

# SAKYADHITA NEWSLETTER

Vol.2, No.2 - Summer, 1991

---

## Contents

1. "Woman's Role as Buddhist Teacher" by Sakya Jetsun Chime Luding
  2. "Buddhist Nuns in Burma" by Dr. Friedgard Lottermoser
  3. International News:
    - England
    - Sri Lanka
    - Thailand
    - Tibet. Includes Rafaela Moltam's impressions during her September 1990 trip to Tibet.
    - United States. Includes a report on Project Dana, a new Buddhist voluntary program to assist the frail and elderly in community.
  4. "Activities on the Vinaya Research Committee" - a report on the last three years (1987-90) by Bhiksuni Jampa Tsedroen
  5. More books and articles on women in Buddhism
-

## Woman's Role as Buddhist Teacher

by Sakya Jetsun Chime Luding

Based in Vancouver, British Columbia, Sakya Jetsun Chime Luding has been teaching Western people since 1979, and has become a source of inspiration for many people, especially women. She is particularly devoted to the practice of Vajrayogini, a meditational deity in female form, and has long dreamed of constructing a retreat center for the practice. The following words of advice are from talks which she gave in Los Angeles on December 15 to 16, 1990. We are grateful for her permission to share them with you here.

The Buddha himself has never said, as people have heard, that women are a lower class or polluted in some way. Other, older traditions may speak in this manner, but when we look at what the Buddha himself actually taught, there is never a word saying that women are inferior to men. The Buddhist teachings of the Vajrayana specifically say that women represent the essence of all wisdom, just as men represent skillful means. Women are symbolic of the essence of wisdom itself, and wisdom is a very great quality, being one of the aspects of enlightenment. There is nothing within the Buddhist teachings that degrades women in any way, and we see that in the Vajrayana, women are extolled as symbolizing wisdom.

The important practice for women, or anyone, is to abandon all non-virtuous actions and accomplish as much virtue as one can through the "three doors" of body, speech, and mind. One should not kill other living beings, or steal, or commit impure deeds with the body. With the voice, one should not lie, or divide people, or slander, or gossip. With the mind, one should abandon desire (or covetousness), hatred, and wrong views. It is not always possible to abandon all non-virtuous deeds of body, speech, and mind immediately, but if you examine whether your actions are appropriate or inappropriate, and abandon those that are inappropriate, then slowly, stage by stage, you can overcome non-virtue.

Many teachers have come in the past, are coming now, and will come in the future, and it is very beneficial to meet them, receive teachings from them, and then put into practice whatever teachings you can. In Tibet, within the four traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, many women entered into the practice of the various paths and many of them also gained realization. Within the Sakya tradition, there have been a number of women who were accomplished, and I will tell you about three very holy women within the Sakya family itself who gained realization.

One was Chime Nyima, the sister of a very famous lama by the name of Karma Lodro. This holy woman received many teachings on Vajrayogini and, through that practice, Vajrayogini actually appeared to her. It is said that the essence of the wisdom of Vajrayogini merged with her own mind, so that her realization was that of Vajrayogini. This also happened to other practitioners within the Sakya family through practicing the teachings of Vajryogini.

Another woman of the Sakya family was named Tenba Wangmo. She was renowned for her accomplishment of the teachings called Lam Dre, or path and result. Once, when this woman was giving a teaching in Eastern Tibet near the border with China, she appeared in a very beautiful form and was able to perform various different types of miracles. One man receiving the teachings was thinking that she was very cute, very attractive. As he had these thoughts about her, she actually understood his thoughts. While she was giving a Long Life initiation, this man came up to receive the blessings. Just then, as she adjusted her robe, the vase of long life in her right hand and the bell for blessing people in her left, stayed suspended in air. The man then knew that she had attained a very high level of realization. He saw that his thoughts of desire for her were very impure thoughts to have towards such a holy person and he became her disciple.

There was another woman of the Sakya family whose name was Pema Trinley who, though born in Sakya, lived many years of her life in Eastern Tibet. There she gave numerous teachings, very high and special Tantric teachings, such as the Lam Dre and a very large collection of Tantric teachings known as Chidu Quindo, which take a very long time to give. At that time there was also a Nyingma lama in that area who was a terton, a person who finds buried treasure teachings. In one tradition, the teachings would be inside a huge rock, called a treasure rock. If opened by the right person, a certain teaching would be revealed.

One time this Nyingma lama became aware that a particular huge rock was a treasure rock with teachings in it, but could only be opened with the blood of a realized yogini. So he searched everywhere to find one who could assist him in opening it. There was a woman in that area whose name had the same initials as on the rock, but it would not open with blood from her. So, for a long time he searched, until finally he heard about this very holy Sakya woman, Pema Thinley, who was giving some teachings. Her initials

were also "Sa" for Sakya and "Trin" for Trinley. One time when she was cutting some meat, the knife slipped and cut her hand. Someone put a white cloth to stop the bleeding and gave it to the lama. Later, when he put it on the rock, it opened up. When it opened, he spontaneously gained great faith that she was definitely the actualization of wisdom and was a real, transcendental wisdom dakini. Many other Nyingma lamas in Eastern Tibet also gained faith in her as an actual dakini who had come to the world. Deshung Rinpoche, whom some of you have met, had great faith in Pema Trinley and said that she had seen many deities, including a female protector by the name of Matsuma, a very wrathful female deity that sits on a mule and holds up a sword. Actually Pema Trinley was my great aunt.

For practitioners, then, the basic idea is simply to abandon impurities, imperfections, and non-virtues of body, speech, and mind. If we examine at all times what we do with our body, speech, and mind, we come to understand whether our actions are appropriate or inappropriate. If we then receive teachings from a qualified teacher and follow those teachings properly, there is nothing to prevent women from gaining the state of full and perfect enlightenment. If we practice the teachings properly and eliminate the obscurations of our mind, the stages of enlightenment will definitely be attained, no matter who we are.

Q: How would you recommend that we pursue the teachings here in a different environment with our very different lifestyle. Is there a possibility of incorporating the teachings into our lives here or do we have to go to some different place?

A: First of all, where you live or where you practice doesn't really matter. The Buddha himself said that the place of practice is your own mind. It's not a physical place. The only thing you have to look for is a place that is suitable for your own physical body. Some people like a hot place or a cold place or whatever. You should see that it is a place suitable for gaining a proper livelihood, where you can get food and a place to stay and everything. Beyond that, it doesn't matter where you are. You can go anywhere to practice Dharma, because the source of Dharma is your mind, not a physical location. You can go to India for a few weeks, for example, because it is the place where the Buddha lived and gained realization, so it has a very great blessing, but there is no necessity to live there in order to practice.

The most excellent practice is to eliminate all non-virtues and use your body, speech and mind in a very pure way, examining your motivation for doing whatever you are doing. If you are interested just in your own selfish gain and are involved in different defilements like desire or jealousy, then no matter who you are with, whether parents, friends, or neighbors, you are always going to have problems. But if you can overcome, or try to decrease those defilements, goodness will follow you wherever you go.

Q: I have had the experience of being taken advantage of in a variety of ways by a variety of people who have misinterpreted my attempt to help and to practice these things as weakness or something. I haven't really quite known how to handle that.

A: At the beginning, when you first begin to try to create a mind of purity, it is easy to think that other people are using you. But you should not think about it like that - just try to keep your mind in a state of equanimity. Try not to think whether people are using you or not, because you can't really know if they are or not, especially in the beginning. It's better to just practice as hard as you can and try to purify your mind in a way that is not so attached to what other people are trying to do. In reality, mind isn't some kind of physical entity. It's really just a thought that has no nature of its own. It's just a thought that has been created, that just drifts away in any case.

Q: How do you keep your practice going with family and all the demands and obligations that come from the outside world?

A: It is a question of setting your own mind. For example, I get up everyday about 5:00 or 5:30 and do my practice, get ready and go to work, work a full day, come home, and sometimes there are a lot of problems in the house. So I deal with those problems, but at the same time, I have decided in my own mind that I want to make time for practice, and I just do it. Sometimes I sleep less or do whatever is necessary to accomplish it. So, it's not easy, but it's settled. It's done.

Q: What is the best way to deal with children, especially a teenage child who is rebellious?

A: I have four children who all passed through the teenage years, and I found that by a lot of talking, a lot of reasoning from both sides, things can be worked out. Fighting and arguing have gotten nowhere. It is best to explain things with good reasoning, with a lot of persistent and carefully-worded arguments, especially on a good day when the child is in a happy mood. It's good for children to think for themselves and examine what they're doing. In this way, both sides come to an understanding. The more you argue, the more the children close their ears. Shouting and fighting don't work. It will only work through understanding. In America, children are very independent. If they don't like you, they leave. But through understanding between the parent and child, the child will see what is beneficial and actually want to stay.

Q: How do you deal with anger? Do you use meditation or some other approach?

A: I am not a Buddha. I am just an ordinary person. Sometimes it happens that I get angry, so what I do is examine why I am angry, whether there is any benefit in it. And if there is no benefit for myself or the other person, then I see I should abandon it, just get rid of it. If you are not able to do that, then maybe you should read a book or go for a walk. That will help.

Q: I wonder if there are more difficulties for women as teachers.

A: In Tibet, a qualified person can become a teacher, whether it be a man or a woman. It's a question first of really studying, receiving teachings, and then really practicing and accomplishing them. If a person has gotten various signs of accomplishment, then that person can become a teacher. Basically it's a question of really studying the teachings, understanding the teachings, then putting them into practice. Within the Sakya tradition, anyone born in the Sakya family can become a teacher, but there are a lot of women who never did, and also many who did. It's not a question of just having the name, but a question of really studying and practicing. Anyone who does that and gains realization can be a teacher.

In Tibet there were quite a few women lamas. The majority were among the Kagyu or Nyingma or Sakya traditions. For example, there was a very great woman practitioner named Machig Labdron who lived in the eleventh century. Her teachings are practiced

today by all four traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. Although there haven't been many women teachers in the Gelukpa tradition, still the teachings of women have been revered over the years. Presently, also, there are a few women teachers in the Nyingma and Kagyu traditions, though not many.

Q: In Tibet was there ever a place of higher learning for women?

A: There was no specific center of learning in Tibet that was only for women, but women were allowed to go and learn in different monasteries. There are a number of Sakya monasteries where both men and women would go and receive teachings. There were many centers of learning where women were not disqualified from coming to learn, and there were many cases where they did so.

Q: What attitude should men have toward women, what attitude should women have towards men, and why is it wrong to have desire and attachment between them?

A: From the Buddhist point of view, especially the Vajrayana point of view, if you take teachings with another person, it is really like becoming brothers and sisters. In the Vajrayana, you become Vajra brothers and Vajra sisters. It means that you have received a blessing simultaneously within the same mandala, in the same place, of the same teaching, with the same teacher. Because of that, your attitude toward others should be one of a loving connection of brotherhood or sisterhood. You are creating an environment with another person who is your helper or lover or companion to assist you in friendship and in gaining livelihood. Being part of a person's life and sharing together, you want to bring benefit both to yourself and that person. You create a lot of karma, or actions, together and you want to create them in a very positive way, to assist each other as you share your life. Through understanding your shared karma, your attitude is positive and you share in a positive manner.

The greatest fault with desire is that it brings unhappiness. Actually there are lots of different desires: there's desire for another person, there's desire for things, there's desire for the place where you live, and so on. For example, if you have a place that you own, it creates pleasure in your mind. Since you have desire for it, you are afraid of losing it. You are afraid of other people liking it or wanting it, so it creates jealousy in

your mind. Jealousy is a very harmful. If you have jealousy in your mind or fear that someone else is going to take what you have, you can't have real happiness. The problem with desire is that it brings unhappiness.

Q: What should our attitude be toward employees?

A: The best attitude is to have a mind of love and compassion for your employees. For example, if you own a business, your goal is to make money. There's nothing wrong with making money - that's why you own the business. The employees make money so they can feed themselves. If you understand that they are working to keep their life going and are motivated by that basic need, you have compassion for them. So if you have a good heart, good motivation, and look after your workers with love and compassion, really wishing to help them, they will work for you in a loving and fruitful way. If you don't have a loving mind towards them, even if you pay them more, it doesn't help. They are still not going to like you. It works in a circle.

Q: How does one choose a path or practice which is perfectly suited to one?

A: If there is a certain teacher that you feel great affinity with, or a great devotion to, a natural faith in, that would indicate which way you should go. Then if that teacher presents a number of different teachings, and there is one that you feel an affinity to, then just go with your heart in that direction, where you feel a natural inclination. Within the Vajrayana teachings, there are also many paths and many meditational deities that you can practice, many different types of meditation. Sometimes the lama or the teacher can just tell you which one is good for you. Or maybe there is a certain Buddha or Bodhisattva or meditational deity that you have a great liking or special feeling for. When that special feeling arises, that's an indication that this is something linked with you, a good path for you.

Q: Is there some sort of link between Vajrayogini and Tara?

A: There is no specific connection between the two. In general, both represent forms of enlightened nature and both are said to combine the essence of all the Buddhas and



Bodhisattvas of the three times. In that way, there is no distinction between them; they are both enlightened energy, or the nature of enlightenment.

Q: I heard a teaching one time by someone who said there were three levels on which we do have gender - the inner, outer and secret - either masculine or feminine. I didn't know if this is a general teaching or whether he was kind of making it up as he went along.

A: The next time you meet him, ask him what he meant. Also, ask from which teacher he got it, what the teacher meant, and what the source of the teaching is.

---

## Buddhist Nuns in Burma

by Dr. Friedgard Lottermoser

Friedgard Lottermoser was born in Berlin in 1942 and spent her childhood in what was then known as East Germany. She moved to West Germany when she was ten and spent three years in Burma, where her stepfather worked for a German firm. In 1965, she received a B.A. in Pali from the University of Rangoon, then earned an M.A. in Pali at the University of Mandalay. While in Burma, she studied Vinaya with the bhikkhu (fully-ordained monk) scholar Sayadaw Shin Janakabhivamsa and meditation with the well-known lay teacher Sayagyi U Ba Khin. From 1973 on, she helped organize the first meditation courses of the U Ba Khin tradition to be held in Europe and has been actively involved in establishing several Buddhist centers there. In 1979 she received a Ph.D. for her work in Pali and has been working on a critical Pali dictionary since then. Dr. Lottermoser attended the International Conference on Buddhist Nuns in Bodhgaya in 1987 and serves as a member of the Sakyadhita Vinaya Research Committee.

According to a legend in the Burmese historical chronicles, the Burmese race arose from the union of a Sakyan prince, a fugitive related to the Buddha, and the daughter of a local chieftain in the city of Tagaung in Upper Burma. This is fixed in the memories of the people with the proverb, "The beginning of the Burmese people is from Tagaung." Quite certainly Theravada Buddhism has been a nation-building element in Burma. The majority of the inhabitants of the modern nation, the Socialist People's Republic of the Myanmar, define themselves as Burmese Buddhists. This statement is not merely a religious definition, but has a full range of social and juridical implications.

Burma presently has a population of approximately thirty million with an overwhelming majority (75%) of Theravada Buddhists. Only Thailand has a higher percentage (95%) since it never came under colonial rule. The Sangha census held in 1980 show 300,000 males wearing the Buddhist robes of a monk (bhikkhu) or a novice (samanera), and approximately 30,000 females in robes, that is, Buddhist nuns referred to as sila-rhan (pronounced thila-shin, meaning "owners of virtue"). If these figures are correct, and we have every reason to assume that they are, there would be ten males and one female wearing the robe in the Buddhist religious orders out of every thousand nationals in modern Burma.

What is the status of the "Buddhist nuns?" Social rights for women are traditionally at a fairly high level in Burma. Women usually handle the family finances and are trained to do so when quite young. There is, however, that little extra "male superiority," referred to as "bhun" (bhaga in Pali, meaning glory or power), which is supposed to be stronger in men than in women. How does this reflect on the status of Buddhist nuns in Burma today?

Daw Mi Mi Khaing, a well-known woman author of Burma, wrote a book called *The World of Burmese Women* which contains a chapter on "Women in Religion." I have compared it with my personal observations made in Burma during the last twenty-five years, particularly from 1965 to 1970, when I lived in various Buddhist monastic establishments in Upper Burma.

When discussing the status of Buddhist nuns at an international level, we find ourselves confronted with a profusion of terms in many languages, a veritable "Babylonian tower

of confusion." It is important to clarify this jungle of terms to find out what Buddhist women in religious robes actually are in the different countries where Buddhism is practiced today. The present nuns of Burma are not regarded as full female equivalents of the monks. They are not bhikkhunis. The name for the Buddhist nuns is sila-rhan (owner of good moral conduct), may-sila (Miss Virtue), or bhva-sila (granny virtue). However, "rhan" is also the normal term of address for male novices (Pali: samanera, Burmese: kui-ran). Even the word "rhan-pru" (make a "rhan") refers to the pabbajja (leaving the household life) of male novices.

It is a traditional cultural requirement for every male Burmese Buddhist to become a novice in childhood for some time and a monk in adulthood. There is even a saying, "You must become a monk, before you can become a man." Such a cultural requirement does not exist for women. The shaven head is a fairly strong cultural barrier, in fact, since almost every adult laywoman takes great pride in her long hair (as did the men until the British conquest of Mandalay). But now, with modern short hair styles becoming fashionable for young ladies, this obstacle to wearing the Buddhist robes is somewhat diminished. I have heard that the temporary wearing of the robe, so common for men in Burma, is now more frequently practiced by young women during long vacations.

The present nuns in Burma had a great period of revival and prosperity during the sasana reforms sponsored by King Mindon, who built the royal city of Mandalay and held the Fifth Buddhist Council there in the second half of the nineteenth century. The most prominent nuns at that time were Saya Kin and May Nat Pe, two orphans of war from Manipur (now India) who reached Burma in early childhood and were adopted by a royal minister. At Sagain and Mingun in Upper Burma, just across the river from Mandalay, on the banks of the Irrawaddy, there are hundreds of nunneries even today - a veritable "kingdom of nuns."

Historical Background of the Buddhist Nuns of Burma

The history of Southeast Asia is still a field wide-open to investigation in many respects. Some recently established facts may not yet have become common knowledge. According to research done by Luce and Than Tun, there is inscriptional evidence to show that there were bhikkhunis as well as bhikkhus in Pagan. Daw Mi Mi Khaing says that one bhikkhuni (rahan-ma, or female monk) was even a bishop! These reports were confirmed in a conversation I had in 1986 with a woman scholar, Daw Tin Tin Myint, who is head of the Department of Oriental Studies at the University of Rangoon.

When Did the Bhikkhunis Come to Burma?

Pali tradition states (in the Samantapasadika 69.10, translated by N.A. Jayawickrama, p.61) that Emperor Asoka sent the monks Sona and Uttara to Suvannabhumi and that they established the Buddhaddhamma there. On that occasion, 3500 noble men and 1500 women entered the Buddhist order. Suvannabhumi has been identified with Lower Burma. The city of Thaton has been identified with Sudhammanagara, the capital of a Mon kingdom of that time.

From archaeological remains, including stone inscriptions in Pali found in Lower Burma, we know that the Pyu people living there before the Burmese arrived were Theravada Buddhists. There is Chinese evidence to the effect that both boys and girls of the Pyu were educated in Buddhist monasteries and that "they left at the age of twenty, if they did not feel inclined to the religious mode of living on a life-long basis." This statement is very significant. Twenty years (after conception) is the age required for higher ordination according to the Vinaya. Bhikkhuni ordination may therefore have been available to Pyu girls. The monastic system of education applied to both boys and girls equally and may have resembled the system found in villages of Upper Burma even today. The Bhikkhuni Order may have been introduced into the Pyu kingdoms of Lower Burma from South India along with other features of Theravada Buddhism.

It is not quite clear how the bhikkhunis disappeared from Burma. Pagan was sacked by the Mongol emperor of China in 1298 A.D. After this, Burma was in a state of political unrest, split up under different rulers for several centuries. Some of these were

antagonistic to Buddhism. The present area of the Socialist People's Republic of Myanmar is defined by the conquests of the Konbaung dynasty (1751-1885 A.D.) which was replaced by British colonial rule after three successive wars fought in 1824, 1852, and 1885, respectively.

The order of monks managed to survive all these trials, but not the order of bhikkhunis. To restore the order of bhikkhunis, a sasana reform would be required. An effort in this direction has already been made by the Burmese government in the early 1980s. Identity cards have been issued to all citizens in robes, both male and female. Monks who do not conform to the Dhamma and the Vinaya have been made to leave the order. Two Sangha universities are now being set up, in Mandalay and Rangoon, where modern subjects are being taught to monks in addition to the traditional Pali Buddhist scholarship. It would be a very laudable development if these efforts could also be extended to the Buddhist nuns. After all, half the Buddhists of Burma are women, and the opportunity to practice their religion is an important feature of their lives.

In my inquiries, I have come across several unsuccessful attempts to re-introduce bhikkhuni ordination into Burma. There was one attempt in the 1930s, by a very learned monk named Shin Adicca. There was apparently another effort by the teacher of the Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw, an elder named Jetavana Sayadaw, who wrote a book in Pali in the 1950s, entitled *Milindapanha- atthakatha*, in which he advocated the ordination of bhikkhunis (by bhikkhus). And in 1970, there was an application to the Burmese government to re-introduce the "Bhikkhuni Sasana," with copies sent to twenty leading monks in Burma. This application was made by my own Dhamma teacher, a Burmese woman of the Sayagyi U Ba Khin tradition, who has been a keen meditator for 33 years. As a laywoman, she has studied Pali in all aspects, including fifteen years' study of Vinaya, in a famous monastic university in Upper Burma.

I firmly believe that it is our duty as Buddhist women of the present age, when the sasana is undergoing worldwide revival and is spreading to many countries where it was not known before, to try our level best to make the sasana bright, shining, and complete. The sasana is incomplete if higher ordination into religious orders is not available to women, since this opportunity was originally granted by Lord Buddha. Buddha himself said to Mara that his teaching is well-establish only if all the four groups of disciples are complete: bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, upasakas, and upasikas. There is a prophecy that the sasana will last for 5000 years and that there will be a revival after

2500 years. This means in the twentieth century, our own time - now! In fact, the growing interest in Buddhism at an international level seems to bear out this prediction.

As the Buddhadhamma is being re-introduced into India, as it becomes newly established in many Western countries, the different schools of Buddhism meet and come into close contact with each other. They develop an attitude of cooperation and discover their common ground. It becomes increasingly obvious that the basic tenets of Lord Buddha have to be emphasized to make the Buddhadhamma strong in the modern world. This includes the bhikkhuni ordination for women. As in most other spiritual movements, women around the world have taken a very strong interest in Buddhism. About two-thirds of the meditators in the West are women. It is our duty as Buddhist women to make an effort to establish the sasana in its full completeness.

May all beings be happy! May the women of the world make a special effort for progress on the path of sila, samadhi, and panna - virtue, mental calm, and insight. May peace prevail in the world.

#### Editor's Notes

1. Published by Zed Books, London, 1984.

2. Sasana refers to the teachings of the Buddha, the practice of the teachings, and the fruits of the practice.

3. Bhikkhu refers to a fully ordained monk, bhikkhuni to a fully ordained nun, upasaka to a Buddhist layman, and upasika to a Buddhist laywoman. The precepts of the upasaka and upasika are the same, five in number: to refrain from taking life (killing), to refrain from taking what is not given (stealing), to refrain from sexual misconduct (adultery and so on), to refrain from telling lies (especially about one's spiritual attainments), and to refrain from taking intoxicants. The precepts of the bhikkhu and bhikkhuni include these and more.

---

## International News

### England

A Sakyadhita Meeting will be held in London on Sunday, September 8, from 2:15 to 6:00 PM. Reservations have been made at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square. The nearest tube station is Holborn. The program for the meeting will feature a presentation by women of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO), including a talk, slide show, and discussion.

This is the third annual Sakyadhita Meeting to be organized in London due to the kindness of Wendy Barzetovic, representative for Sakyadhita in England. She is the living embodiment of Sakya Jetsun Chime Luding's advice: "Just do it." A single parent, Wendy has maintained her strong Dharma practice and has managed to organize a national Sakyadhita meeting each year of her young daughter's life. Wendy gained international fame while holding a traditional parasol to greet the arrival of His Holiness the Dalai Lama at the first International Conference on Buddhist Nuns. Her photograph appeared in many Indian newspapers.

For further details of the upcoming meeting, please contact Wendy at 9, Caldwell Court, Donnithorne Avenue, Nuneaton, Warks, CV11 4QQ, England.

-----

### Sri Lanka

Ayya Nyanasiri has written about a series of workshops for Buddhist women to be held in Kandy from June 14 to 16, 1991. The featured topic of the workshops will be how to integrate nuns into social action programs to serve the needs of the community.

The event will begin with Perahera, an auspicious puja, or religious service, to be conducted by senior nuns. Early the next morning, there will be a program of pujas, chanting, and meditation at every temple in Kandy, with Dayake (donor) committees organizing offerings to the participants. Workshops in the mornings will discuss

programs for women prisoners and orphanages, rehabilitation of young girls now in government camps, counselling services, and plans for a new international meditation center.

Topics to be considered in the afternoons include how to bring the Dhamma to educated young people, higher education for nuns, creating Dhamma materials for Montessori classes, and serving the aged and dying. Bhikkhus, government officials, university professors, grade school teachers, hospital administrators, physicians, nurses, and psychiatrists will join with Buddhist women to determine the specific needs in their areas and what programs will best serve those needs.

Anyone interested in helping develop any of these programs may contact Ayya Nyanasiri at Dhamma Vahini, Primrose Gardens, Kandy, Sri Lanka.

---

Thailand

Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh reports that preparations are going smoothly for the first International Conference on Buddhist Women, to be held in Bangkok from October 25 to 29 this year. All invited speakers are confirmed and registrations are being received from all over the world. Through the kindness of Michal Armstrong and her group in Singapore, sponsorships are being provided for six women to attend the conference from developing countries. There are many others from these countries who are also hoping to attend.

Members of the Thailand branch of Sakyadhita plan to host a luncheon for participants on October 27 at Wat Songdharmakalyani, Thailand's only bhikkhuni temple. On that day, there will be a special tour of the wonderful temples of Bangkok. After the conference, a number of people plan to go to Suan Moke, the meditation center of Ven. Buddhadasa, for a ten-day retreat.



There are still accommodations available for attending the conference, so please send your registration as soon as possible to: Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University, Bangkok 10200 Thailand.

---

Tibet

Rafaela Moltam wishes to share some images of her trip to Tibet in September of 1990:

On the way back to our hotel in Lhasa after a visit to Ganden Monastery, we called in briefly at a nunnery known as Ani Tsongkang. This was physically quite difficult: the little maze of back streets was hardly wide enough for our minibus and the driver had never been there before. In the end, we walked for several hundred yards, objects of friendly curiosity to local residents (no Chinese here in the 'native quarter'...) Through a doorway, we entered a small courtyard bright with potted plants. Facing us was an almost vertical staircase to the shrine, which we slowly, slowly climbed, encouraged by the sound of chanting. Inside the dimly-lit temple were rows and rows of nuns. With their shaven heads and deep voices, one intrepid traveller amongst us mistook them for monks.

After circumambulating the shrine room, we were shown the nunnery's proud showcase - the meditation cell of King Songtsen Gampo and his queen. The actual cave is now behind glass, along with large images of the king and his consort. We were told with relish that, while his Chinese and Nepalese wives were responsible for bringing Buddha images to Tibet, it was his Tibetan wife who provided the heir to the throne. As we viewed the tiny cell, a Lhasa lady arrived with an offering of dri butter for the lamps.

We were invited into the kitchen for bowls of Tibetan tea. The kitchen was located in a building apart from the shrine and the nuns' living quarters, presumably as a fire precaution. Like all other kitchens we saw in Tibetan homes, it was gloomy, lit only from the doorway and small window. A water pan sat upon the constantly-lit stove, pots and pans bedecked the walls, smoke stained the furnishings, and flies held sway.

When the puja ended, three nuns joined us in the kitchen. We had already met the oldest inhabitant, who was proud of being seventy-six. She served as official caretaker and helped in the community trade of making mani rolls to go inside prayer wheels. Caretakers are in an equivocal position: they have to be approved by the Chinese and are expected to inform the authorities of any 'irregularities.' She was not one of our kitchen party.

Just a week before our arrival, seventy nuns from various nunneries had been arrested in the latest round of protests against the Chinese authorities. From Ani Tsongkhong, twenty nuns had been sent to prison and another twenty-five had been sent home and denied permission to visit the nunnery. The sixty nuns remaining were understandably nervous and unsure of the future. Nuns are easy targets for the police and army. It seems that the unstated aim is to ensure that no nun dare make a political statement and to gradually close the nunneries down.

Although lay Tibetans bring offerings from time to time, the nunnery lives from hand to mouth. A silver-gilt snow lion was produced just before we left, a sort of 'under the robe' sale. It is now in an appreciative home in the U.K. As we left, many other nuns stared, smiled, giggled, or peeped around the corner at the peculiar foreigners.

On the way to Samye monastery, we met with a travelling nun. She was sitting patiently on a boulder by the roadside near the ferry, waiting for a life. She wore the standard travelling hat, practically flat, but with a long, wide brim to serve as a sunshade, and clutched a bag of provisions. With cries from the passengers, she was hoisted onto the back of the ramshackle lorry along with half a dozen others and a motley collection of goods. She was strangely silent and vanished quietly when we reached our destination.

We met many lay Dharma practitioners, too. One Sunday morning there were lines and lines of them at the Jokhang, the main temple. The word must have passed by bush telegraph that, for once, it was not a day for foreigners only. There were women of all ages, some of whom brought children of all ages with them. It was certainly encouraging to see that it was not just the elderly who came with such devotion. Everyone had a selection of prayer wheels, malas (prayer beads), katas, and butter,

and some had all. It seemed unlikely that all of them could complete the circuit of shrines before the temple closed at the end of the morning.

Another day we went to Tsurphu with two women, and the husband and two daughters of one of them. It was quite a long journey, including a 2 1/2 hour delay for extricating our minibus from the mud. The lone woman talked of her fears for her 13 year old daughter who had just gone for her first term at the School for National Minorities in Chengdu. (On every official building in Tibet, you see the five stars of the five nations of the Great Motherland. The Han star is the largest, dominating the others.)

The daughter had to attend school there, because no science may be taught in the Tibetan language (although it has an adequate vocabulary) and upper secondary educational is not available anywhere in Tibet. The woman wondered how much her daughter would be influenced by Han attitudes toward cultural minorities. When she returned home, would she still think (as the two little girls with us obviously did) that travelling to a war-devastated temple with offerings was a day well-spent?

#### Notes

1. The dri is the female of the yak family. Since yaks are male, they give no milk, and hence, no butter. The frequently-used term "yak butter" is a source of great mirth to Tibetans.

2. The letters of the mantra "Om Mani Padme Hum" are printed on paper and the strips of paper are then rolled into cylinders for enclosure in large prayer wheels. These prayer wheels are turned constantly by hand, with prayers for peace, happiness, prosperity, and enlightenment for all living beings.

-----

#### United States

The Fujinkai, or Buddhist Women's Association, has been active in linking the Japanese and American Buddhist women of North America for decades. The Honolulu United

Hongwanji Buddhist Women's Association has grappled with such topics as the relevance of Dharma to "real life," relating Buddhism to personal and emotional needs, modern time constraints on practice, and language problems.

Women of the Moiliili Hongwanji Mission have now begun a novel project. Recognizing the great and growing need to assist the frail and elderly in leading independent lives, they have developed Project Dana. The project has already recruited and trained nearly 55 volunteers who are helping 110 individuals in areas of Honolulu. Among the service provided are friendly home visits, caregivers' relief, telephone reassurance, minor home repairs, light housekeeping, hospital and care home visitations, when necessary, and transportation to medical appointments, stores, and church services.

Although volunteers and recipients of services come from all sectors of the community, Dana, the Buddhist principle of selfless giving, is the guideline for the project. It means giving selflessly of time and energy, providing compassion and care without thought of recognition or appreciation. There are seven types of immaterial giving identified in the Samyukaratna-pitaka- sutra: (1) physical offering: using good manners and greeting others with respect; (2) spiritual offering: serving others with compassion; (3) offering of eyes: looking with loving kindness; (4) offering of countenance: smiling and showing a gentle disposition; (5) oral offering: speaking with affection from the heart; (6) seat offering: sharing one's seat; (7) offering of shelter: extending hospitality to visitors in one's home.

Project Dana is expanding rapidly and involving Buddhists of all traditions and nationalities. Initially funded through a one-time start-up grant of \$20,000 from the Public Welfare Foundation in Washington, D.C., the project will serve an additional 100 people next year with assistance from local foundations and businesses. The current project administrator is Rose Nakamura, who founded the project after retiring from her position at the East West Center at the University of Hawai'i.

Project Dana provides a valuable prototype as a Buddhist social service activity that can tremendously benefit our aging society. Any questions regarding the project may be directed to Rose Nakamura, Moiliili Hongwanji Mission, 902 University Avenue, Honolulu, HI 96822.

## Dana

The religious foundation for the practice of dana was presented by Rev. Tatsuo Muneto at the the first training session for Project Dana volunteers. A parable called "Nanda's Lamp" tells of a poor woman who gave one lamp to the Buddha, while others gave many more. When a windstorm arose during the night, all lamps were extinguished except for the one which Nanda had offered from her heart. This illustrates the importance of the intention in giving.

---

## Activities of the Vinaya Research Committee

A report on the last three years (1987-90)

by Bhiksuni Jampa Tsedroen

Everything precious is difficult to attain. Consequently, the establishment of the Bhiksuni Sangha in the countries where it has disappeared or never came into existence is proving to be a slow process. It is not enough to send women to be ordained as bhiksunis; it is very important that when they return to their countries, they can live according to the Vinaya and be able to study and practice. Having taken the vows, they must know how to keep them purely and how to purify transgressions. It is relatively easy to become a nun, but keeping one's vow for one's whole life is another matter. In short, living as a nun requires good knowledge and practice of Vinaya.

To provide guidelines for nuns and to prepare the ground for an intensive dialogue on the bhiksuni issue, especially with the Bhiksu Sangha of the different traditions, are among the main aims of the Vinaya research committee, which was founded in

February 1987 at the end of the first International Conference on Buddhist Nuns in Bodhgaya.

Such research is an extremely difficult task, because it requires qualified women with a good knowledge of Buddhism in general and of Vinaya in particular, as well as, ideally, at least ten years experience of living as a bhiksuni. This is a necessary precondition for a dialogue between bhiksunis and bhiksunis-to-be of the various traditions. Why is such a dialogue necessary? There are several reasons: first, dialogue with Chinese bhiksunis is necessary, because the bhiksuni vows are taken within their tradition, the Dharmagupta. This, incidentally, was brought to China by Sinhalese bhiksunis in 433 A.D. Another reason is that there are doubts within the Tibetan (Mulasarvastivadin) and the Theravadin traditions as to whether or how the Bhiksuni Sangha should be established within their traditions today. Much research is necessary and, since the field of research is the same, even though carried out from different viewpoints, women can work together and give each other a lot of moral support.

Women who are working in the Vinaya committee are facing several problems. These include different languages (The sources one has to refer to are written in Sanskrit, Tibetan, Pali, Chinese, and several other Asian and European languages), far distances, lack of time, lack of financial support for the study materials and literature, not to mention the simple lack of practical experience of the Bhiksuni Vinaya in the countries where it is to be established, that is, experienced bhiksunis within these traditions to guide others.

It would be best, for example, if we could send nuns who have finished their education within the Theravada or Tibetan tradition, who speak English fluently and are willing to learn, to a Chinese nunnery for extended studies of the Chinese language and Vinaya studies. But up to now we have nobody whom we can send. Therefore we need nuns who have studied Vinaya properly within their own traditions, who can then engage in dialogue comparing the commonalities and differences of the Vinaya of each tradition, especially the Pratimoksa-sutra and the Karmavaccana, which explain the rituals for admission to the order and other formal acts of the Sangha. Again, this requires prior, proper study of the whole Vinaya.

In 1987, Ms. Kusuma Devendra and Dr. Friedgard Lottermoser met for some months to work together on the Vinaya of the Theravada tradition, and also had some exchanges with other members of the Vinaya committee.

In August, 1988, a Foundation for Tibetan Buddhist Studies was officially established in Hamburg, Germany. One purpose of the Foundation is to assist in establishing a Bhiksuni Order in Germany. Its aim is to promote the orders of Buddhist monks and nuns, taking the Bhiksuni Order into special consideration. Tibetan and German scholars of certain German universities and the Tibetan Center in Hamburg, including two bhiksunis of the Tibetan Center, were asked to be on the advisory council, which is responsible for Vinaya research.

In order to promote communication between Buddhist nuns throughout the world and to prepare the ground for the establishment of a Bhiksuni Order in Germany, translations of the most important passages in the Tibetan Vinaya literature are being undertaken and comparative studies with other traditions are being done. It is also planned to have the bhiksuni ordination rituals and the rules of the order, both of which are still in use today, translated from Chinese into Tibetan, since the corresponding practices in the Tibetan tradition probably never came to Tibet and the Sanskrit originals of the Chinese translations are apparently lost.

Among other things, a written commentary has been requested of a Tibetan scholar, Geshe Sonam Rinchen. He was asked to express the Tibetan viewpoint on questions that will possibly be answered differently in the different traditions. With the help of Tibetan Vinaya masters, Bhiksunis Jampa Tsedoen and Thubten Choedron have adapted some rituals from the Tibetan tradition and translated them into English for regular practice. They are also translating the regular Vinaya classes given by Geshe Thubten Ngawang from Tibetan into German and are translating them later into English. The topics covered so far are: the meaning of Pratimoksa, the relationship between teacher and disciple according to the Vinaya, the confession ceremony (posadha), summer retreat (varsa), and the closing of the summer retreat (pravarana).

For a whole month in December 1988, Bhiksunis Karma Lekshe Tsomo and Jampa Tsedoen observed the Three Platform Ordination (which includes the bhikshuni ordination) held at Hsi Lai Temple in Los Angeles, California, together with the Tibetan

bhiksu scholar Geshe Kunchok Tsering, who was sent by the Council for Religious and Cultural Affairs of His Holiness the Dalai Lama at the invitation of Hsi Lai Temple.

In the meantime, Bhiksuni Heng-ching Shih, a learned and experienced nun from Taiwan, agreed to join the Vinaya Committee. She began a re-translation of the Dharmagupta Bhiksuni Pratimoksa Sutra with Karma Lekshe Tsomo who, as many people know, escaped death by a hair's breath and is recuperating. So the project will take some time.

Soon a short survey on the Tibetan Vinaya will become accessible to those interested in Vinaya research, as a contribution towards dialogue with other traditions, especially between the Pali (Theravada), Chinese (Dharmagupta), and Tibetan (Mulasarvastivada) traditions. This will give Western nuns, especially those of the Tibetan tradition, some assistance in their study of the Tibetan Vinaya. The pamphlet will also include a bibliography on Tibetan Vinaya literature and a selection of Vinaya literature of different traditions, mainly works translated into English and German.

---

## Bibliography

### More Books on Women in Buddhism

- Blakiston, Hilary. *But Little Dust*, Allborough Press, Cambridge, 1991.
- Byles, Marie B. *Journey Into Burmese Silence*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1962.
- Galland, China. *Longing for Darkness*, Viking, New York, 1990.



- Khiang, Mi Mi. *The World of Burmese Women*, Zed Books, London, 1984.
- Talim, Meena. *Woman in Early Buddhist Literature*, \*
- Thera, Piyadassi. *The Virgin's Eye: Women in Buddhist Literature*, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, 1980.
- Wayman, Alex and Hideko. *The Lion's Roar of Queen Srimala*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1990.

#### More Articles on Women in Buddhism

- Arai, Paula. "Soto Zen Nuns in Modern Japan: Keeping and Creating Tradition," *Bulletin of the Nanzen Institute for Religion & Culture*, No.14, Summer, 1990, pp.38-51.
- Aziz, Barbara Nimri. "Buddhist Nuns," *Natural History*, Vol.98, No.3, March 1989.
- Bancroft, Anne. " ", *Women in the World's Religions* (Ed. King), Paragon House, New York, 1987.
- Barua, S.R. "Household Life and Women in Buddhism," *Maha Bodhi*, 1956, pp.352-7.
- Barnes, Nancy Schuster. "Buddhism," *Women in World Religions* (Ed. Sharma), State University of New York Press, 1987, pp.105-33.
- Benard, Elisabeth. "Ma-chig Lab-dron," *Choyang, Dharamsala*, 1988, pp.43-51.
- Byles, Marie B. "A New Type of Bhikkhunis," *Maha Bodhi*, 1962, pp.344-5.
- Dhammapala. "The Place of Women in the Buddhist Church," *Maha Bodhi*, 1908, pp.32-5.
- Dharma, Prabhasa. "The Role of Women in Buddhism Today," *Zen*, March 1990, pp.10-22.
- Fages, Martine. "The Tradition of the Zen Nun in Korea," *The Middle Way*, Vol.60, 1985/6, pp.162-5.
- Guha, S.N. "Buddhism and Womanhood," *Maha Bodhi*, pp.296-9.
- Keyes, Charles F. "Mother or Mistress But Never a Monk: Buddhist Notions of Female Gender in Rural Thailand," *American Ethnologist*, 11(2), May 1984, pp.223-241.
- Khema, Ayya. "Bhikkhunis Today," *The Middle Way*, Vol64, 1989/90, pp.43-6.

- Lal, S.C. "Buddha and the Female Sangha," Maha Bodhi, 1931, pp.175-7.
- Law, B.C. "Buddha's Chief Disciple and His Influence on Woman," Maha Bodhi, 1939, pp.259-69.
- Legget, Trevor. "Women in Early Japanese Zen," The Middle Way, Vol.50, 1975/6, pp.181-7.
- Paul, Diana. "Empress Wu and the Historians: A Tyrant and Saint of Classical China," Unspoken Worlds: Women's Religious Lives in Non-Western Cultures (Ed. Falk and Gross), Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1980, pp.191-205.
- Salanave, M. "Buddhist Nuns," Maha Bodhi, 1932, pp.452-6.
- Schuster, Nancy. "Changing the Female Body: Wise Women and the Bodhisattva Career in Som Maharatnakutasutras," Jo