



Sakyadhita

International Association of Buddhist Women

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News



INSPIRING NUNS IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

by *Dominique Butet, with Kate Bennett*

Beyond the snow-covered passes, the far-off places of Arunachal Pradesh felt like jewels hidden in golden boxes. As we moved beyond the Brahmaputra riverscape, we slowly left behind the warmth of rice paddies. Gradually, banana and palm trees disappeared from view. We reached the Sela Pass after a twelve-hour drive. At the top the pass, 13,700 feet high, a path stretched before us along a glistening frozen lake that led to a wonderful land nestled between Tibet and Bhutan. In this land, the region of Tawang, green slopes mingled with deep forests and pristine streams plunged down steep gorges into turbulent rivers.

Located in the western region of Arunachal Pradesh in the northeast of India, Tawang is home to the distinctive Monpa people and their culture. Historically, the Tibetan word "Mon" referred to the indigenous tribes of Bhutan and southern Tibet. The Monpas became separated from their Tibetan cousins in 1914, when the British drew the MacMahon Line along the high ridges of the Himalayas, demarcating a border with Tibet. The Monpas were subsumed into the British Raj and eventually into Arunachal Pradesh, the 24th state of India. Nevertheless, Monpa culture has been preserved up until the present, largely thanks to the political and social activities of the 13th Tsona Gontse Rinpoche. Not only did this respected *Jama* maintain close relations with the Indian government, but he also created many schools. These schools include Shanti Deva in Bomdila and the Central Institute of Himalayan Culture Studies in Dahung. Today, these schools have a total of 280 students, including 80 monks and 23 nuns.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the 12th Tsona Gontse Rinpoche founded a nunnery in the village of Singsur, located about 20 kilometers from Tawang. At that time, three hermit nuns who

were practicing there approached him to request his support. Touched by their devotion, the 12th Tsona Gontse Rinpoche agreed to help them build a nunnery on the grassy slopes of Lhou Village. In his next rebirth, the 13th Tsona Rinpoche again assisted the nuns and the community has continued to grow.

Singsur Nunnery is currently home to 44 nuns. The nunnery consists of a number of small dwellings called *shaks* that have been constructed around the temple. These dwellings are built on stone foundations and have cement-reinforced bamboo walls. Each adult nun lives with and supports up to three younger nuns. In these dwellings we discovered the power of “aunties,” who not only take care of and educate their “nieces,” but also perform essential responsibilities. These include growing vegetables, preparing their own meals, collecting wood for rigorous winters, and performing rituals in the villages to help earn money for their subsistence. In this way, they also ensure that villagers have access to Buddhist practices throughout the year in their own homes. These nuns also play a vital role in maintaining Buddhist traditions in the Tawang region, showing great devotion by giving all their remaining time to spiritual practice.

Sometimes the nuns’ families help them build their *shaks*, but this is not always the case. As 58-year-old Jambey Chozom explained:

When my parents died, I was 11 years old, so I had to take care of my four brothers and sisters. I ran away twice to join the nunnery, because I clearly wanted to become a nun, but my family made me feel guilty about this decision. At the age of 25, I finally succeeded and, I went to live with my nun teacher at Singsur. Then nine years ago, I built my own *shak* with the money I earned during rituals and now I can take care of my three nieces.

Genden Lhamu, who was in charge of supplies at the nunnery, was also the resource person who opened the doors of the *shaks* and gave us access to the nuns’ touching stories. She had recently completed an extensive research project on all of Tawang’s nunneries. This 27-year-old woman has been a nun since the age of nine and was then serving in the rotating role of *nyerpa* (storekeeper) for one year. She was quick-witted and totally dedicated to the community. In June 2017, she attended the 15th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist women in Hong Kong and presented a paper about the nuns of Northeast India. She, too, had shown great tenacity in becoming a nun because her family was not in favor of this choice at first. Since her parents refused her decision, she escaped from the house at the age of nine and hid under a large tree planted outside the village. Her family looked for her all night and when she was finally found, Genden Lhamu refused to go back home. Her parents finally understood that her decision to be a nun was irrevocable. They agreed that she would live at the nunnery in her great-aunt’s *shak*, while recommending that she be careful never to disrobe. Her father’s advice was: “Become a nun, but never come back.” Although he was attached to the family’s reputation, he was equally concerned about his daughter’s happiness.

Fortunately, it was easier for 25-year-old Tsering Dolma, who

joined her aunt with the approval of her family at the age of twelve. Academically talented, she had been studying for six years in Dahung and was starting her final year before university. She hoped to continue her studies and become a teacher. Tsering admitted to having thought about becoming a *geshema*, but this new and long curriculum would be daunting, and such a choice depended on her aunt’s finances. “Education is as important as rice in life,” she stated with conviction. Genden Lhamu agreed. She had recently completed her Master’s degree in Buddhist philosophy, closing four years of higher education in Delhi.

The joyful Thupten Choezom, 25 years old, was in charge of leading the chanting and prayers during rituals, thus fulfilling the function of *umze*. She was able to join her great-aunt at Singsur Nunnery at the age of 13. However, she did not have the opportunity to study beyond the fifth grade. In fact, her great-aunt had decided that it would be in her best interest to memorize the ritual texts so she would not lose her traditional culture. Thupten Choezom, who led all the rituals with her inspiring voice, claimed to be happy. “And the most important thing in life is to be happy, right?” she added as evidence. Nevertheless, since becoming a “nun-teacher,” she was in charge of two young nuns: 13-year-old Pema, who was continuing her secular schooling in seventh grade, and a 19-year-old nun who is studying at Dahung. “It’s also very important to be well educated,” Thupten Choezom said, concluding our conversation with a burst of laughter.

Knowing how crucial education is for the future of her nunnery, Genden Lhamu was pleased when a qualified monk scholar (*geshe*) arrived. The *geshe* had come to teach for two years in Singsur at Genden Lhamu’s invitation. The other two nunneries of Tawang have also benefitted from this kind of precious help. But Genden Lhamu has even bigger plans for her community. Her dream is to create a monastic college (*shedra*). By offering both religious as well as modern subjects such as math and English, the nuns could continue their studies after primary school without going to Dahung. This would also serve older nuns of the community who were unable to receive a secular education and are beyond the age to do so now.

To this end, Genden Lhamu has created an association that is in the process of completing the administrative registration in Delhi. She will thus be able to raise funds to pay the salaries necessary for good teachers and to recruit a *geshema* to ensure that the nuns receive a quality education. Reluctant to continue her studies and start a PhD, Genden Lhamu is certain that she would eventually like to teach either Tibetan or English. She is highly motivated, as evidenced by the fact that she had managed to have three young nuns admitted to Thupten Choeling Monastery’s Balika School, located below Singsur Nunnery. Founded in 2015, as a project of the 13th Tsona Rinpoche, and with the agreement of the Indian government, this school welcomes 100 girls from kindergarten up to third grade. The school plans to open a new class each year, eventually offering education up to eighth grade, with six teachers who would teach classes in Tibetan, English, Hindi, mathematics, environmental studies, and Buddhist philosophy, all in a pleasant and serene environment conducive to studying.

This enthusiasm for education was not a privilege solely for young nuns. Jambey Chozom regretted that she had not had

access to formal education. At 58 years of age, she only spoke Monpa dialect and had to memorize all the ritual texts without being able to read them. She said, "Education is important because it brings greater recognition for nuns by the society." Upon reflection, Thupten Wangmo, 63 years old, went even further: "Education makes it possible to bring new things into society and to change the mindset." Her dreams? That there would be good teachers for nuns, of course, but also a system that would enable, for example, the nuns to take meals together in a common kitchen to engender greater social cohesion. "Yes, with education, my life would have been different," she concluded with clarity reinforced by years of practice. "I could have talked to you directly in English, for example. I hope the young nuns will have a life less difficult than mine."



Geden Choeden, from Bhutan, had other considerations. At 83 years of age, she had spent nearly 70 years in Singsur. When we met her, she was taking advantage of the slight midday sun to recite *mantras*, her main occupation. Sitting in the grass above the temple, she told us about the many retreats in mountain or forest huts that had shaped her experiences and her life. Her best memory was of having helped the 12th Tsona Rinpoche build the Tsongkhapa statue in the old temple. She proudly added that she had attended the teachings of Kalachakra five times. Her face was beaming when she evoked the blessing she had received from His Holiness the Dalai Lama; after she fainted during the teachings, she realized his blessing had cured her of her headaches. Her simplicity and depth inspire profound respect. Genden Lhamu also came alive as she listened: "One thing is certain: for young nuns to achieve such serenity in the future, education and practice need to go hand in hand."

These words filled our hearts with joy. Thanks to the nuns' devotion and the high quality of the projects they have carried out, Singsur Nunnery already contains the seeds of great spiritual attainments that will surely ripen in the future.

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VISAKHA: THE CHIEF FEMALE BENEFACTOR OF THE BUDDHA

by Asoka Bandarage

The year 2017 marked the centenary of Visakha Vidyalaya,

the renowned Buddhist girls' school in Colombo, Sri Lanka, named after the chief female benefactor of the Buddha. The Buddha remarked, "Visakha stands out foremost among my women lay supporters... of the Order."¹ The generosity (*dana*) of royal and wealthy patrons such as Visakha and Anathapindika, the Buddha's chief male lay disciple, contributed greatly to the preservation and spread of the Buddha's teachings (Dhamma) over the centuries. In light of contemporary debates over such concerns as the ethics of wealth and the roles of women, it is inspiring to reflect upon the life of Visakha, the great Dhamma practitioner who was the Buddha's chief benefactress.

Visakha was born into a wealthy family in the Maghada Kingdom and grew up in Saketa, a lovely city built by her father near Savatthi, located in the Kosala Kingdom. In Savatthi, she married into a family of great wealth. In addition to her riches, Visakha was renowned for her beauty, charm, poise, and physical strength. She possessed the five maidenly attributes of beauty – exquisite hair, teeth, skin, youth, and form – that her husband Punnavaddhana had required of his bride. After marriage, Visakha gave birth to ten sons and ten daughters, who in turn gave birth to a great many grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Visakha was an exemplary wife and mother, and a compassionate caretaker of animals. She was also a person of wisdom, kindness, generosity, and other attributes of inner beauty. Though she lived in a patriarchal society, Visakha maintained her own independent business and was known for her managerial and communication skills. Among all of Visakha's virtues, most noteworthy was her devotion and support for the Buddha and the *sangha* – the monastic community of monks (*bhikkhus*) and nuns (*bhikkhunis*).

Visakha first met the Buddha, listened to his teachings, and entered the path of the Dhamma when she was just seven years old. From then on, until her death at the age of 120, she used her wealth and talents to tirelessly and generously serve the *sangha*. Visakha's father-in-law Migara was a devout disciple of the Niganthas, a sect of naked ascetics. The story of how she convinced him to accept the Buddha's teachings attests to her sense of humor, intelligence, and audacity.

One day, a Buddhist monk came to Migara's doorstep as he was eating out of a golden bowl and Migara refused to offer him any food. Embarrassed, Visakha said to the monk, "Pass by, Venerable Sir, my father-in-law eats stale food." The enraged Migara demanded an explanation. In her calm voice, Visakha explained that Migara was eating the benefits of his past good deeds without doing anything to accrue further merit. Visakha also said that, given her unshakeable faith in the teachings of the Buddha, she did not feel comfortable living in a house where monks were not welcome. If she did not get permission to invite the monks to the house, she would leave.

Reluctantly, Migara agreed to invite the Buddha and the monks to a meal at his house. When he heard the Buddha's

discourse at the end of the meal, Migara entered the Dhamma path. He expressed gratitude to his daughter-in-law for helping birth his spiritual liberation and declared that henceforth Visakha would be like a mother to him. Thus, Visakha came to be known as Mother Visakha or Migaramata, the mother of Migara. In time, she built the magnificent Pubbarama (Eastern Monastery) and donated it to the *sangha*. The monastery came to be known as Migaramatupasada, the terraced abode of Migara's mother.

Visakha always tended vigilantly to the well-being of the *sangha*, attending to the needs of both monks and nuns. She requested the Buddha to grant her eight boons. As long as she lived, she wished to give robes to monks during the rainy season, rice gruel to the monks daily, meals to monks who entered Savatthi, meals to monks who left the city, meals to sick monks, medicine for sick monks, meals for monks tending the sick, and clothes for nuns to wear while bathing. When Visakha disclosed her pure intention, the Buddha granted her these eight boons. Her request was not motivated by self-promotion. Instead, she wished to develop the five spiritual faculties (*pancha indriya*) – faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom – and the seven factors of enlightenment (*sapta bhojanga*) – mindfulness, keen investigation, energy, joy, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity.

As the leading female lay disciple of the Buddha, Visakha played an influential role in activities pertaining to the *sangha*. A number of monastic precepts were promulgated due to her intervention. For example, she questioned those monks who refused to ordain novices during the rainy season. She told the Buddha, "The Dhamma is timeless. There is no time when the Dhamma cannot be followed." Thereafter, the Buddha allowed ordination during the rainy season. Visakha played an especially important role in managing the *bhikkhuni sangha*. Sometimes the Buddha allowed her to settle disputes among the nuns. Some precepts for the nuns were set forth on her advice.

The story of how Pubbarama came to be built is fascinating. One day, while Visakha was listening to a Dhamma discourse at Jetavana Monastery, built by Anathapindika in Savatthi, she set aside a valuable jeweled cloak that was part of her bridal jewelry and forgot it there. When she discovered the loss, she refused to take it back and instead auctioned it off to raise money to support the *sangha*. When she could not find anyone in the whole of Savatthi with the means to buy her expensive cloak, worth some 90 million pieces of gold, Visakha bought it back herself. With that money and an additional 180 million, she bought land and built Pubbarama at the eastern gate of Savatthi. The building had two floors, with 500 rooms on each floor, and a pinnacle of solid gold at the top that could hold 60 water pots. It is said that the building was very tastefully furnished and completely carpeted. Pubbarama was donated to the *sangha* in the thirty-first year after the Buddha's awakening.

On the day that Visakha dedicated Pubbarama to the



sangha, she circumambulated the monastery with her children and grandchildren, singing elatedly. Seeing this unusual behavior, some monks asked the Buddha whether Visakha had lost her mind. The Buddha responded that Visakha had not lost her mind; she was simply reciting some verses of exultation over the fulfillment of her aspirations in past and present existences. The Buddha then spoke a verse extolling the merits of putting one's resources and abilities to good use. This well-known verse is known as "Visakha Vatthu":

Just as from a collection of flowers many
garlands can be made by an expert florist, so
also, with wealth, faith, and generosity, one who
is subject to birth and death can do much good.²

Pubbarama is mentioned frequently in the Buddhist texts. The Buddha spent many rainy seasons there during the last 25 years of his life and delivered many important discourses there. In the *Agganna Sutta*, which was delivered to two *brahmins*, the Buddha refuted caste ideology. He explained how human beings became bound to the wheel of *samsāra* life after life and how the practice of Dhamma, which is universal, allows aspirants from any of the four castes to attain enlightenment. It was also at Pubbarama that the Buddha gave permission for the *patimokkha*, the basic code of conduct for the *sangha*, to be recited in his absence.

One full-moon night, while the Buddha was residing at Pubbarama and the white kaumudi lily was in bloom, the Buddha delivered the *Anapanasati Sutta* to a vast community of silent monks. In this discourse, which is central to the Buddha's teaching of meditation, he explained mindfulness of breathing in detail:

O bhikkhus, the full awareness of breathing, if developed and practiced continuously, will be rewarding and bring great advantages. It will lead to success in practicing the Four Establishments of

Mindfulness. If the method of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness is developed and practiced continuously, it will lead to success in the practice of the Seven Factors of Awakening. The Seven Factors of Awakening, if developed and practiced continuously, will give rise to understanding and liberation of the mind.³

Over time, due to a confluence of factors, Buddhist teachings and culture nearly disappeared from India. These factors included internal dissension, loss of patronage from the royalty and wealthy donors such as Visakha and Anathapindika, the revival of Brahmanism, and invasions. Like most other Buddhist monasteries and sacred sites, Pubbarama was destroyed. Thanks to the pillars built by Emperor Asoka in 3 BCE, important Buddhist sites throughout the Indian subcontinent can still be identified.

The ruins of Pubbarama and the *stupa* that houses Mother Visakha's ashes are yet to be excavated. Ironically, today the only thing that marks Pubbarama, the site where the Buddha spoke out against caste ideology and taught mindfulness of breathing, is a broken Asokan pillar in the shape of a Shiva lingam, worshiped by Hindu villagers. Appreciation and respect for Visakha's contributions to human spiritual advancement call for the excavation and restoration of Pubbarama by the Indian authorities, with the support of the international Buddhist community

NOTES

1. Anguttara Nikāya 1, chap. 14.
2. Dhammapada, verse 53.
3. Anapanasati Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya 118.

FROM RAPE TEXTS TO BRO BUDDHISM: CRITICAL CANONICAL AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON THE SEX ABUSE SCANDALS IN WESTERN BUDDHISM

by Sarah H. Jacoby

The following is a response to a panel of the same title organized by Ann Gleig and Amy Paris Langenberg at the American Academy of Religion Meeting in Denver, Colorado on November 18, 2018.

"Everybody knows, yet no one ... has ever publicly spoken out..." Ann Gleig began her paper with these words, spoken by the Canadian Zen teacher Eshu Martin.¹ And just a few months ago, in September of 2018, His Holiness the Dalai Lama responded to his meeting in Rotterdam with victims of sex abuse perpetrated by Sogyal Lakar by saying, "I already knew these things, nothing new."² These comments resonate because many of us, too, have known about the problem of sex abuse in Buddhist contexts for a long time. There are now innumerable examples in North America and Europe, and in Asian Buddhist monasteries and religious communities more information about sex abuse is slowly coming to light.

As the Roman Catholic sex abuse crisis has proliferated

over the past 25-plus years, many of us have realized that it would only be a matter of time before Buddhist sex abuse scandals hit the cover of the *New York Times*. Of course this has now actually happened multiple times in the last decade, most recently Andy Newman's July 11, 2018, article titled "The King of Shambhala Buddhism is Undone by Abuse Report." There's nothing like waking up to an article like that on the cover of the *New York Times* right before walking into class to teach a summer course on Buddhism. Like the comments I quoted above, I already knew this about the Shambhala leader; I've heard stories about his escapades for years. But knowing this and seeing it splashed across the front page of the *New York Times* are two different things.



It is no exaggeration to say that Buddhism is having its #MeToo moment. This has been a long time coming, and it is urgent and necessary for this public reckoning to take place. It is painful, and raises problematic questions. If, for example, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has known about Sogyal Lakar's abuse since 1990s, if it is "nothing new" as he said, then why has it taken this long for the leading hierarchs of Tibetan Buddhism to speak publicly about it? If Robert Aitken had been keeping such detailed records of forty years of Eido Shimano's sexual predations (and we should be glad that he did), why was it not until 2008 that his records were unsealed and shared across the Zen community? Bringing this closer to home, if we "all know" that sex abuse is rampant in American Buddhist communities (and many outside America, too), then how can we actively reduce this harm?

What is it about American Buddhism and problems with money, sex, and power? Zen communities have been exploding with successive sex abuse scandals.³ Over the past year, Tibetan Buddhist' communities and individuals, including the Rigpa and Shambhala communities, as well as Lama Norla's center, Kagyu Thubten Chöling, have all faced public crisis. Is this latest Buddhist sex abuse crisis just another version of what happened in the Roman Catholic Church, an iteration of what's going on elsewhere in the #MeToo movement, or something more specific to Buddhism? To what degree is the American Buddhist problem with sex abuse caused by Americans' far-reaching ignorance about Buddhism, and to what degree is it inherited

from Asian Buddhist traditions, such as the primacy of the guru-disciple relationship and conceptions that skillful means supersedes ethics? Do Buddhist canonical sources and cultures condone, critique, and/or ignore instances of what we would today define as “sex abuse”? Regardless of how we answer this last question, what is to be done about this now?

Given the scope of the problem of sex abuse in Buddhist monastic and lay communities, it is remarkable how little scholarship has been done on this topic to date. There are some important journalistic pieces and books about scandals in Buddhist communities for the general public, but there is ample room for further academic research on the causes, conditions, historical precedents, recovery, and prevention of sex abuse in Buddhist communities. The papers in this panel do important work filling this gap, and I commend them all for tackling this controversial and difficult subject with such careful attention and insight. There is much to be learned here from all of these papers.

Ann Gleig’s new book from Yale University Press, *American Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Modernity*, is coming out in February, 2019. An important aspect of her work, addressed in her paper, “From Sweeping Zen to Open Buddhism: Sex Scandals, Social Media, and Transparency in Western Buddhism,” is the generational shift currently taking place in American Buddhism from the liberal, therapeutically-oriented baby boomer generation to Gen X Buddhist leadership, which she characterizes as more progressive and politically-oriented. Her paper analyzes the Internet and social media as vehicles through which “an ethic of transparency” is taking root, as opposed to the cultures of secrecy that have enabled sex abuse.

Gleig provides many examples that lend credence to the value of this transparency, including the online magazine *Sweeping Zen* founded by Adam Tebbe in 2009, the “Open Buddhism” Facebook group now operating under the name “Contemporary Buddhism” started by Rob Hogendoorn, and online spaces for sex abuse victims to form community and challenge hierarchical power structures, such as *Buddhist Project Sunshine* started by Andrea Winn in 2017. Invoking Michel Foucault, Gleig raised an important reminder that technologically mediated transparency does not eradicate the operations of power but rather rearticulates them. Nonetheless, as Gleig suggests in her conclusion, “the move toward transparency is an ethically essential and legitimate one.” Central among those who have the most to fear from the newly democratized online spaces in which Buddhist community members are talking to each other are those who stand to benefit most from secrecy, namely abusers and their apologists.

Another feature of Gleig’s paper that I found particularly evocative is her five-fold typology of responses to situations involving sex abuse in Buddhist contexts: (1) canonically defensive (victims dismissed); (2) Buddhist bad apple (one bad guy, rest of them okay); (3) canonical critique (calls for Buddhist solutions such as ethics); (4) non-canonical

critique (calls for solutions outside of Buddhism, such as feminism and psychotherapy); and (5) reductive critique (the whole thing is a hopeless mess). I would be curious to hear Gleig’s thoughts on how race, class, and sexuality figure into and affect these different interpretive camps in online forums. Do the typologies such as this five-fold one and the generational differences she articulates appear in similar ways for people of color, those who are gender nonconforming, or for Americans who come from multi-generation Buddhist heritages? Are certain interpretive strategies used more often in Zen communities, and others in Tibetan Buddhist communities?

Based on Gleig’s use of the word “canonical,” defined earlier in her paper as “interpretations that draw primarily on Buddhist frameworks,” she is envisioning “canonical” as an expansive Buddhist domain rather than a specific set of authoritative Buddhist scriptures. Nevertheless, thinking about canonical explanations for sex abuse raises a question that several of these papers grapple with, namely: Is this spate of sex abuse scandals in American Buddhist communities an anomaly, or is it actually a part of Buddhist tradition that Buddhist teachers are faithfully, if excessively, importing? It becomes crucial, as several of these papers underscore, to know one’s Buddhist history. What resources can one find within Buddhist canonical sources that provide guidelines for sexual ethics and prohibitions against sexual misconduct? José Cabezón’s massive and important book *Sexuality in Classical South Asian Buddhism* (Wisdom Publications, 2017), provides considerable guidance in answering this question.

Adding to this is Amy Langenberg’s paper, “Pleasure is Consent: A Study of Rape Texts in the Vinaya,” in which she analyzes the definition of consent in Vinaya texts that adjudicate what qualifies as rape, and what qualifies as sex leading to expulsion from the order. Langenberg demonstrates that consent to sex is not about a willed decision to act, but rather about the presence or absence of sexual pleasure; in her words “pleasure itself is consent.” This is completely different than contemporary definitions of rape, which have nothing to do with the victim’s state of arousal. A few things stand out as particularly curious about the world of the Vinaya that the author has enlivened for us. First, one has to hand it to the authors of the Vinaya for comprehensiveness. The definition of sex that Langenberg retrieves from the Vinaya (the first *pārājika* for *bhikkhunīs* in the Mahāsāṅghika-lokottaravāda) defines sex as an insertive act involving vagina, anus, or mouth with human, nonhuman, or animal partners that may either be awake, asleep/unconscious, or dead. All this, including even necrophilia, and still only two genders are mentioned with whom women are forbidden from having sex – men or *pandakas*. The idea that women could have sex with women is inconceivable based on this definition. It is simply beyond the realm of possibility.

Second, what strikes me about the rules regarding what constitutes rape in the Vinaya is the prevalence of both men

and women acting as rapists. Take, for instance, the scene in the Vinaya where a group of six women happen upon an elderly homeless man sleeping outside beneath a tree and decide to mount him. The monk is later absolved of any wrongdoing by the Buddha because he was sleeping throughout his victimization, though the Buddha does suggest that monks should sleep indoors to prevent women from taking advantage of them like this.⁴ How does one understand scenes like this in which women are perpetrating rape? What does this tell us about early Buddhist conceptions of female sexuality and agency? What work is rape litigation doing in the Vinaya?

Third, I'm curious about how one understands the possible connections between canonical evidence of sexual predation and its contemporary manifestations in Buddhist communities. Langenberg's paper demonstrates that on the subject of rape as adjudicated in the Vinaya, desirelessness is the *bona fide* Buddhist virtue, not respect for others' boundaries or nonviolence per se. What are we to do with that today as we consider the limitations of consent caused by power differentials between gurus and disciples (a topic that Emily Cohen's paper also raises)? Last, drawing from a conversation about José Cabezon's book, is there anything worth saving here about early Buddhist understandings of consent?⁵

The importance of knowing one's Buddhist history is also a central take-home message from Rob Hogendoorn's paper, "The Making of a Lama: Interrogating Sogyal Rinpoche's Pose as an Incarnate Master." How can we determine the authenticity of Buddhist credentials held by a teacher such as Sogyal Lakar? On what grounds can we say that Sogyal Lakar's cavorting with a bunch of beautiful young women he calls *dākinīs* is a manipulation of tantric tradition? Here a careful understanding of the place of sexual yoga in Tibetan Buddhist doctrine, ritual, and culture is of paramount importance and is, by and large, still unavailable to most European and American spiritual seekers given the esoteric nature of this topic. This is slowly changing, and I think it needs to, because borrowing words Wakoh Shannon Hickey uses in reference to American Zen, "This is a system ripe for abuse."

One of the most convincing parts of Hogendoorn's paper is his effort to present a counternarrative about Sogyal Lakar's early life that demonstrates "the mutual construction of authority and power between this Tibetan lama and his western followers." According to Hogendoorn, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* did not establish the resultant image, it exploited it. This is a crucially important point. Western orientalist projections about Tibetans as ethereal, mystical, superhuman, enlightened beings enabled this enterprising displaced son of a once-prominent family of Tibetan traders to reinvent himself into the figure of their fantasies. The fawning audiences Tibetans like Sogyal encountered mixed poorly with the utter lack of checks and balances that young Tibetan religious entrepreneurs found when they arrived in Europe and the United States

in the 1970s and 80s. There were no senior monastic abbots or religious hierarchs, no elder relatives, and exceeding few Tibetan community members to put them in their place, deflate their newly enhanced egos, or remind them of the ever-present dangers of the eight worldly *dharmas*. This climate, paired with some charisma on Sogyal's part, set the stage for decades of abuse.

Hogendoorn is spot on in his assertion that elements of this kind of abuse of power could, and did, happen in Tibetan contexts, and hence the importance of looking into Tibetan history as a reference point for making sense of the present. However, his conclusion that the repeated history of Tibetan Buddhist reform movements can provide a roadmap for how to investigate the qualifications of Tibetan Buddhist masters could use some further nuance. With figures such as Atiśa, Tsongkhapa, and Khenpo Jikmé Püntsock in mind, Hogendoorn explains that "Sexual malpractice under the guise of Buddhism gave rise to Tibetan reformatory movements, right up until our present day and age." This is not quite accurate. Sexual malpractice has been a stated offence precipitating action by multiple generations of Tibetan Buddhist reformers, but in practice we cannot lose sight of the fact that previous centuries' Tibetan reformers have been involved in intersectorian competition and contests for temporal power that had as much to do with their spirit of reformation as sexual ethics did. It also needs to be noted that non-celibate religious professionals, and ritual practices involving visualized and literal sexuality are a part of "canonical Buddhism," using Ann Gleig's definition of canonical.

At one point, Hogendoorn displayed a list of negative Tibetan words, such as *zokpo* (charlatan), *dzunma* (fake), and *lokyem* (sexual misconduct), but he also included as part of that list words that are not negative, but rather refer to non-celibate Tibetan religious identities such as *serkhyim* (householder cleric) and *khyim tsün* (revered householder). These do not belong on the same list. And if, as a child in Khyentsé Chökyi Lodrö's household, Sogyal witnessed what Hogendoorn describes as the "putative extension of lamas' lifespan by sexual relations with young women," this is perhaps extremely uncomfortable for us, but it is a well-attested aspect of "canonical" Tibetan Buddhism. So understanding Buddhist history is indeed essential, but it is a complicated history, and one that needs careful examination.

Returning to the topic of Sogyal's *dākinīs*, some of whom have filed lawsuits against him, it is difficult from a strictly canonical perspective to assess whether Sogyal was violating tantric vows because this would depend on whether or not he was acting with desire. According to Tibetan Three Vow (*sdom gsum*) literature, even a monastic upholding *prātimoksa* vows including celibacy does not violate those vows by having intercourse if he does so as a method "unstained by desire so that it is performed as a practice."⁶ I love Tulku Thondup's summation of the difficulty of actually doing this, included in his introduction

to the book *Perfect Conduct: Ascertaining the Three Vows*. He writes, "Highly accomplished tantrics... can maintain the vow of celibacy even if they have consorts, but such claims of attainment are authentic only if they are also able to bring the dead back to life." This is an example of the skepticism or critique available within the Tibetan tradition. Tulku Thondup isn't calling these practices pseudo or doubting their efficacy, but rather demanding an extremely high standard of accountability, requiring practitioners to be honest about their capacities. With this in mind, we have ample reason to doubt Sogyal Lakar and every reason to believe in the harm experienced by the women he abused.

In her paper "Teacher Misconduct in American Zen: A Cross-Cultural and Inter-religious Analysis," Wakoh Shannon Hickey directs our attention to "the larger cultural and historical contexts of clergy abuse" that she finds under-examined. She demonstrates that American Zen has emphasized Dharma transmission and charismatic authority over the more routinized training credentials of the Japanese Temple system. Reading this, I was struck by the ways in which American Zen has modeled itself according to Americans' stereotype of Zen as iconoclastic, ineffable, and anti-ritual more than it has on the actual Japanese Zen tradition it purports to transmit. Hickey notes that American Zen leaders have no independent oversight or requirements, aside from receiving Dharma Transmission from their teachers. Given Zen teachers lack of systematic education in pastoral care, Hickey concludes that "this is a system ripe for abuse." Indeed, she makes a strong case for why this is so. She offers a final suggestion that looking toward Protestant ways of developing church leaders, namely seminary education, could be instructive for Zen teachers as well. What would the ideal Buddhist seminary education consist of? What specific forms of oversight and regulation does she recommend the American Zen community adopt to lessen the blow of sex abuse scandals? Are their elements of Asian Buddhist tradition that Hickey would recommend or elide?

Finally, as Emily Cohen points out in her paper, "Sexual Abuse by Zen Teachers in the United States: Naming the Patterns," "Abuse is about patterns"; knowing how to recognize these patterns can help communities acknowledge and address problems faster. Cohen's list of these patterns is familiar and aptly underscores her statement that "Abuse is about power and control." Whether or not a religious teacher is celibate, sexual contact between gurus and disciples causes harm in that it is a violation of role, it is a misuse of power and authority, it takes advantage of vulnerability, and it is absent of meaningful consent. Regarding this latter point about consent, Cohen concludes that "given the previously mentioned factors of role, power, and vulnerability, meaningful consent within a teacher-student relationship is generally not possible." I'm curious to hear what sort of conversation Cohen and Langenberg might have about the topic of consent.

Cohen notes particular elements of sex abuse as they

appear in Zen settings, including the intimacy of the teacher-student relationship and the way in which disciples are to view the teacher as enlightened. These are both important in Tibetan contexts as well, and I wonder whether these elements explain why the greatest number of American Buddhist sex abuse cases seem to be coming from Zen and Tibetan communities. I also found Cohen's point about "White Sanghas and Racialized Teachers" to be an important reminder to pay attention to the ways in which racial identity indexes authority and authenticity in Buddhist contexts. In what ways are racial stereotypes about Asian and white masculine authority factoring into the sex abuse scandals we have heard about today?

Once we have recognized the patterns of abuse that Cohen aptly describes, what suggestions can we make for how to most effectively report and respond to these crises? It is a depressing reality that there are now many more instances of Buddhist communities' post-sex abuse scandal recovery processes to draw from, just as now there are more experts in California who are well-versed in best practices for post-wildfire search and recovery. Which communities seem to be healing and processing effectively, and what patterns of recovery would Cohen identify, whether they pertain to rebuilding a Buddhist community or moving on after its closure? What are the best ways to prevent sex abuse from happening in the first place in Buddhist contexts?

I conclude by reiterating the importance of talking about this topic, no matter how divisive and unpleasant it can be. I think about this in terms of my daughter, who is ten years old right now and very eager to become a teenager. I ask myself, "Which American Buddhist communities pass my litmus test as places that I'd feel comfortable with her forming closer ties?" To be honest, I find this a hard call, given the extent of sex abuse in American Buddhist communities. So, for our children and those in our communities not to have to experience the kinds of things that so many of us have gone through, it's time to take sex abuse in Buddhist contexts more seriously through talking about it, listening to survivors, examining the causes and conditions that make certain Buddhist communities "ripe for abuse," and contributing to an American Buddhist future in which all practitioners are protected from harm. *Sarah H. Jacoby is an associate professor of Religious Studies at Northwestern University. Her research interests include Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, gender and sexuality, Tibetan literature, the history of emotions, and Buddhism in contemporary Tibet. She is the author of Love and Liberation: Autobiographical Writings of the Tibetan Buddhist Visionary Sera Khandro (Columbia University Press, 2014).*

NOTES

- 1 <http://sweepingzen.com/everybody-knows-by-eshu-martin>.
- 2 <https://vaaju.com/colombiaeng/dalai-lama-confirmed-that-he-was-aware-of-sexual-abuse-of-buddhist-teachers-since-1990>.
- 3 Richard Baker at the San Francisco Zen Center, Taizan Maezumi and Dennis Genpo Merzel at the Zen Center of Los

Angeles, Dainen Katagiri at the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center, Rinzai teachers Eido Tai Shimano and Joshu Sasaki, and most recently there are allegations against Noah Levine at Against the Stream, which closed down on September 30, 2018.

4 Vinaya Pitaka III.38-39 as referenced in John Powers, *A Bull of a Man: Images of Masculinity, Sex, and the Body in Indian Buddhism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 67.

5 In the context of considering Buddhist sexual ethics, José Cabezón asks, “Is there anything worth saving in the ancient texts, or are they so oppressive and outdated that they should be jettisoned so as to allow for a fresh start?” (*Sexuality in Classical South Asian Buddhism*, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2017), 520.

6 Ngari Panchen Pema Wangyi Gyalpo, *Perfect Conduct: Ascertaining the Three Vows*, trans. Khenpo Gyurme Samdrub and Sangye Khandro (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1996), 142.

7 *Ibid.*, xi.

DISABILITY, ILLNESS, AND DHARMA: A TALE OF THREE LIVES

by Lynn Merrill Weyman

Every morning when I awaken, before my mind starts its usual churning, I breathe five times, sweeping quickly up and down the length of my body. In/out, up/down, I count the exhalations. This practice of mindful concentration – the fact that I can coherently follow these steps – lets me know that I am in the present moment and not lost in some intensely vivid dream. My pulse and heartbeat clue me that I am alive for another day in this familiar realm. Again for another day, I embrace Dharma teachings as guiding principles that direct my experience.

I am not a devout practitioner. I wouldn’t even call myself a disciple. I am merely a stumbling beginner. My initial experience with Dharma practice – the Three Jewels, right view, and meditation – occurred some five decades ago. In Miami, Florida, I encountered a small group of people dedicated to “Mahayana yoga” and joined their community. At the time, I did not completely appreciate the lives of my friends. Their silent retreats, raw vegan foods, and laudable service to the local community were unfamiliar, almost incomprehensible. But life has a way of knocking one on the head; the knock may not lead to enlightenment, but it may at least shove one toward the path. For me, however, the path took many turns due to several traumatic events.

Roughly twelve years ago, at the age of 46, I suffered a back injury that kept me mostly bed-ridden for nearly a year. I had just gone back to college as a “returning student” with steadfast determination to complete my degrees, starting with my Bachelor’s. With the unstinting help of my partner, I managed to attain this goal. But for months on end, the pain was relentless. What was initially acute pain turned into chronic pain, and I could no longer move or sit without a great deal of discomfort, I discovered the truth of *dukkha* (distress) firsthand. This was *samsara*, the wheel of suffering. I was convinced of the truth of the Buddha’s teachings but not yet ready to actualize the wisdom he and so many others

imparted.

Two years after the back injury, I was diagnosed with a rare gastrointestinal cancer. This terrifying diagnosis was compounded by the fact that my father died from colon cancer at the age of 57. His two-year decline was tortuous, starting with delayed diagnosis, through ineffective treatment, to an excruciatingly painful death. When I received a diagnosis of Stage 3 cancer with nodal involvement, I thought it was karmic retribution and envisioned an abbreviated future. At this point, I had begun my graduate studies and was uncertain about completing my Ph.D. I remember crying uncontrollably for weeks and screaming at a colleague over the phone. How could my doctor deliver the news of a malignant diagnosis in a phone message? The treatment – chemo, then radiation therapy – was harrowing. How could my suffering assuage the assault of karma?



While going through cancer treatment in San Diego, I was referred to a nearby Buddhist group. The hospital social workers said that mindfulness practice was a good way to deal with all that had occurred. But any mindfulness practice I might have had completely disappeared.

For several years after radiation, I experienced mystifying and debilitating gastrointestinal symptoms. My doctors initially suspected it was radiation-induced damage. My body was thin, frail, anemic, and exhausted. After many specialists and many tests, I was diagnosed with celiac disease (CD). CD is an autoimmune disorder in which the body cannot digest the gluten found in wheat, barley, and rye and attacks itself. These foods became lurking enemies, with the world divided between “safe” and “unsafe.” Not only was a slice of bread off-limits, but even the facility where the bread was baked. Not only was a piece of chocolate risky, but also the delicate flour dust on the wrapping. Pasta, once a staple, was unapproachable. I thought that my condition might be the karmic consequence of my odd propensity as a child of hiding bakery goods in my bedroom dresser drawers. The doctors assumed that I had inherited the disease from my father. Previously dormant, the disorder had been exacerbated by

the radiation. My studies languished as I grappled with major health challenges.

The most recent knock on my head, quite literally, came two years ago when I suffered several Grand Mal seizures. I awoke in a hospital, not knowing how I got there, unable to recognize my partner of 13 years, not even sure what a partner was. After I was released from the hospital, I could not even make coffee, a task I had completed thousands of times. I could not indicate the correct time on the face of an analog clock, nor could I recognize depth perception in a cube. Driving was forbidden – my license was taken away in the hospital. My body slept for a month straight, while my brain had dreams so vivid that I was convinced of their illusions. Reality became delusional. The seizures had also wiped away my memory from the previous three years or so. I was convinced that I had not seen some friends in years, when it had only been a matter of weeks. Conversely, I was convinced I'd been in recent contact with people I'd actually not spoken to for a decade or more. I could not remember one thing about a trip I'd taken to Uruguay only weeks before the seizures.

Everything was foreign. I had literally lost myself, and the recovery of my identity has been a strange, ongoing journey. As I write this, I am exercising vestigial muscles, much like reciting a mantra. Prior to my seizures, I had been clinically depressed. Chronic back pain and cancer had taken the spark of life out of me. While chronic pain tests one's endurance, chemotherapy is unmistakably a form of lethal poisoning, pushing the body to the brink of demise. Radiation, a poison in its own right, may give rise to other forms of cancer. Grand Mal seizures are a form of *petite mort*. During seizures, the body stops breathing. Limbs become clenched and rigid, as in *rigor mortis*, the third stage of death, when chemical processes in the muscles slowly come to an end. Yet, while consciousness ceases during seizures, brain activity does not, and it can be quite intense. Amnesia often results from this natural form of electric shock therapy. My brain scans revealed a pattern of lesions suggestive of multiple sclerosis (MS), an autoimmune disorder in which the body erodes sheaths covering the central nervous system of the brain and spinal column. This news was the last blow. Wrung inside out and in tatters, I had finally arrived at the temple gate. At last, I was ready to receive the Dharma.

In San Diego, I was referred to a nearby Buddhist group. The social workers said that mindfulness practice was a good way to deal with all that had occurred. This community has continued to sustain and encourage me up to this day.

Dukkha (distress) takes many forms. Clinging is a persistent form of *dukkha* – longing to grasp the ungraspable. Anicca (impermanence) is another form. Many years ago, it was just a concept, but as I returned to the texts, it began to make perfect sense. Memory is fallible, but living in the present moment with wisdom became a corrective. Oddly enough, post-seizures, the veil of depression had lifted. I eagerly embraced the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. *Dukkha*, I learned, was not personal. Being born into

this world is a gift involving causes and conditions. My *dukkha*, I learned, was not unique, nor was it mine, *per se*. I had been clinging to greed, hatred, and delusion based on the illusory concept of “self.” But clinging to the notion of inherent identity had only held me captive and isolated.

Gradually, my attachment to the illusory “self” became weaker, as the Dharma pointed to a healthier understanding of self-awareness. I began a daily meditation practice and joined the local Buddhist *sangha*, understood today in North America as a community of fellow practitioners. As we recounted our different experiences on and off the cushion, one common theme became apparent. *Dukkha* is pervasive and touches everyone's life in some way. Karma, I came to learn, is simply cause and effect. It is we who complicate our lives through misconceptions, misinterpretations, and the imposition of opinions and judgments. Renunciation, letting go of the illusory “self” and accepting the fleeting nature of this vast universe, is the key to contentment. Dharma replaces the “I, me, mine.”

To say that Dharma and mindfulness have touched every aspect of my life is an understatement. I take seriously those Buddhist precepts that urge the cultivation of compassion and wisdom; I necessarily started small. Surveying the tangible objects of my journey thus far, I reflected on the baskets and pottery I've collected over the years. Created by indigenous communities throughout the world, some have traveled with me for decades. Some began as twigs and branches, meticulously selected, steamed or soaked, then bent into shape; others began as clay I witnessed being carved from the earth. I pondered the many hands that made them. My closets and drawers were filled with wondrous textiles that I barely remembered collecting. Numerous books told me where my mind has been. But this is not who I am anymore. Accruing and clinging to objects is one way we attempt to reinforce our constantly shifting identity, but these are merely impressions, not reality. Wincing these possessions has been a profound practice of *dana* (generosity), giving away whatever I truly do not need.

Practicing *ahimsa* (non-harm), I value the life of all sentient beings. A “have-a-heart” trap allows me to catch wayward mice, then relocate any furry interlopers to the fields and release them. I try to focus on right thought, right speech, and right action, but habitual *kilesas* (destructive emotions) are deeply rooted, and sometimes I utter unskillful words. My little dog, Alice Lucille, keeps me mindful of these precepts. If I say such a word in a fit of unskillful emotion, she senses my distress and comes running. She leans her body weight into one front paw as she places that paw on my arm or thigh, expressing concern and offering comfort. This reminds me that the power of right speech and right intention must be carefully cultivated.

Slowly, I was able to get back to work. Fortunately, the seizures did not affect the language center of my brain. Still, it's taken a few years to regain the confidence to write, edit, and find my own voice. To hear someone's voice on the page requires skillful listening, balancing the flow of the

words with the wisdom to discern the intent. This is not a contradiction. The written word has a voice and to hear it we must practice the art of letting go. Mindfulness and meditation practice are crucial in this process.

Day by day, the simple act of breathing amazes me. Practicing mindfulness of breathing (*satipatthana*), I relish following my breath. Our breath is the gift of life. Practicing insight (*vipassana*), I see the body (*kāya*) as a sacred temple for gaining understanding. Our breath recalls the breath of the Buddha, rejuvenating us like water recycled in the atmosphere. Water stains in the house no longer annoy me. They are precious reminders of impermanence (*anicca*).

Dukkha arises from expectations about the outer world. Dharma insists that we are responsible for our actions and that we do the inner work required to change. I am heartened by the words of wise teachers who enrich my knowledge. With infinite wisdom and compassion, the Buddha's awakening indeed changed the world, most importantly from within. I want to follow his lead.

WOMEN IN MONGOLIAN BUDDHIST CULTURE

Altantsetseg Jadamba, translated by Otgo Tseveldorj

I live with my two children, a son and a daughter, in Tarialan District of Khuvsgul Province in northwestern Mongolia. I was born in nearby Zavkhan Province in 1976 as the oldest child in a family of six. After high school, I studied to be a chef at a college in Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia. I managed the canteen at the college for awhile, then worked as an assistant chef in a Russian restaurant called Bistro. I enjoy cooking a lot, especially international dishes, and my cooking also brings happiness to others.

In 2010, I had the great opportunity to join Sakyadhita International Association on Buddhist Women as a representative of Mongolian Buddhist women. The next year, I met Karma Lekshe Tsoemo and Christie Chang when they visited Mongolia and was fortunate to take part in the Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women that was held in Ulaanbaatar. The year 2013 was a fantastic time for me. Doing voluntary charity work made me feel intensely alive and active. Since joining Sakyadhita, I have learned more about Buddhist women in Mongolia and become inspired to do whatever I can for the Buddha and Buddhist women in my country. Currently, I am one of the leaders of the Women's Union in Tarialan, Khuvsgul.

Buddhism in Mongolia is culturally unique. Sadly, however, there are only a few Buddhist centers for women there. While many Buddhist centers for male practitioners have been in existence for centuries, those for women have been few in comparison. As a result, Buddhism is very unbalanced in terms of gender equality in Mongolia.

Nevertheless, developing Buddhist women's potential in this country should be easy since Buddhism is the dominant religion of Mongolia and about 80 percent of the population identifies as Buddhist. Unfortunately, many other religions have been streaming into Mongolia in recent years,

particularly Christianity. All these religions have their own buildings for organizing activities and, with the help of international investment, have the means to introduce many special services. With so many resources, these religions make a big impression in the minds of the people. My objective is to help Mongolian Buddhists have greater access to their own Buddhist religious heritage. I am strongly committed to working for Buddhism on the local level.



My aim is to promote awareness of Buddhism in the countryside. My central tasks include publicizing and implementing Buddhist activities for local nomadic people and their children living there, especially the herders who live in remote rural areas, far from urban centers. The most successful method of promoting Buddhism locally has been through religious arts festivals. Publicizing Buddhism in this way incorporates performances and other aspects of Buddhist art and culture that nomadic people find very interesting and beneficial. In cooperation with lamas from the local monastery, we have been organizing local religious arts festivals two to three times every each year since 2013. During the festivals, we offer concerts and other performances, religious events, and awards. We give little presents to the elderly and the children. I also do my best to provide free training programs, including distributing books provided through Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women and organizing English training with volunteers provided through Jamyang Foundation. Every day, many local people visit my home requesting assistance.

Often, I think about how to go forward with this work. What is the best way to handle the difficulties since Buddhist schools for women in Mongolia do not exist, not even for nuns? Information about Buddhism is very scarce, but somehow the women who are devoted to the Buddha have not lost their faith.

From the start, when I begin organizing these events, I am immediately faced with the problems of finding money and space for them. We should, theoretically, have a Buddhist center that includes a proper prayer hall and library in it, but in reality information about the practice of Buddhism and facilities such as these are lacking in Mongolia. As a result, I serve the local people in my home. My goal is to create a

Buddhist tour that includes all the provinces of Mongolia to publicize and promote the Dharma, and also to provide Buddhist education to the herders' children.

I am delighted to be a member of Sakyadhita. Having loving Buddhist sisters around the world is quite encouraging to me. In my hands I hold very important religious treasures that I have inherited from my ancestors. Over the course of my life, I have recognized the great responsibility I have to share these treasures, passed down from generations of ancestors. I am dedicated to passing them on, to ensure their existence for generations to come.

BUDDHIST PREVENTION OF MENTAL DISORDERS

by Geshe Tenzin Kunsel

Material development in the world today is rapidly hurtling forward with an exceptional and often unfortunate impact on human ethics and behavior. The contemporary way of life has become a major source of mental suffering, and its effects have reached epidemic proportions in our global society, presenting humanity with one of its greatest challenges ever. At this critical juncture, for several years now the members of the Body, Mind, and Life Conference at the Tibetan Medical Centre (Men-Tsee-Khang) in Dharamsala (India) have been engaged in organizing scholarly discussions about preventing mental disorders. I feel this kind of discussion is much needed and feel grateful for efforts that address this important topic. Here I would like to share my ideas based on Buddhist ways of dealing with emotional disturbances.

Preserving Our Ancestors' Healing Ways

When we look on the positive side of humanity's ancestral wisdom, we find progressive discoveries about many mental disorders. In every cultural tradition, there are certain preventive measures that have been passed down through the wisdom of the ancestors and are still practiced effectively in societies today. In Tibetan culture, for example, our people have investigated healing biological and emotional disorders for centuries. We have learned about healing herbs and studied the physical body to learn about winds (*lung*), channels, and energy flow, and this knowledge has been skillfully used by Tibetan doctors. We have also developed spiritual healing, which is used by our spiritual masters. *The Blue Annals*, written by Desi Sangye Gyatso in the 17th century, is a Tibetan medical book of historic renown. Tibetan medicine has its roots in the ancient indigenous culture of Tibet and was greatly expanded in the 8th century under the instruction of King Trisong Detsen, who organized a large medical conference at Samye Monastery in Tibet, which was attended by physicians from China, India, Nepal, East Turkistan, and Persia. Ancient knowledge of herbal medicine has been preserved and passed down to generations for over a thousand years. In 1916, His Holiness the 13th Dalai Lama founded the Men-Tsee-Khang, the official medical institution of Tibet. Worldwide, there are remedies for mental disorders in every culture. Those methods are extremely helpful and

we can be proud of our ancestors' insight into such successful treatments. We can clearly see the wisdom in preserving the knowledge and methods of our ancestors.

Śākyamuni Buddha's Discovery

The founder of Buddhism was born into a royal family in India and gave up all worldly pleasures upon seeing their unsatisfactory nature. He left his family to seek lasting happiness for all sentient beings. His quest for enlightenment was inspired by seeing three forms of suffering that are unavoidable: aging, illness, and death. Great compassion led him to seek a universal solution to suffering, a way that all beings could follow to find freedom. After six years of intense ascetic practices and determination, through serious study, contemplation, and meditation practices, he attained perfect awakening.



After attaining Buddhahood, he taught the Four Noble Truths and many other effective measures to end suffering. He studied the major scientific texts of the time, quickly mastering them all. Analyzing these teachings, he soon realized that these spiritual systems were imperfect. The Buddha clearly saw that by following them only brief, temporary relief could be gained, but not ultimate happiness and liberation from suffering. His deepest insights involved the nature of reality, including the nature of mind.

Today we increasingly find that these teachings are effective ways of treating all types of disturbing emotions and suffering. These practices are the source of everlasting happiness and deep, stable, and clear mental peace. According to my understanding, Buddhist preventive measures are presented in two ways: a temporary way to find peace, and a way resulting in permanent ultimate happiness. Here I will only speak about the first, since the second is quite complicated and the first is most relevant to a discussion

of mental disorders. These ways were further clarified by Chandrakirti, the 7th-century Indian Buddhist master of Nalanda, who stated, "All mental afflictions arise from the view of perceiving an independent self-entity." In other words, our minds become disturbed because the way we see and understand ourselves as independent individuals and other phenomena as inherently existent is not an accurate view of the nature of reality. This is the root of all mental disturbance. Chandrakirti further taught that we can stop all wrong thinking and mental disorders by applying a direct antidote to each of the afflictive emotions.

Nature of Mind

In order to develop insight into how this is possible, it is important for us to understand the nature of the mind. There are several terms in Buddhism used to describe it: mental consciousness, awareness, mindstream, or mental continuum. Mind travels with our body the way a shadow follows the body. While we are alive, the mind and body are inseparable. But when the physical body ceases, the mind stream flows on to new experiences. Buddhism describes the nature of our mind as being clear and luminous. All defilements are superficial or adventitious. Mental defilements are impermanent and are not embedded in the nature of mind. They have no solid existence and are merely conditions that arise and pass away.

The nature of mind can be explained based on the ancient Indian texts of logic. Mind is not a physical object, but is produced in dependence upon its causes and conditions. Mind cannot be seen with the eyes, nor can it be touched. It is like clear transparent space, naturally pure. Mind, or mental continuum, has no beginning and no end. Mind is not defiled by any impurities of the afflictions. Unlike physical or material objects, which are limited, the more we train our mind in ethics, the more spiritual qualities such as compassion and loving kindness can be developed, without end. Training the mind is powerful and allows for the elimination of all three types of suffering that living beings encounter.

Boundless Motherly Love

One example is the love of a mother for her child. During the mother's time with her child, love tends to grow increasingly deeper and seemingly without end. If we extend limitless love to all living beings in the same way, we can develop an infinite depth of love and appreciation. When we love this way, it makes us very comfortable and happy inside and we can live a long life without obstacles or problems.

We know these benefits well and can clearly see them in our own life experiences, without learning about them from books. We also know these benefits from examining our parents' and grandparents' societies and lives. With love, we can engage in more openhearted work. We will have more peace of mind and a happier future life. The more peaceful our minds are, the fewer physical and mental disorders we will experience, and the longer and more joyfully we can live.

We can confirm this through our own experience, learned from our ancestors' way of life. We can clearly see the benefits of peace of mind compared to the challenges and problems of contemporary life.

Physical objects are quite different. According to Dharmakirti's text on logic, physical objects are limited, or measurable, in terms of change, whether good or bad. For example, if we continue boiling water in a kettle, eventually we get to a point where not even a single drop of water remains. This shows that there is an end. However, in the case of mind, we know that change is endless. We can develop our mind infinitely. For this reason, we must strive to eliminate the causes of all emotional disorders. This is definitely achievable, if we make the effort.

How Do Emotional Disturbances Come Into Existence?

Mental illness is a factor of the afflicted emotions. These arise primarily because we reify the world around us. His Holiness the Dalai Lama frequently quotes a scientist who says that 99 percent of what we see and feel is our mental projection. By not applying antidotes to the root of ignorance in our relationships with others, for example in the home or workplace, many opportunities for disturbing emotions such as attachment and hatred arise. Other factors that contribute to emotional disorders are wealth, economic stress, alcohol, sexual desire, family members, and domestic animals. These are major causes of ignorance because they create a false view of reality and solidify the viewpoint of self and others as separate entities. Other factors, such as an imbalance of the elements within one's body, can cause mental or emotional disorders like depression.

As the result of these disorders, many conflicts may arise on the personal level, in the family, community, society, and country. These include war between nations, separation from family members, and even suicide. Eventually, future generations have to face the problems made by those who come before them. This much is clear. Examples of these problems include abuse of alcohol and drugs, killing animals for meat or skins, ignorantly fishing for entertainment, harassment of the poor by the rich, extracting and smuggling human organs by force, marketing polluted food products, sexual abuse, and human trafficking. These may result in suffering due to emotional disorders. In short, human beings foolishly engage in many self-destructive actions by mistakenly considering them a way to find happiness. The result is just the opposite, producing only suffering.

There are multiple causes of hatred: threatening and bullying; greed for the property of others; lack of contentment with one's own possessions; and strong attachment to the fleeting pleasures of worldly life, such as food, clothes, sex, money, and reputation. These may all act as a catalyst for imbalanced mental attitudes that exaggerate what is attractive and underestimate what is unattractive. These states of mind are basically associated with the ego or self-cherishing. The selfish mind induces too strong an attachment to oneself, and produces negative emotions, including hatred towards

others. These unfortunate experiences are the result of over-indulgence in unethical behaviors under the control of the self-cherishing mind.

Method of Emotional Disorder

There are two preventive methods for emotional disorders: temporary and ultimate. The temporary method can be used to solve mental disorders short-term, and this may produce short-term happiness for oneself. It does not remove the root of our suffering, but it can improve our situation. This can be done by removing problematic external conditions. If one has a good place to live, food, clean water, and enough resources, one can intentionally avoid physical and mental problems. This is quite difficult, however, since it depends on conditions such as livelihood and resources, but it is beneficial to mental peace and calm.

We need to make good use of mental peace and calm. For example, it is better to transform one's mental state into a neutral state when intense anger pops up, because an immediate change to a positive state of mind is next to impossible. When a strong attachment develops, one needs to meditate on the undesirable aspects of that object. In the case of physical attraction or attachment to a person, we can reflect on the nature of that body as being full of impurities such as flesh, blood, and pus.

In today's world, people pay more attention to general academic subjects in their studies, and expect a kind of spiritual healing or guidance from them that serves only their immediate aims in this life, but not in the next life. Most people think that their problems will be solved by someone else or will end at death. At the same time, they neglect to train their minds, feeling that mental development is only for the religious. They also may not have much concern for the welfare of others. When meeting with unbearable problems, different imagined stories or negative thoughts can easily dominate the mind, resulting in feelings of despair.

At such times, using one's breath as the object of concentration is extremely effective in learning to calm down. This is known as mindfulness of breathing. We focus on the sensation of the breath as it enters and leaves the nostrils. All problems associated with negative thoughts soon cease. Most importantly, we should not disregard the precious words of early scholars from all traditions. We should not allow the wisdom to go in one ear and out the other. For example, we often try to rescue animals or stop them from being killed by donating money. If we attentively listen to the advice of our early scholars, we soon realize that giving up eating meat is the most compassionate way of saving animals. Whatever we do, our motivation should be influenced by love and compassion. So many ancient scholars from traditions around the world have taught this. This is the most important responsibility of each person; otherwise, our emotional disorders will not be reduced. If our actions are genuinely motivated by love and compassion, we will become more sympathetic to the welfare of others. I believe this will eventually help us solve all the world's problems.

It is also beneficial to lead a balanced life that is neither greedy nor stingy. For this, we have to restrain our sense faculties to reduce attachment to sensual pleasures. We then need to make an effort to lead our present life more meaningfully, not getting stuck thinking about the past and not hoping for the impossible, which may bring great disappointment in the future. By avoiding these two extreme modes of thought, we can minimize or resolve the world's conflicts which are deeply associated with greed or desire.

What are the benefits of controlling emotional disorders? The greatest benefits are that people around us can enjoy a true sense of well-being, both temporarily and in the long term. We can preserve the rich legacy of ethics bequeathed by our ancestors and proudly pass it down to the next generation. We will rest assured that we have followed the best advice and led our lives following the Buddha, who gave unmistakable instructions that led us to the highest happiness.

We are now in a period of great chaos and degeneration. This is the ideal time for us to think carefully and deeply about preventive measures for emotional disorders. Let us reexamine the measures discovered by our forebearers and add some of our own solutions. Let us not waste our precious time just criticizing modern external and material advancement; instead, we should try hard to reduce our overwhelming human-made mental disorders. Using a Buddhist approach, we can slowly uproot them, because these disorders are not permanent conditions. We need to apply these methods soon. If we do nothing to remedy and heal disturbing emotions, great suffering for future generations will result.

As Śāntideva says in the *Guide to the Bodhisattava's Way of Life*, "There is nothing here that has not been explained before and I have no skill in the art of rhetoric." What I have presented here is not something new that has never been explained before. Nor have I explained all this as a learned person. I am merely speaking from my own experience and what I have learned from my spiritual teacher, His Holiness the Dalai Lama. May his enlightened aspirations be fulfilled! *Geshe Tenzin Kunsel was a student in the first graduating class of Tibetan Buddhist female monastics to earn the esteemed Geshe degree in 2016.*

BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE: "MULTIPLE BELONGING"

by Eleanor Pontoriero

In this essay, I would like to address the concept of "multiple belonging" within the context of modern human rights. In addressing the rights of women and girls in the global community, for example, the challenge is the gap between theory (written documents) and praxis (implementation, reinforcement, protection). African-American professor of law Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw explains that gender-based violence is intersectional – multiple forms of oppression reinforce one another (i.e., gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation). The intersectional approach to human rights

is central. One example is General Recommendation No. 35, adopted in 2017 by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, to eliminate gender-based violence against women.

Intersectionality locates gender-based violence on the individual, social, and structural levels, and includes physical, mental, economic, social-political, religious, and cultural forms of violence. While educational and legal reforms are essential, these do not eradicate the deep conditioning that is the root of violence. The legal sphere often deflects our personal and social responsibility because responding to suffering is optional rather than imperative; what is lawful and unlawful may not always be the same as what is morally just. For example, it may be unlawful to intervene in the affairs of a state, but it may be morally just to do so in the case of genocide. Take, for instance, the persecution of Rohingya in Burma or violence against women and girls. Legal reforms, global and local, are essential. In the case of Burma, the violence is perpetrated by some who are Buddhists. Why and how is this possible?

Christian Liberation

The modern human rights movement is a legal and political response to a religious question, both Buddhist and Christian. In feminist Christian liberation theology, human rights abuses can be framed in terms of human-centered theodicy: Why suffering? How should we respond? Sister Jamie Phelps, an African-American Christian theologian, says that socially constructed evil involves patterns of relationship that deny the human dignity and value of some human beings for the benefit of other human beings. These patterns of dehumanizing and marginalizing contradict the doctrine that all human beings are made in the image and likeness of God. Such dehumanization is the source of existential and physical suffering, sometimes including death. Those who consciously participate in the construction and perpetuation of socially sinful institutions, which mediate existential suffering and death, participate in what is designated morally as social sin.¹

Why do human beings create and perpetuate evil by dehumanizing others? How are we complicit with structural, inter-personal, and personal violence? By re-framing modern human rights discourse in theological terms, the goal is liberation from suffering. Here there is a deep resonance with the Buddhist concern with suffering and its end. Ada-Maria Isasi-Diaz, a Latina liberation theologian, says our response must be both spiritual and political. For her, salvation and liberation means realizing the kin-dom of God in history. This is also the goal of recognizing that all human beings are equal in dignity and rights. The task of human rights activists is to create the conditions that support, protect, and nourish life and to eradicate the conditions that oppress and violate the dignity of life. In describing this liberation, Isasi-Diaz says, The process of solidarity, like the process of power and of justice, starts with the cry of the oppressed, with the oppressor listening intently to what the oppressed have to

say. This listening requires and at the same time results in vulnerability on the part of the powerful, an attitude that will lead them to understand how they benefit from oppressive structures and how they contribute to the oppression of those whose cries are awakening them to their own injustice. This is all part of a process of conversion that results in the oppressor being in solidarity with the oppressed, in using his/her privileges to undo oppressive structures. The oppressor has now become “friend” and has to establish a dialogic relationship—a relationship of mutuality with the oppressed. It is within this relationship of mutuality that both the dominant and the subordinate agents empower each other, that liberative power is exercised.²

Buddhist Liberation

For Buddhist practitioners and responsible citizens of the global community, the Dhamma has the potential to eradicate deep-seated cultural and personal attitudes that may then transform the legal and political spheres. Buddhist mindfulness is informed primarily by the ethic of non-harming (*ahimsa*) of self and others. This ethic includes both a negative formulation (refraining from harming beings, including all violence both individual and social) and a positive formulation (creating the causes and conditions to support the dignity and rights of every being and eliminating those that do not). The five precepts are gifts to oneself and others.³ The practice of Buddhist mindfulness is a path to cultivating freedom from animosity and oppression. This way of living creates safety for oneself and others; it is called *abhaya-dāna* or the gift to others of freeing them from fear. For example, Thai Buddhist feminist Ouyporn Khuankaew articulates “noble mindfulness” in this way:

“We use the Buddha’s teaching of mindfulness and compassion to move our feminist intellectual analysis to the ‘heart’ level, to understand gender oppression and violence against women. We incorporate the terms and language of Buddhism when talking about the concepts of activism or feminism. For example, the feminist analysis of structural oppression is collective *kamma* (Sanskrit: *karma*). When we work for social change, it is about practicing wisdom and compassion, which is a core teaching by the Buddha.”⁴

In Buddhist practice, deep transformation is possible in the spiritual cultivation of mind and heart. This is key to eradicating discrimination, hatred, and violence against others within ourselves, and to effecting change outside ourselves. This direct realization allows for the radical possibility of change. Oppressive conditions are not permanent, views about ourselves and others are not fixed, but are based on social conditioning that we internalize. Re-conditioning, by cultivating wholesome qualities such as compassion, can transform habitual conditioning. The gradual cultivation of Buddhist mindfulness is indivisible

from practicing the five lay precepts, developing an ethical sensitivity, and following the eightfold path.

Compassion becomes the moral compass for our actions, recognizing that no one is free from harm unless we are all free from harm. We are interdependent: oppressors are imprisoned by their ignorance and the oppressed are bound by the ignorance of others. Each individual's commitment to refrain from harming others creates the conditions for others to be free from harm. Not killing life creates the conditions for others' right to life. Thus, the precept of non-harming guides our actions of body, speech, and mind. Not harming is the means by which we protect the rights of one another. This moral sensitivity works in tandem with legal protections.

The Buddhist understanding of *kamma* as volitional action is dynamic, not static. We create *kamma* moment by moment. Actions and intentions plant seeds that manifest on both the individual and social levels, ripening either as individual and structural liberation or oppression. The effects of our actions may not always be immediately visible, but may ripen in the future, near or far. These seeds condition our responses, creating habitual patterns that result in well-being or suffering. Unwholesome seeds may result in perceptions that stereotype, discriminate, or otherwise condition the relationships between oppressor and oppressed. The teachings of the Buddha help us eliminate habitual patterns that create suffering for ourselves and others. This is the eightfold path of liberation.

Multiple Belonging: Personal Examples

As a university teacher of religion, women, and human rights, I apply secular mindfulness practices as resources for peacebuilding and human rights activism. The United Nations manual on "integrated security" or "mindfulness without borders" incorporates these practices in a variety of cultural contexts, from Rwanda to Eastern Europe, without mentioning Buddhist ethics. When I integrate mindfulness tools in teaching religion, I find it important to consider both the diversity of students in the class – diversity of religion, culture, gender, race, ethnicity, social status, and sexual orientation – and my values as a practicing Buddhist with Christian and European ancestry. Although my personal Buddhist values may be part of the discussion and practice, I recognize and respect the cultural and religious diversity of students who are not Buddhist. Our aim is not to cultivate Buddhist mindfulness per se, but to cultivate peacebuilding tools and insights across our differences.

Mindfulness of breathing (anchoring our awareness in the breath), the practice of council, and mindful listening are three methods that help integrate theory and praxis. They are invaluable tools for peacebuilding and social justice that connect the individual with social, spiritual, and political concerns. We begin with the explicit intention to cultivate compassion, with phrases such as "May I and all beings be free of suffering," "May we be free of suffering," or "May I contribute to a more peaceful, and just society for all." Depending upon their personal values (whether they identify

as Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, or secular), students are encouraged to do this practice at home and to formulate an intention or devotional prayer that is in keeping with their values. They may also formulate questions to guide their reflections on how this practice may be a tool to work for social justice and may inform their spiritual practice. In this way, they can link the spiritual and political dimensions in meaningful ways. These practices provide a structure for the upper-level seminar. Student presentations and discussions are included in the guidelines for council, using a talking piece and ground rules, to develop empathic, non-judgmental, and mindful listening (and speaking), encouraged by the sharing of intentions and reflections.

If our vow is to work toward the alleviation of suffering, is this a Buddhist or Christian practice? In the classroom, what matters is that mindfulness practices are meaningful for the students within the context of their lives and faith, and that they inspire them to move in the direction of human rights and peacebuilding. In light of the recent murders at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Philadelphia, one Iranian Muslim expressed how mindful listening can help her to hear from her Jewish brothers and sisters about how she could be of assistance. She recalled that her religious brothers and sisters rallied after the shootings at a mosque in Quebec city in January 2017, but she felt no one just listened to her experience.

An African Roman Catholic student expressed her willingness to take up mindfulness practice, inspired by her volunteer work in a refugee camp overseas this past summer. She said that mindfulness practice helped support her faith and social justice work. A Chinese Buddhist student expressed that her connection to other faiths derived from the compassionate intention that we began our practice with each time. Last week, another student informed us that compassion, discussed in connection with women, human rights, and peacebuilding, is a chemical and neural response that she can access with an app! This reveals that the interpersonal dimension may be obscured by an excessive focus on the scientific aspect of mindfulness. Engaging issues like these is part of the process of cultivating compassionate intentions. We engage secular mindfulness as a support for understanding how and why we engage in human rights and peacebuilding.

Mindfulness practices can also facilitate reconciliation among religious communities. Thai Buddhist feminist Ouyporn Khuankaew says that listening mindfully with an open heart is meditation in action and "a spiritual practice without identifying with religious institutions, dogma, or authority."⁵ Deep listening is a profound day-to-day practice of responding to suffering, either our own or that of others, at the personal, community, and societal levels. Khuankaew continues: "From a feminist perspective, listening deeply to someone who experiences oppression or violence is a way to reconnect with their power within, their values, and their confidence, which have been lost from living with a dominant culture." Deep listening helps them develop "trust and have confidence in their own innate wisdom, ability and resilience

to survive, to solve the challenges they are facing.”

What is key here is that if we do not know how to be with our own suffering, then we cannot be with the suffering of another person. Khuankaew links this with anchoring the breath: “Listening with our heart open to hear someone suffering requires a calm and stable mind... We anchor our minds at the breath and the body, aware that we are breathing, and aware of the whole body posture while we are listening. This is the mindfulness of breathing practice that allows us to engage our own difficulties while learning to be present to others’ suffering.” Deep listening helps us bear witness and be present with others’ suffering and our own. The practice is healing and can be used in reconciliation and peacebuilding. The practice of loving kindness and compassion help create connections between oneself and those who are suffering.

Earlier this year, I participated in an ongoing process of reconciliation between First Nations elders and the ecumenical Christian community at Emmanuel College Toronto, where a multi-faith community and several other First Nations representatives, including two Native elders, spoke about the violence and inter-generational impact of Christian residential schools in Canada. The invitation from the Native elders was a request for non-Indigenous allies like myself to listen and bear witness to their stories of trauma and resilience in the aftermath of the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation report. When some non-Indigenous allies wished to respond, the elders asked us not to speak, but instead to hold noble silence and form a circle by holding hands. As we did this, the female Native elder took my hand. We held her medicine bundle and a young Native man offered a prayer and blessings. It was a gift to hold the space, listen deeply, and bear witness. Who was the receiver, the one listening or the one speaking? Who was the giver, the one listening or the one being heard? What was the gift, the story spoken or the story heard?

In practicing and engaging these issues as a process of cultivating compassionate intention, faith-based mindfulness practices function as a support for interfaith reconciliation. These practices are profoundly resonant with the Mahāyāna intention to free all sentient beings.”⁶ Dharma practice and social engagement occur through reconciliation and multiple belonging.

Eleanor Pontoriero teaches religious ethics, women, human rights, and peacebuilding in comparative context at the University of Toronto. She integrates secular-based mindfulness practices into contemplative faith-based contexts with a focus on social justice. In 1992, she formally took refuge and lay precepts in the Mahāyāna tradition and later in the Theravāda. She leads devotional practice and meditation in both Buddhist and interfaith contexts.

NOTES

1.Cited by Patricia Johnson in “Womanist Theology,” *Gender, Ethnicity, and Religion: Views from the Other Side*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002).

2.Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the*

Twenty-First Century (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996).

3.Anguttara Nikaya 8:39. “The Five Precepts: *pañca-sila*,” www.accesstoinsight.org/ptf/dhamma/sila/pancasila.html

4.Ouyporn Khuankaew, “Tackling Gender and Sexual Discrimination in Buddhism,” *Arrows for Change*, 14:1/2(2008) 13.

5.Ouyporn Khuankaew, “Listening to the World: Engagement with Those Who Suffer,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 34(2014) 59–62.

6.The Mahāyāna intention of the bodhisattva (for example, in the four vows or Way of the Bodhisattva) is also articulated in the Pāli canon, in a *jataka* tale of one of the Buddha’s former lives, *The Banyan Deer*.

NEWS FROM THE GARDEN

by Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo

Dongyu Gatsal Ling (Garden of the Authentic Lineage) is a nunnery in the Drukpa Kagyu tradition for young nuns from the Himalayan regions. The nuns receive training in academic studies, meditation and ritual. The younger nuns also receive a general education.

Recently, there was much excitement as the nuns cleaned and decorated the main temple and surroundings. With happy hearts, they prepared for the arrival of His Eminence Khamtrul Rinpoche, the founder of their nunnery. The master would be accompanied by many Khenpos (senior teachers) and senior monks from our affiliated monastery at Khampagar in Tashi Jong, Himachal Pradesh, in northern India.

The occasion was the graduation ceremony of our senior class of nuns who were receiving certificates granting them the title of Lopönma, or Master of Philosophy. They had studied diligently for many years, so this was a great day for them all. Along with traditional tea, sweet rice, and speeches of congratulations, Khamtrul Rinpoche gave an inspiring talk on cultivating the mind.

Later, Khamtrul Rinpoche and I took lunch with the seven nuns who are staying in long-term retreat. Practicing under the personal guidance of Togden Achoe, the senior *yogin* at Tashi Jong, these nuns have now completed nine years and nine months of retreat practice. They are dedicated to reviving the female Togdenma meditation lineage in India.

The newly graduated Lopönmas will now continue for a further two years of tantric studies. Following this, many will choose to undertake the traditional three-year retreat. Already, several of these graduate nuns are teachers for the junior nuns. At the completion of their training, they will receive the rank of Khenmo. We are proud of their achievements and wish them all well for their future contributions to the spread of the Dharma.

A NUNS’ LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

by Khenmo Drolma

On August 28, 2018, Vajra Dakini Nunnery in Maine, in the United States, welcomed Acharya Yeshe, the first Leadership Fellow from Drikung Kagyu Samtenling Nunnery, located

in Dehradun, India. The Drikung Acharya Nuns' Leadership Program is a one-year fellowship program that provides training in international leadership and the future growth of Samtenling Nunnery and its graduates. Acharya nuns developed the program in conversation with an international team. The program is supervised by Namgyal Taklha, the former director of Samtenling Nunnery, and myself as abbess of Vajra Dakini Nunnery. This leadership program is available to nuns who have completed the Acharya degree, which is granted upon completion of a ten-year program in philosophy. Candidates for the program need to be proficient in basic English and committed to returning to Samtenling to share what they have learned.

In 2017, I asked the new Acharya graduates, "How can we better support you?" A special meeting ensued. Those who attended the meeting included the current leaders of the nunnery, as well as longtime former director Namgyal Taklha, current director Acharya Tsekyi, accountant and secretary Acharya Kunsang, teacher Acharya Yeshe, longtime German sponsor Vajramala, German nun Tsunma Jinpa, Vajra Dakini Nunnery board member Joanne Swirez, and myself.

During the meeting, the Acharya nuns expressed their dreams for the future as well as concerns regarding the nunnery. For example, in recent years the nunnery has admitted two classes of young girls between the ages of eight and eleven. The older nuns have had to assume responsibility to care for these young girls, including training in basic health and hygiene. In addition, new classes of nuns coming from remote areas of India and Tibet speak different languages, with no shared language. The situation requires patience and compassion. Further education about nutrition is also needed to benefit the nuns.

In extensive and frank discussions, we identified several long-term goals and significant needs, including proficiency in English and access to the modern world through computer technology. The leaders of the nunnery also had a number of goals and dreams. For example, some wish to serve as Dharma teachers and translators. Namgyal Taklha contributed her vision and discussed the potential for the nuns to serve the wider Tibetan community with activities such as hospice and elder care, modeled on programs by highly skilled Catholic nuns. We could all see that each graduating class of nuns in the Acharya program will produce educated women with great potential for leadership.

It became clear that this is a wonderful opportunity for nuns to step forward and help determine their future in the 21st-century as leaders in the Drikung lineage. To expand their understanding of the range of choices available to them and increase their confidence, we felt that it would be beneficial for the Acharya nuns of Samtenling to broaden their horizons by participating in an international leadership program. This program would provide them with the opportunity to focus on English and computer skills while at the same time allowing them to experience the role of women's leadership in various religions and community service activities. Traveling abroad to Vajra Dakini Nunnery

would introduce the nuns to an expanded worldview that could inform their vision for the future of Samtenling. To implement these objectives, we developed an advisory committee composed of women leaders who have diverse skills and professional backgrounds, and also come from Drikung centers across the United States.

Each Fellow will be invited to create a personal project on a topic of her choice. These may include exploring issues of health, education, or environment, and programs will be tailored to those interests. The advisory committee has developed a flexible program model that offers international teaching and professional experience, particularly in programs led by women. This program model may be adapted to the interests of each visiting Acharya. The advisory team will identify model projects that the Acharyas can visit, learn from, and potentially duplicate or modify to benefit Samtenling Nunnery, the Drikung lineage, and other nunneries throughout India.

A Fellow will begin their experience in the U.S. with intensive language classes in both English conversation and Dharma terminology. They will shadow Khenmo Drolma as she oversees the programs of Vajra Dakini Nunnery, including Dharma teachings, retreats, and interfaith events. For example, Vajra Dakini organizes an annual March to Feed the Hungry event in conjunction with the Buddhist Global Relief organization. The Fellow would also join Khenmo in attending the annual Western Buddhist Monastic Gathering, where monastics join together for dialogue across traditions. These gatherings have reduced misunderstandings and prejudices that have historically arisen as a result of geographical isolation and have created models of equitable leadership and respect among genders.

Once a Fellow declares an area of interest, she will travel to various locations to gather information for her project, drawing on the expertise of the advisory committee. The first year's program offers training and education in three areas: curriculum and education training; nutrition and health education; and development. When the Fellow goes back to India, she will share her experiences by designing talks, workshops, and classes for the 100 nuns at Samtenling. The leadership program will become a resource and an inspiration for the whole community of nuns. For further information about this developing program: www.vajradakininunnery.org.

SAKYADHITA GERMANY MEETS AGAIN

by Rotraut (Jampa) Wurst

Sakyadhita Germany was approved as a national branch of Sakyadhita International in 2013. We hold a meeting of Sakyadhita Germany every two years, alternating with the Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women. Our guest speaker was Thich Nu Tinh Quang from Canada. In 2014, our guest speaker was Dr. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, one of the original founders and former president of Sakyadhita International. In 2016, we invited Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo,

who is currently the president of Sakyadhita International. This year, on August 4, 2018, we held our third meeting at the Tibetisches Zentrum in Hamburg and invited Thich Nu Tinh Quang from Sakyadhita Canada to be our guest speaker.

Over the years, it has been challenging for the members of Sakyadhita Germany to keep in touch with one another and renew our connections with Sakyadhita International. This year, we were fortunate to hold our meeting under the auspices of the Tibetan center in Hamburg. Thanks to the donations of people who were interested in Sakyadhita activities, it was possible to again invite an international guest. As the president of Sakyadhita Germany, I issued an invitation to Thich Nu Tinh Quang, who practices in the Vietnamese Thien (Zen) Buddhist tradition. She accepted our invitation and happily agreed to stay at my place. Gisa Stülpe and her team seamlessly arranged everything for the meeting and invited us all for lunch. We are grateful for their kind support!

A small group of 16 people attended the Sakyadhita Germany meeting. Only two other Sakyadhita Germany members were able to attend. Although the weather was unusually hot that day, the meeting was successful and quite beautiful. I began by describing the history and activities of Sakyadhita Germany. I also mentioned some of the challenges we had faced in organizing local Sakyadhita projects, such as "Sitting in Council," because there are so many different Buddhist groups in Germany who organize various activities. I informed the participants about the 16th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women to be held in Australia in June 2019 and encouraged everyone to attend. Some interested participants exchanged email addresses, so we could keep in touch.

Next, Thich Nu Tinh Quang began with her challenging workshop on "Buddhist Ethics and Intrinsic Bias." She had prepared some small slips of paper to distribute to the participants. On each slip of paper was the beginning of a sentence and each person was asked to finish the sentence, for example, "Gays are..." "Muslims are..." "Buddhists are..." and so on. The slips were collected after everyone finished the sentences they had received. The slips of paper were then distributed and each person chose a slip of paper to read aloud. Thich Nu Tinh Quang then facilitated a discussion among the participants on the question, "What feeling came up when you read the sentence you were given?"

The next activity, the famous Blue Eyes, Brown Eyes experiment, was even more challenging. As each person approached Thich Nu Tinh Quang, she took a look and separated people into two groups. One group was asked to stay and the other group was asked to leave the room. She told the people who went outside that they were superior, more gifted, and instructed them to re-enter the room but not to take a seat next to "the others," who were not as privileged.

The activity caused a range of surprising responses. Interactions between the two groups were strained and many uncomfortable feelings, prejudices, and judgments emerged. The activity ended with a very emotional discussion!

The third and fourth activities were simulation exercises. The first one involved an imagined scene at a cocktail party at the United Nations. We gathered into groups of four or five people and each person received a slip of paper. On each paper was written the name of a fictitious country such as "Shnabbeldizupf." And each country was described as having special attitudes, ways of speaking, and manners of behaving. We were then asked to interact with each other, which was quite difficult.

In the fourth experiment, we were again assembled at the imagined cocktail party at the United Nations. But this time, we were supposed to be *bodhisattvas*. We were asked to be aware of our feelings and behavior, regardless of our assigned countries. People's responses were sometimes funny, sometimes heartbreaking, sometimes difficult, but everyone happily accepted these challenges.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Thich Nu Tinh Quang gave a Dharma talk about Buddhism. She reminded us that the Buddha will not take us by the hand and lead us to enlightenment, but that he did provide us with a map or, in modern terms, a GPS to guide us toward enlightenment, summed up in the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. These guidelines help us think about our intrinsic biases and prejudices in a new light. Everyone was grateful for this enriching experience. We look forward to the fourth meeting of Sakyadhita Germany in 2020!

For information on Sakyadhita Germany, contact me at jampawurst@t-online.de or visit us on social media: <https://de-de.facebook.com/Sakyadhita.Germany>; <http://sakyadhita-germany.blogspot.de>; and <http://www.sakyadhita.org>.

LIVING VINAYA IN THE WEST: TAIWANESE VINAYA MASTER TEACHES AT SRAVASTI ABBEY

by Bhiksuni Thubten Chonyi

Eastern Washington was the site of an important moment for American Buddhism. From January 22 to February 8, 2018, Sravasti Abbey in Newport, Washington, hosted 49 nuns for Living Vinaya in the West. The 16-day course was an experience in learning and living the Vinaya, the advice the Buddha gave 2,500 years ago to guide, govern, and support harmonious nuns' and monks' communities.

Living Joyfully as Buddhist Nuns

Bhiksuni Master Wuyin, the abbess and president of Luminary International Buddhist Society (LIBS) in Taiwan, was the vinaya master, and she was supported by six bhiksunis (fully ordained nuns) from her community. Sravasti Abbey founder and abbess Bhiksuni Thubten Chodron also taught from her experience of establishing the vinaya in an American monastery. The Abbey is the first Buddhist monastery in the United States to form a bhiksuni sangha community and adopt the monastic rites prescribed by the Buddha.

Nuns from three Buddhist traditions – Chinese Mahayana, Tibetan, and Theravada – gathered from Europe, Asia, and

South America as well as the United States and Canada to attend the course. About half of these nuns have no opportunity to live in a monastic community. Several others are in the early stages of founding nuns' communities. Everyone was joyful to be together and learn about the monastic precepts and way of life. Laughter, sincerity, transparency, celebration, and discipline co-existed amicably within the harmonious sangha, literally drawn from ten directions.

A Historic Event

The Living Vinaya in the West course was historic in several ways. It was the first such training offered in the United States for Western nuns in diverse traditions. In addition, it featured the first ordination of a novice nun that was conducted by an all-Western, English-speaking sangha in the Dharmaguptaka tradition, as practiced at Sravasti Abbey. Previous ordinations at the Abbey have included the support of senior nuns from the Chinese Buddhist tradition.

The instructor for the course, Bhiksuni Master Wuyin, has been a Buddhist nun for over 60 years. She has dedicated her life to improving the status of fully ordained nuns, first in her native Taiwan and now around the world. At the age of 77, Master Wuyin said she came halfway around the world specifically to teach this course at Sravasti Abbey. She wanted to observe and support the Abbey's growing bhikshuni sangha and to train and inspire nuns from other places to establish nunneries themselves.

Bhiksuni Master Wuyin said her experience during the course gives her hope for the future of monastic communities in the West.

Why Is This Important?

Monastic communities are essential for the long life of the Dharma – the Buddha's teachings and practices. The Buddha stated that wherever a community of four or more fully ordained monks or nuns practices the vinaya, his teachings would live long in the world. Sravasti Abbey was founded on that basis.

Buddhism is still new to the United States and the Dharma teachings are extensive. Buddhist monasticism is little known and poorly understood in the West. The teachings on how monks and nuns can live in harmonious communities have not been widely translated or disseminated. These teachings, preserved in the vinaya, contain detailed instructions from the Buddha himself. Western practitioners can learn much from the Asian lineages that have preserved the Buddha's teachings.

A Living Vinaya

The term vinaya is usually translated as "the Buddhist monastic code of ethics." The vinaya teachings of the Buddha are rich and vibrant. They include guidance on everything, from how to handle monastery resources to methods for resolving disputes. These teachings provide guidance for life inside the monastery, and Bhiksuni Master Wuyin also emphasizes the role that monastics must play in modern

society by being of service to society outside the monastery.

Bhiksuni Karma Lodro Gangtso, an American nun who spoke on behalf of the Tibetan Buddhist nuns who attended, was touched by the Buddha's care for the nuns and monks directly under his guidance. "We learned that the stories about monastics from 2,500 years ago are still alive today, that those bhiksus (fully ordained monks) and bhiksunis were just like us. The way Bhiksuni Master Wuyin taught this course made it feel like they were here, like they lived yesterday, and not long ago in a distant land far away. The course made the vinaya teachings feel so relevant."

According to Bhiksuni Master Wuyin, the vinaya teachings must be lived to be understood. Through teachings, videos, discussion groups, skits, and active participation in some vinaya rites, the LIBS faculty brought the vinaya alive for the residents of Sravasti Abbey, where the rituals are practiced, as well as for the guest nuns.

Bhiksuni Karma Lodro Gangtso said, "We were able to experience so many of these things we learned: doing the posadha (fortnightly confession and purification) together, conducting the ordination, living together, experiencing what it's like to confess, what it's like to rejoice, what it's like to get up every day and put on our robes, to shave our heads, to witness the head shaving. All of these things have been very meaningful."

The Future

In the Mahaparinibbana Sutta and other texts, the Buddha emphasized the importance of the four-fold assembly: male and female lay Buddhist practitioners and fully ordained monks and nuns. All have a responsibility to "walk the path of the Dharma." All are necessary for the teachings to survive and thrive. With several million Buddhists in the United States today, the Buddha's teachings to alleviate suffering and bring happiness are clearly taking root. Sravasti Abbey is encouraged that support for Buddhist monasticism is also growing. We rejoice in the burgeoning monastic communities in the West and offer tremendous gratitude to our teachers in the Taiwanese and Tibetan Buddhist communities who have helped us learn and grow.

As she was leaving, Bhiksuni Master Wuyin promised to return to Sravasti Abbey soon to encourage our monastics' efforts to serve society. As we witness recent discord in contemporary American public discourse, we rejoice at learning ways that monastics can be more effective in bringing Buddha's teachings on love, compassion, and wisdom to all who wish to hear them.

Acknowledgments

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