats was very effective.

Anagarika was dedicated to the Dhamma, and it was through her wisdom, compassion, and sharing of the Buddhist teachings that so many lives were profoundly influenced. Under her guidance, Dhamma: A Theravada Buddhist Society was founded in British Columbia in 1979, and Light of the Dhamma was incorporated in Alberta in 1984.

Having a strong desire to continue her own meditation practice, and perceiving the need for experienced teachers in the West, Anagarika arranged to bring a number of well-known Abhidhamma teachers to Canada. In 1981, she was able to further her studies with the late Venerable Sumatipala Nyaka Mahathera in Kanduboda, Sri Lanka. While in Sri Lanka, she also met with the Venerable Nyanaponika Mahathera of the Buddhist Publication Society, the late Venerable Nyanasatta Thera of Banderawela, Ariya Dhamma of Colombo, and the late Egerton C. Baptist of the International Buddhist Society, and investigated the possibility of inviting Dhamma teachers to Canada. She supported the travel and teachings of the late Venerable Nyanasatta Mahathera, Venerable Piyadassi Mahathera, Venerable Ananda. Maitreya, Mahanayaka Thera, Achan Sobin Namto, and Venerable Punnaji Mahathera. Through Anagarika's efforts, countless North Americans were given the opportunity to meet and study with these visiting Dhamma teachers. Tapes and transcripts of their lectures provided valuable information for further studies and continuing practice. For all of these experiences, for her love and friendship, for being our teacher and for sharing the Dhamma, we will be forever grateful. Suki Hotu!

For many years, Anagarika had suffered from arthritis in her hips. After much preparation, the time had come for her to have surgery. On September 19, 1990, while recovering in the hospital from hip replacement surgery, she died suddenly, painlessly, and with a clear mind. We had lost a dear friend and the Buddhist world had lost an excellent Dhamma teacher. May she attain Nibbana!

[Editor's Note: Warm thanks to Shirley Johannesen for writing this article on Anagarika Dhamma-Dinna-]

"Message to the Sakyadhitas"

[Editor's Note: This poem and accompanying note was received from a Tibetan living in exile. It was sent from Dharamsala, India. "Tashi Delek" is a warm Tibetan greeting.]

Daughters of the Buddha,
Look around you.
There lie many needing care.
No need to think of the needs
Of people far, far away.

Extend your concern
To the person nearest you.
Light the lamp of compassion,
Spread the rays of your love,
Your care and your kindness
To the person nearest you.

This is a humble message from a Tibetan Sakyadhita. For the wonderful contribution from Sakyadhita for world peace and for the benefit of humanity, I wish you sisters all the best. Tashi Delek! 0

--*Namgyal Lhamo ("Victorious Goddess")*

Buddhism and the Environment

[Editors Note: We thank Andrea Husnik for preparing this article, based on a talk, given at the Sakyadhita meeting in London on September 2, 1990, which sparked a heartfelt discussion of the ways Buddhists can become more aware of the earth and protect our environment.]

What has Buddhism to do with ecology? What is the connection between spiritual growth, health, and a polluted environment? How do we relate spiritual consciousness with politics? I would like to discuss these questions, stimulating further discussions on the themes, and give some tips on how we can change our actions to more ecological ones.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama was asked why he, as the head of the Tibetan people, is so engaged in environmental protection (in a project called "Me Buddhist Perception of Nature"). His answer was "Because I feel myself to be a son of this planet. Until now our mother has borne the naughtiness of her children, but now as we have become more and more shameless, she is showing us the limits of our actions and warning: BE CAREFUL! Environmental protection is nowadays not so much a question of morality, but more one of survival."

I am of the same opinion. Working on the frontlines, I can see that our environment is making us ill yet it is difficult in many cases to prove the relationship between any substance and a particular effect on our health. Detailed studies are extremely expensive and not always perfect proof. But even when a relationship is proven or suspected, powerful manufacturing groups and/or government have resisted safety legislation for as long as possible. If some hazardous pollutants have been tackled by the government, it has only been because of sustained consumer pressure, as in the case of lead in petrol, asbestos in the workplace, DDT and organ chloride pesticides.

"Until now, our mother has borne the naughtiness of her children..."

It is not enough simply to recognize problems of the environment; there is a need for reassessment and ecological learning & a need for each and every one of us to take an active role. Environmental crises such as the greenhouse effect, radioactivity, and damage to the ozone layer can be discussed rationally, but have strong emotional undercurrents.

So ' where do we start? And how? Real change must start within ourselves; we ourselves can help to create a new consciousness. We can join one of the many groups already formed, or we can start a new group to discuss, for example, the application of Buddhist teachings to counter the "religion of consumerism" which rapidly depletes natural resources and speeds ecological

breakdown. We can discuss how to make Buddhism more relevant to modern-day problems and more meaningful to society.

It seems that Sakyamuni Buddha was already dealing with the root source of our present environmental problems when he spoke of greed and its effects. Greed is the underlying cause of human exploitation of nature and other living beings. Unless we can steer consumers toward a simpler way of life, "clean" technology can, at best, only buy time before our planet comes to an inevitably messy end.

Sakyamuni Buddha also spoke about interdependent arising. Observing nature, we can experience the interdependent relationship that exists among living beings, and see how closely humankind depends upon both plant and animal life forms. Seeing how things are interdependently related, and thus conditional upon one another, enables us to understand the law of cause and effect. We see how the sequentiality of events plays a significant role in Nature, and how, by abusing Nature, humans abuse themselves.

"...We must take responsibility for the earth. There is no alternative."

With this knowledge, we develop respect and compassion for our environment, and realize the need for a certain level of self-restraint. Buddhism talks about self-realization, humility, love, compassion, and good-heartedness. With an awareness of these virtues, as we go shopping, build houses, use cars, and go about our daily life, we understand that all actions bring results. Let's make these results productive rather than destructive. For example, by being aware, we can avoid buying goods with excessive packaging that will end up in a landfill or a waste incineration plant, causing harm to the animals of the earth and eventually polluting our own lungs and drinking water. We can be aware that others have to drink the water we contaminate and breathe the air we pollute.

Since personal health and spiritual growth are not possible in an insane environment, we need to get rid of our self-cherishing attitude and replace it with a sense of universal responsibility. As His Holiness said in an interview, "To ensure Mankind a future in happiness and prosperity, we must take responsibility for the earth. There is no alternative. Where should we escape to?". We must take responsibility for our own actions. If we nurture our inner nature, there is no selfishness. Then our external environment will be automatically preserved; there is nothing there to exploit Nature.

It seems that politics must become more spiritual, and the spiritual must become more political. Politics has to do with everybody. We cannot wait for others to do something, or put it off until later. Let's decide what we can do.

Some things we can do:

- Become informed consumers-get information through Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, and other contact groups.

Demand responsibility from government and industry.

Recycle-glass, paper, cans, waste oil, textiles, even some plastics.

Avoid environmental hazards-pesticides, solvents, smoking, toilet disinfectants, leaded petrol, aerosols and other air pollutants.

Shop wisely buy unbleached paper, dioxin-free nappies, environment friendly detergents, mercury-free or rechargeable batteries, and other "green" alternatives.

Articles on Women in Buddhism

In the last newsletter, we provided a list of books on women in Buddhism. Here we present a list of articles and additional books on the same topic. If you know of other books or articles of interest, please let us know so that we may add them.

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Sakyadhita Membership

I support the goals of Sakyadhita and would like to become a member. Enclosed is my donation of \$10 for a one year membership.

Name: -----

Address: -----

Telephone:-----

Please send a check or money order in U.S. dollars only.

Thank you for your support.

Sakyadhita

400 Hobron Lane, #2615

Honolulu, I-H 96815

Appreciation

Sakyadhita would like to acknowledge several important contributions. Many thanks go to Kimberly Snow of Santa Barbara for her donation of a portable word processor which has been an invaluable office tool. We are grateful to Marie Aguirre of La Jolla for donating a 1982 VW Rabbit which has helped immensely in accomplishing the many tasks involved in our international effort. (We were delighted to find that the license plate was GOM, since "GOM"

means "meditation" in Tibetan.) And to Dr. Yvonne Vaucher, we express our heartfelt appreciation for providing office space, computer facilities and expertise, endless encouragement, and support on every level for our staff this entire year. Through these virtues may our contributions all gain effortless realization!

This issue of Sakyadhita was compiled by: Susan Clark, Brittany Faulkner, Karma Lekshe Tsomo, Yvonne Vaucher and Brian Wagner.