

Sakyadhita Newsletter

Vol. 3 No. 2

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Buddhism Needs Feminism

by Kerry L. Fitz-Gerald

Like many religions, Buddhism can be seen as patriarchal and misogynist. But possibly unlike others, this is due not to the basic teachings of the Buddha, but to impositions of sexist values from the cultures in which Buddhism has flourished. These impositions occurred not only at the time of the founding of Buddhism, but at every interaction between Buddhism and the patriarchal cultures into which it spread. However, now, as women begin to challenge male-dominated social systems, Buddhists need not only to tolerate such change, but to actively support it both within the general social structure and within Buddhism itself. Not only is change along feminist lines not incompatible with the teachings of the Buddha, it will be necessary for the continued flourishing of the Dharma. Feminist change will make Buddhism more responsive to the needs of women, both lay and monastic, and truly productive feminist change will improve society as a whole, for both male and female.

A general definition of feminism has three parts: an assertion of humanism in which it is made clear that women and men are equally capable and deserving of treatment and participation as full-fledged members of the human population; an acknowledgment that this has not been the

actual experience of women in most cultures; and finally, an agenda of action to redress the wrongs suffered by women. All feminists would accept, I think, this very general three-part statement about feminism, but would differ greatly in their agenda of action. This third part is essential however, because it separates feminists from the liberal social theorists who both believe in the equality of the sexes and acknowledge the traditional downplaying of women, but have no specific agenda for women-oriented change. Many of these social theorists have agendas for social change which, though not focussed on women, they argue will necessarily include women. Feminists, by doubting the efficacy of general change to satisfactorily address the problems faced by women, have generated specifically women oriented agendas intended to directly improve women's status and treatment by society. Although this focus on specifically women-oriented change challenges the plans of general social theorists, redressing the wrongs suffered by women not only benefits women, but improves the quality of society as a whole by allowing all of its members to fully exercise their potentials. As mentioned, feminists differ in their assessment of the appropriate content of the agenda for change. There are three general types of feminist agendas, each different in the type of change advocated but consistent in their goal of the advancement of women. Some feminists seek to raise the value of what has been traditionally defined as feminine. That is, they wish to force society to acknowledge the equal value of women, women's work, and women's roles. Other feminists argue that to affirm this type of femininity is to affirm what a patriarchal society has defined to be women's work and roles, not what is in truth feminine. Therefore we should not accept and praise what has been previously defined (by men) as feminine, but women should create a new definition of what is feminine, of what is "woman". Still others respond that this redefinition of women cannot happen outside of the patriarchal framework. Thus, what is feminine may be redefined, but it will still take the inferior role. We should, then, stop making assertions based upon sociological gender distinctions, and in fact should destroy both the framework within which these definitions are made and the very idea of psycho-social gender differences.

I will not argue here for the superiority of any one of these agendas. It is clear that women's movements in different cultures will take different forms and have different goals. Because the sexism in Buddhism stems from the cultures in which each Buddhist lives, feminist change will not be consistent throughout the religion as Buddhist women in each face culturally specific problems. In spite of the multiple forms feminist change can and will take, the general definition of feminism with its agenda for change is a useful starting point.

Before speaking of the beneficial interactions between Buddhism and feminism, I must make clear that feminism is not in opposition to the basic teachings of Buddhism. That is, nothing in the most basic tenets of Buddhism entails the inferiority of women. The Buddha taught the Dharma to all people, men and women alike, without making gender distinctions. He taught that both women and men are able to recognize the Four Noble Truths, and to follow the Eight-Fold Path. He allowed for the establishment of orders of both monks and nuns. And finally, he taught that both women and men are capable of attaining Nirvana.

The Buddha intended the religious community to consist of two parts: the monastic community and lay practitioners. Each of these parts included women and men equally. Buddhism was not intended to distinguish between individuals on the basis of class, caste, race, or sex. Where, then, did the misogyny and patriarchy of Buddhism originate? Since it has not originated within the most basic teachings of the Buddha himself, it must have come from outside the essential doctrine. These outside influences have, over time, been mixed in with the formal hierarchy and written history of the religion. These patriarchal influences are now difficult to separate out, but

we must.

The culture within which Buddhism was founded reflected strong misogynist attitudes. However, I. B. Horner in *Women Under Primitive Buddhism*¹ argues that the advent of Buddhism brought a brief respite from male domination in India. This shows that Buddhism was not inherently sexist although the culture at the time was. Historian S. R. Goyal, however, argues² that women were no better off under Buddhism than under Jainism or Brahmanism, thus that Buddhism was equally sexist. He cites examples including Buddha's reluctant admission of nuns and the "highly insulting" eight special rules for women's admission. He notes that a woman must receive permission of either her parents or her husband to join the order, but that men need not consult their wives. And finally, he recalls the Buddha prophecy that because of the admission of women, the pure religion will last only 500 years. However, this appears to be poor evidence that we, in our time, should infer a patriarchal message from these writings.

If Goyal's arguments are based upon an accurate picture of the culture at that time, they could show not that Buddhism is inherently and necessarily sexist, but that Buddhism represented the cultural requirements of the time. Goyal himself does not argue that women were worse off under Buddhism, just that they were no better off. It may be that Buddha was conscious of the needs of both the women and men of that time period and chose to create a system which would address the cultural requirements. It may also be, as some have argued and linguistic analysis may bear out, that the misogynist tendencies found in the sutras were not actually words of the Buddha, but were added at a later date by monks entrenched in patriarchal cultures. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said that "many of these explanations came about in relation to the times, the place, and the social conditions, and most probably were not the original thought of the Dharma itself."³ In this case, the arguments of Horner may reflect a clearer picture of the early life of Buddhist women.

Although Buddhism has not featured many women in the same exalted light as men, there are many sutras, among them some of the most popular sutras, which portray women as highly realized beings. Diana Paul has collected some of these in *Women in Buddhism*.⁴ Paul's project is concerned with images of the feminine in Mahayana Buddhism so not all of the sutras she has translated contain positive imagery. Nonetheless, Paul finds three sutras in which women are positively portrayed as Bodhisattvas.

In these three sutras, Candrottara, Jewel Brocade, and Queen Srimala not only provide positive role models for women seeking enlightenment, but also address the issue of sexual transformation. The Buddha was male, and much has been made of the necessity of being male in order to attain enlightenment. The Mahayana tradition holds that one of the thirty-two major marks of a Buddha is maleness, thus women cannot hope to become Buddhas unless they transform their female bodies into male. However, in *The Sutra of the Dialogue of the Girl Candrottara*, Candrottara speaks on the meaninglessness of sexual transformation. "The nature of Emptiness cannot be changed or altered. This is also true for all phenomena. (Consequently) how could I change my woman's sex now?"⁵ Having explained this, however, Candrottara proceeds to change her female form. Paul's commentary suggests that this transformation occurred to enable Candrottara to avoid the societal necessity for a woman to marry and become the mother of sons. It is also possible that this transformation was a literary addition by monks to preserve the belief that a mark of Buddhahood is a male sex organ.

Jewel Brocade, however, in *The Sutra of Sagara*, the Naga King, responds to the claim that one cannot attain Buddhahood within a woman's body by arguing:

You have said: 'one cannot attain Buddhahood with a woman's body.' Then one cannot attain Buddhahood within a man's body either. What is the reason? Because the thought of enlightenment is neither male nor female. The Buddha has said: 'The one who perceives through the eyes is neither male nor female nor are (the perceptions of) the ears, nose, mouth, body and mind male or female. What is the reason? Because only the virtuous have eyes of emptiness. The one who perceives through Emptiness is neither male nor female. ... The one who perceives through enlightenment has the Dharma which is neither male nor female.'⁶

Importantly, having delivered this metaphysical statement on the sexlessness of Emptiness, Jewel Brocade does not transform her body, but as a woman enters the Bodhisattva path. Paul views Queen Srimala as the highest image of womanhood in the Mahayana tradition and suggests that Queen Srimala may in fact be a female Buddha. If so, she is of immense importance to women arguing for the ability of women to attain Buddhahood. Not all commentators agree, however, on the level of Queen Srimala's attainment. Alex and Hideko Wayman, translators of the complete scripture *The Lion's Roar of Queen Srimala* would place Srimala in one of the last three Bodhisattva stages.⁷ Although not a Buddha, at such a high level of realization Queen Srimala remains an important example of the potentialities of women on the path to enlightenment.

In their metaphysical statements about the nature of emptiness, Candrottara, Jewel Brocade, and Queen Srimala fulfill four important functions. First, they prove that there have been highly-realized women who are proficient teachers and worthy of respect and reverence. Second, they explain the true nature of the Dharma as sexless, explanations which are to be taken as true given their high level of realization. Third, they provide role models for women on the path today. Finally, and most importantly, they demonstrate the acceptance of women in Buddhism. Understanding that the Dharma is itself sexless, let us now turn to the situations of Buddhist women today, and examine the possibilities for feminist change.

The position of nuns is different in the Mahayana and Theravada traditions. While both traditions originally permitted nuns, there are currently no surviving orders of fully-ordained nuns in the Theravada countries. In these countries there are many women keeping eight and ten precepts who are not ordained as bhiksunis nor even as novices (sramanerika). There is a growing movement for the creation of bhiksuni orders in these countries, but obstacles are being found in both the religious hierarchy and the lay community.

One of the primary difficulties in establishing a bhiksuni order in these countries is the inability to carry out the ordination ceremony. A specified number of both bhiksunis and bhiksus must participate in a dual ordination ceremony. An obvious problem exists in countries where there are no fully ordained bhiksunis. Another difficulty is the argument that establishing a bhiksuni

order may create a schism in the Sangha, but such a schism could result only from the reluctance Sangha members to give up patriarchy. This reluctance, felt by both women and men, perhaps represents a general fear of change. Reluctance to change also arises from an acceptance of patriarchal impositions as essential to Buddhist doctrine. Still another difficulty is belief in the prophecy that the Dharma will decline 500 years after the admission of women. As women were admitted into the Sangha 2500 years ago and the Dharma is still strong, this seems a weak objection.

Although the arguments most often given for opposing the founding of a Bhiksuni Sangha are usually religious, these may be rhetorical cover for the stronger yet less palatable economic objections. Although it is an uncomfortable thought, bhiksu orders may be unwilling to share resources, privileges and power that have belonged, historically, solely to monks. Lacking official status, women have been denied support, facilities, and educational resources that are available for men. There may be fear that already limited resources would be spread too thinly if given to nuns as well as monks. While this may be true in the very beginnings of feminist change, it will not last for long. As laywomen begin to empower themselves, their ability to contribute to the support of bhiksuni orders will increase. In countries such as the United States where there are already strong feminist movements, donations to the Sangha may actually increase as women become aware that they are no longer donating to a patriarchy. And as monastic women begin to progress along the path to enlightenment, they will gain respect and support from the lay community, increasing the total amount of support available to the entire Sangha.

Buddhist or non-Buddhist, women of the world are rallying for greater economic freedoms, better education systems and opportunities, and for greater respect from the community. Buddhism should support these changes, as they will lead not to the destruction of the cultural fabric, but to a general strengthening of society as women are allowed to take active responsibility for themselves and their well-being. Feminist change will also enable women to better support themselves during their training to become nuns.

Feminist change within Buddhism will enable the religious community to better serve the lay people. Increasing the number and standing of nuns will increase a laywoman's opportunities to join the order, as well as provide her with role models and support systems that may be lacking in a male-oriented and male-dominated Sangha. As the numbers of nuns increase, more efforts can and should be made to integrate Dharma study and Buddhist practice with the everyday life of women.

Currently, nuns in some Buddhist communities are extremely active providing social services, including homes for the elderly, retirement homes, orphanages, cemeteries, and education centers. These social services benefit men as well as women. Making this type of activity acceptable for women in other Buddhist communities will greatly improve the availability of social services for all members of the community, regardless of sex.

The Sangha has traditionally been associated with education. In Tibet, the large number of monks could in part be explained by the fact that the monastery functioned as a school. Educating nuns will not only help them and improve the education level of the society as a whole, it will create new teachers, ones who can teach not only women, but also men. This will increase the educational opportunities of all members of the Buddhist community.

Further, women comprise approximately half of all societies. Feminist change will enable the Dharma to flourish among a much larger percentage of the population, thus greatly increasing the strength of the Dharma. Clearly any change which brings Buddhism to more of the world's

population must be desirable.

The open-ended definition of feminism that I choose to employ will not dictate either the means by which feminist changes will take place, nor specifically define what these changes should be. The parallels between the general women's movements in each country and the Buddhist women's movements will direct these changes. Buddhism is not, at its most fundamental level, patriarchal and it has the capacity for change. And as His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said, with regard to women's rights: "It is correct to struggle for one's rights, not with pride or jealousy, but with a view toward taking on one's own share of responsibility in the critical task of improving the quality of human society."[8](#)

NOTES:

Buddhist Nuns from a Modern Perspective

by Juo-hsueh Shih

In a conference on the Lotus Sutra a woman currently doing research in Japan said to me that she was so surprised to see me there. I asked her why, and her reply was that in Japan there are very few nuns and nuns are always in a subordinate position. Since nuns are few in number and inferior in position, people rarely see a nun appearing at a public occasion. For this reason, my attending a conference where the majority of scholars were male surprised her. Nevertheless, she told me that she met several nuns from Taiwan studying in Japanese universities.

As a nun from Taiwan pursuing advanced studies in the west, I became more awakened to the issue of women's position in society, particular in religion. During my stay in America I have been exposed to the problems which nuns encounter in different Buddhist traditions. Therefore, contrasting nuns of today with those of the past, and comparing nuns of one tradition with those of another really interests me. Moreover, I am interested in looking into the issue of nuns' role in the modern world and the possible contributions they may make to human society.

An article entitled "Sôtô Zen Nuns in Modern Japan: Keeping and Creating Tradition" by Paula K.R. Arai evoked my interest and started me thinking. The Sôtô sect of Zen is the largest and most organized sect of nuns in Japan. According to Arai's research, however, nuns have become fewer in number during this century, and the reason for this is the increased opportunities for women in the secular sphere. What does this statement mean? Does it imply that the more successful women become in the secular world the less possible it is for them to commit themselves to the religious life? If this is true, can we further infer that their decision to become nuns was influenced more by the difficulty in making a life in the society than by a genuine intention to pursue enlightenment or liberation? Can we consequently conclude from this that women become nuns due to their failure in the secular life?

Surprised at this reason for a decrease in the number of Japanese nuns, I cannot help but examining it from different angles. From a realistic angle, indeed, an outsider may see no reason

for a woman with a good education, talent, or a successful career to renounce the world. When they can enjoy such colorful lives, why would they enter monasteries and live the dull and poor life of a nun? It is understandable that an outsider see it this way unless we take the religious significance of being a nun into account. After all, being a nun is a decision concerning one's spiritual path rather than a change in occupation.

Contrary to the situation in Japan, there is an increasing number of nuns in Taiwan. It is interesting to find that more and more women with higher education choose to become nuns even though they have or have the prospect of good occupations. In the meantime, it is also noticeable that there are many more nuns than monks in Taiwan. The ratio of nuns to monks is approximately eight to one. One may think that in the modern day there are too many pleasures and enjoyments in life, so it is more difficult for men to live a monastic life. This may be true. The question, however, is that if this is the case for men, why it is not for women? In the past in mainland China, Buddhism was almost entirely a man's world. Nowadays in Taiwan, radical changes have been taking place. Nuns not only greatly outnumber monks, but also prove themselves in leadership capacities as well as in various other roles.

In terms of giving up a more comfortable or successful secular life full of world pleasures, women in Taiwan appear to be much more resolute than men. It takes strong will and great determination to devote oneself to a strictly disciplined monastic life. What explains the difference between these two traditions--the Japanese and Chinese--is a problem which deserves investigation.

Monastic life is more difficult than it was before since it presents such a stark contrast to today's secular life. Moreover, monasteries are by no means harbourages for those who seek easy lives. Therefore, there would be no reason for one to take on the challenges of such a life with much more hardship unless it were for the sake of the religious pursuit. In this light, it is understandable that education for women in Taiwan, by opening their eyes to greater horizons, has in many cases led women to a spiritual awakening. More education may provide them with a deeper understanding of the meaning of existence and with greater insight into the nature of human life. Therefore, it is not surprising that many of them choose a path to spiritual freedom. According to Arai's research, over the past forty years, the average age of nuns entering the order was 16. Most of the girls either were raised in a temple environment or became nuns upon the request of their parents. However, recently there has been a radical change in the age of nuns first entering nunneries. The present average age has risen to 43. Women at this age, whether single or married, have certainly had much more life experience than those in the 1950's. This change may suggest that women now make a conscious and mature decision to commit their lives to the Dharma. At the same time, it also suggests that nuns now are more competent and have greater ability to fulfill their social responsibilities. From the point of view of temple administration, the increase in age as well as the life experience of the nuns no doubt benefit the functioning of the nunneries. Yet, from an existential angle as well as a Buddhist point of view, this advantage does not necessarily apply to personal practice and smooth interpersonal relationships among the nuns. To be more specific, nuns in the higher age brackets might have exposed themselves to more defilements and accumulated more and deeper habits through their some 40 years' life experience. The fact that it takes a long time and great effort to overcome and eliminate those unwanted habits accounts for some difficulty in religious practice.

Again, the situation in Taiwan is different. There have been a growing number of nuns and a decrease in their age of entering the order in recent decades. Although Buddhism is not a religion

only for the elderly, people used to have a misconception that only after they grow old and have already fulfilled all their secular responsibilities can they enter the monasteries, to spend their old age in a quiet and peaceful place, not necessarily for the sake of the religious pursuit. Things have changed, however. In Taiwan many more young women decide to become nuns out of their own free choice as well as a recognition of the value of an earlier beginning on their religious path.

Japanese Buddhist nuns did make history in some matters. For instance, the first ordained Buddhists in Japan were three nuns, the first Japanese to go abroad (to China) to study (Vinaya) were nuns, and also, the first Buddhist temple in Japan was a temple for nuns. However, in spite of their vital contributions, Japanese nuns, just like those in other traditions, have never received the attention and respect they deserve. For most of the history of the Soto Zen tradition, nuns were in a subordinate position, being expected to clean, cook, and sew for the monks. Therefore, they were not allowed to assume positions of power or responsibility.

In Arai's article there are some accounts about the progressive elevation in position of Japanese nuns. Before 1953, the highest rank a nun could attain was lower than the lowest rank for monks. After that, a drastic modification in regulations of all Buddhist sects gave nuns more opportunities. They were allowed to become head priests of the middle rank in temples. In 1978, nuns were also allowed to attain the rank which is the last level before Zenji (Zen master). Nowadays, nuns have gained high positions almost equal to monks. While in some special cases this may be true, only a few nuns actually gain higher positions, certainly not all. Generally speaking, the relative inequality in the positions of women and men still exists.

With regard to the position of Buddhist nuns, there exists a unique phenomenon in Taiwan, which is quite noteworthy. In general it would not be wrong to say that discrimination on the basis of gender exists in almost every society. Since sexual discrimination has had a history of thousands of years, no one can expect a speedy change. Taiwan is no exception. It cannot be denied that, generally speaking, many of the laypeople in Taiwan have more respect for monks than nuns. Obviously this is the natural outcome of a patriarchal society. Nevertheless, Taiwan's Buddhist followers also pay respect to nuns as long as nuns prove themselves either in religious practice or in their career as bodhisattvas, helping sentient beings in one way or another. As was mentioned previously, the fact that nuns greatly outnumber monks in Taiwan inevitably results in nuns' taking more responsibilities and having more commitment in various aspects of religious affairs. At the same time, it also creates more chances and freedom for nuns to develop and demonstrate their capabilities.

Being active and playing an important role in the world of Taiwanese Buddhism, nuns are inferior neither in capacity nor in position. More importantly, the majority of Taiwanese men are not as male- chauvinistic as those in other countries. In mainland China nuns are often despised and definitely had an inferior position. I have experienced monks' disparaging attitudes toward nuns in some of the temples I visited in China. I also witnessed unequal treatment toward nuns in a famous temple in Ssu-chuan Province, where the seating order in the worship hall and at meals was arranged with monks and laymen before nuns, which is very peculiar. In Taiwan, however, most monks have more liberal attitudes toward nuns. This is partly because monks in Taiwan are the minority and consequently need nuns' aid in various ways. No one can deny or ignore the nuns' contributions to the community. Therefore, nuns in Taiwan as a whole do not suffer oppression or devaluation. Some outstanding nuns in particular are highly esteemed both by Buddhists and non-Buddhists due to their distinguished religious practice or great contributions in either education, social welfare, or in spreading the teachings of the Buddha. They are

recognized and revered, thus becoming leading figures in the Buddhist community. However, the fact that they gain high positions is not something given by any organization or by monks; instead, they earn their positions through their own efforts and the recognition of their followers, or even non-Buddhists. In spite of this, there is something that should be pointed out to prevent sending a misleading message to the reader concerning the issue of the nuns' position. Position is not the main concern of Chinese nuns, nor do they aim at gaining high status. Instead of arguing for equality of position, the nuns merely demonstrate their qualities in a quiet way. In other words, they allow their actions to argue for them. In Taiwan, the feminist consciousness has not yet been greatly aroused. Nevertheless, Chinese nuns in Taiwan have a certain degree of freedom to carry out their own ideals and their achievements. Consequently they are recognized by Buddhist followers there.

Generally speaking, nuns in almost every traditions were not given opportunities for proper training or education. Although in the early period, Japanese nuns seem to have had the potential to develop themselves in terms of taking ordination, studying abroad, and so on, their position has declined over the years. It is the traditional gender discrimination of society that accounts for this decline. In China during the T'ang Dynasty, too, Chinese nuns once were well-educated and rather active, but later on they became similarly absorbed by the dominant patriarchal tradition, virtually becoming second-class citizens.

Nevertheless, according to Arai's research, in modern times Japanese nuns have been learning to be strong and independent. At the same time, they seem to have become aware of the importance of improving the quality and elevating the status of nuns. Therefore, some Zen nunneries have been established to train nuns exclusively, offering elementary through advanced levels of training.

The educating of nuns includes traditional Zen training such as zazen (sitting meditation), chanting sutras, studying Buddhist texts and Chinese poetry, sewing Buddhist garments, cooking, and cleaning. In addition to all these activities the training includes kado (the art of flower arrangement), shodo (the art of calligraphy), and chado (the art of making tea) as integral elements. These arts are not regarded merely as skills, but as expressions of the philosophy of the unity of the body, mind, and heart.

Apart from the above-mentioned formal education, there are also various monthly temple activities which help train the nuns in basic temple responsibilities, and also serve as opportunities for the nuns to learn how to interact with and help the laity. Periodical sesshins (intensive meditation sessions) serve to deepen the contemplative aspect of the nuns' training. Japanese nuns in the modern age are considered the living holders of the traditional Zen lifestyle. They generally remain celibate and continue the rhythm of life which they learn during their training in the nunnery. At the same time, they help preserve the traditional arts of Japan. Compared with the Japanese tradition, Buddhism in Taiwan appears to lack a well-organized administrative or educational system. Generally speaking, each temple or monastery is independent. There is no all-powerful headquarters which controls everything or everyone. On the one hand, there is little or no organizational unity in Chinese Buddhism, which produces an image of scattered sand. On the other hand, however, we can see a kind of "order in chaos" or "unity in separation" in Chinese Buddhism, which is also the unique feature of Chinese culture. What Chinese people emphasize is that, in a harmonious way, members of the same group preserve their special characteristics. Therefore, in Taiwan no central organization for the training of the clergy has ever been established. Each temple or monastery is responsible for the training of its own new members. Because of this independent functioning, we often find

differences in various aspects of monastic life, such as the tunes in which the Buddhist hymns are sung, the way the mantras or sutras are chanted, and rituals performed as well as the pattern of daily life, instructions for religious practice, and interpretations of doctrines.

Due to the lack of a central headquarters, the head of each temple can make changes or improvements in certain aspects whenever the need arises. In short, the creative genius of the heads of temples creates variations in the many aspects of religious life, and produces a colorful kaleidoscope of religious practice with diverse presentations of Dharma. It has been mentioned that Chinese nuns in Taiwan have much freedom to express themselves and this is the evidence. They can start their own nunneries or temples, subservient to no one, and decide how they would like to run them.

The thing that most interests me is the different images of Buddhist nuns in Japanese and Chinese traditions. In the Chinese tradition, both monks and nuns are expected to be like "superior men," which is a very masculine term. Superior men are the role models in Chinese culture. Of course, this can be criticized as evidence of gender discrimination. However, from a different angle, it shows that nuns are expected to release themselves from the traditional submissive and feminine image of a woman, and consequently to transcend their subordinate position. In this sense, Chinese nuns have the ambition and make efforts to challenge and break down the traditional expectations for women to seek the favor of men. Just as men do not favor masculine woman, nuns do not accept the traditional image of femininity imposed on women. Chinese nuns are not expected or educated to fit the image society has drawn for women. From our description of the multi-faceted training designed for Japanese Soto Zen nuns, we learn that the nuns are expected to acquire great and diverse abilities. Through contrasting the nuns now with those in the past, an improvement in quality can be seen. However, the training program seems to emphasize the cultivation of people competent in running temples. The training in flower arrangement and tea ceremony is undertaken due to economic considerations. In other words, the nuns have to make their own living by the techniques they acquired. What is interesting is that, according to Arai, the ideal for nuns is just what is expected of Japanese lay women generally. There is a positive side to the nuns' fitting the traditional images and expectations of women because, in this way, the Soto Zen nuns make a positive contribution to the preservation of Japanese culture, yet it seems that the nuns' main function is to run the temples. They teach, yet they primarily teach flower arrangement and tea ceremony, and as a means of making a living. Poverty is not the only difficulty in the lives of the nuns, but it is admittedly one factor explaining why life in the nunneries has become more stressful. It is quite understandable that fewer and fewer women would like to devote themselves to the monastic life if they have to make their own living. If this is the case, there will be few differences between the secular and the monastic life in terms of the amount of time available for religious practice. The question of why there is a decreasing number of nuns and an increase in age in Japan, whereas in Taiwan there is an increase in numbers and a decrease in age is not an easy one to answer. A comprehensive look at the social, economic, psychological, and religious dimensions necessary to understand these opposite developments in Japanese and Chinese Buddhism is beyond the scope of this essay. Nevertheless, I would like to propose an assumption which might be crucial to this issue. Chinese Buddhists generally are quite practice-oriented. This emphasis on religious practice strongly dominates the minds of the Buddhist followers. Therefore, when it is time to make a decision, most of them are able to disregard the possible difficulties in the monastic life and resolutely dedicate themselves to seeking the Dharma. Moreover, Chinese nuns generally are expected to be great practitioners rather than successful temple administrators.

They have more alternatives to select from if they are not interested in running a temple. Even the nuns who seclude themselves from society and make no "concrete" contribution to humanity earn respect and support from the Buddhist followers. If they are good practitioners, their contribution is in being living spiritual models of the teachings for other Buddhists to admire and follow.

International News

Sakyadhita Meeting in England

The English branch of Sakyadhita, the International Association of Buddhist Women, held its third annual meeting at Conway Hall Red Lion Square, London, on September 8, 1991. The meeting was attended by 53 women and 2 men, and began with introductions and expressions of support for women in Buddhism. Wendy Barzetovic welcomed everyone and dedicated all merit arising from the gathering to the well-being and enlightenment of all sentient beings. Dharmacharini Sanghadeva and Dharmacharini Gunabhadri then gave an informative talk about the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order. They showed slides and answered questions about the order's activities, including the work of transforming buildings into functioning Buddhist centers. Next a video on the book *Weavers of Wisdom** by Anne Bancroft was shown. The video included an interview with Ven. Ayya Khema at Buddha-Haus in Germany and footage of Parappaduwa Nuns' Island in Sri Lanka. During the break, everyone chatted over tea and biscuits, and browsed among the books and various items available for sale. Ayya Khema then gave a talk on "Women in Religion" and answered the many questions put forward. The meeting concluded with a loving kindness (metta) meditation which engendered feelings of warmth and respect for all of life.

*Anne Bancroft, *Weavers of Wisdom: Women Mystics of the Twentieth Century*, Penguin Arkana, 1989.

What is the Western Buddhist Order?

by Dharmacharini Sanghdevi

The Western Buddhist Order (WBO) was founded in 1968 by Ven. Sangharakshita. Twenty-four years later, there are around 450 members of the Order worldwide, including women and men, Dharmacharinis and Dharmacharis, "ones who fare in the Dharma." Individuals may become a member of the Order when they are recognized as going for refuge effectively to the Three Jewels. Going for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha is the central act of the Buddhist life.

Some years ago Sangharakshita distinguished different levels of going for refuge. First, "ethnic going for refuge" is when people regard themselves as Buddhist by virtue of the fact that they have been born into a Buddhist culture. However, they may have very little understanding of, or interest in, Buddhism as a spiritual path of practice. Second, "provisional going for refuge" is when people have some understanding of Buddhist principles and make use of them to bring a greater sense of order and harmony into their life. However, they have not yet fully committed themselves to the Three Jewels. Then there is "effective going for refuge" where people have reached the stage of being able to make a conscious and wholehearted commitment to the values embodied in the Three Jewels. This is based on a background of some understanding and experience of the Dharma particularly meditation, Dharma study, ethical observance, and spiritual friendship. They are ready to put the Three Jewels at the center of their lives and to let the Three Jewels gradually transform them completely.

The willingness of the person who has effectively gone for refuge to be transformed by the Three Jewels is reflected in the ten precepts that are taken at the time of ordination into the Western Buddhist Order for transforming body, speech and mind. Known as the ten virtuous actions, they are a set of precepts which Sakyamuni Buddha encouraged both his lay and monastic disciples to follow. Unlike some other Buddhist traditions, ordination into the Western Buddhist Order is the same for both women and men, with this one set of precepts being observed by all. The Western Buddhist Order includes members with and without family responsibilities. What is essential is that the members are going for refuge. The first duty of a members is to work on their own individual spiritual practice: to keep up a regular meditation practice, to endeavor to observe the ten precepts ever more fully, and to study the Dharma. The second duty is to maintain and deepen their contact with other members of the Order so that they come to an ever deeper appreciation of spiritual community. The third duty is to help others, which is the inevitable consequence of the altruistic dimension of going for refuge. Many members of the Order choose to do this through running city and retreat centers where instruction and guidance in meditation and other aspects of the Buddhadharmas are given. There are also team-based right livelihood businesses, fund-raising for Dharma and social work projects in India and helping run them. The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) is the name given to the various charitable organizations worldwide through which members work to spread the Dharma. It also includes people associated with the Order through various activities. This year, as FWBO celebrates its twenty-fifth anniversary, we find that there are many thousands of Friends across the world. Those who wish to make a more definite link with the Order and to deepen their understanding of Buddhist principles become Mitras. There are special retreats and events for Mitras. Many Order members and Mitras live together in communities, which are usually for either men or women. Over the years, it has been found that both women and men benefit from living in single-sex communities, study groups, retreats, or work situations.

Many Mitras eventually decide they would like to commit themselves to the Three Jewels and be

ordained into the Western Buddhist Order. The time which elapses between a person's first contact with the movement, their subsequent decision to request ordination, and then their actual ordination varies from individual to individual, but usually takes several years. Until recently, the final decision about a person's readiness for ordination rested with Sangharakshita who also conducted all the ordination ceremonies. The views of Order members acquainted with the person would also be taken into account. Now the responsibility for making these decisions and conducting ordinations is gradually being shared with others in the Order who have come to be known as "preceptors."

The Buddhist Revival in India

by Dharmacharini Padmasuri

Trailokya Bauddha Maha Sangha (TBMSG) is the Indian wing of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) founded in the U.K. in 1967 by the English-born Ven. Sanghrakshita. In 1978 Dharmachari Lokamitra, an English senior disciple of Sanghrakshita, went to Pune, Maharashtra, in India to set up TBMSG activities. There he started Dharma work among some of the eight million ex-untouchable Hindus who had converted to Buddhism in 1956. These new Buddhists had changed their religion under the inspiration and guidance of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Born an untouchable, Ambedkar was well aware of the plight of his people. It was through great perseverance and hardship that he managed to get a good education and become the first Law Minister of independent India. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that he became a great leader of the untouchable masses. When, after many years of deep thought and research he converted to Buddhism, many thousands of others followed suit.

Ambedkar saw being a Buddhist as the only way out of the dreadful stigma of the Hindu caste system, a system of graded inequality which is backed by the authority of Hindu scriptures. Those born as untouchables are destined to be treated far worse than the lowliest of animals, and within the Hindu religion there is no way out of this pre-determined future. It is important to realize that Ambedkar saw Buddhism not only as a means to social and political freedom, but also as a path to spiritual emancipation. This emphasis on the spiritual aspect was of utmost importance to him. Tragically, only six weeks after the mass conversions Dr. Ambedkar died leaving this new Buddhist movement both leaderless and in a state of shock.

In the twenty-two intervening years until Lokamitra arrived, very little had been done by the Buddhist world at large to teach these new Buddhists how to practice their chosen religion. The ex-untouchable Buddhists⁹ live in some of the worst Indian slums and shanty-towns or are banished to the outskirts of the poorest villages. Until recently most were illiterate, were only allowed to do the most menial jobs, and were treated with contempt and degradation merely due to their birth status.

In 1982 I, as a nurse but also as a committed Buddhist and a member of the Western Buddhist

Order, went out to help set up a medical project in a large slum area in Pune along with an English Buddhist doctor. By 1987, apart from Lokamitra, this and many other social welfare projects were entirely under the direct of Indian nationals. The Western contribution now is to raise money for helping the former untouchables through a charity organization named The Karuna Trust. The charity's aim is to get away from the idea of conventional aid from rich country to poor country and to move towards a new vision of social development based on the highest human values of individual dignity, self-respect, and self-determination. The specific social projects now underway amongst the new Buddhists in India include health education and primary health care, kindergartens, adult literacy classes, hostels for children getting decent education in the cities, sewing classes, and income generating schemes. Women constitute the backbone of many of these projects.

In addition to the social projects for helping people out of their often miserable circumstances, there are Dharma activities. Dharma talks are held for the public in the open air between the tin and gunny-sack huts, attended by hundreds and sometimes thousands of people. There are classes where basic Buddhism and meditation are taught, along with devotional practices. Initially Westerners taught Indians, but now more and more Indians are teaching one another. More than one hundred ex-untouchables have become Dharmachari, putting the Three Jewels at the center of their lives, and thousands are in contact with the activities of TBMSG.

Dharma retreats are sometimes held in rented schools, but also in newly-built country retreat centers. At these retreats women and men can begin to understand what Buddhism is about and, by doing so, help the Dharma to flourish again in the land of its birth. A true Dharma revolution is happening among the ex-untouchables of Maharashtra and beyond, as practical application of the Dharma transforms their previously impoverished lives.

Though my initial involvement was with the social projects, by popular demand I soon found myself leading Dharma classes, holding retreats, and teaching meditation to enthusiastic women. Women who perhaps for the first time in their lives have left their family homes for a few days or even hours are able to listen to the Buddha's teachings and begin to put them into practice. Gradually they are getting a grasp of the path of morality (sila), concentration (samadhi), and wisdom (prajna), experiencing a glimmer of the freedom that Buddhism offers. Many are able to take that glimmer back home with them into their shanties and put into practice the five precepts and meditation. Indian women are bound by a lot of social conditioning which makes it difficult for them to develop their human potential, let alone their spiritual aspirations. Despite these conditions, however, their initial progress on the path can be quite stunning to watch.

In 1987, the first two Indian-born women from untouchable backgrounds were ordained into the Western Buddhist Order. In this short article it is hard to convey the immense impact Buddhism is having on so many Indians today. I will end with a quotation from my book, [But Little Dust](#),¹⁰ which expresses what this momentous occasion meant to me. Several women were on retreat together at the TBMSG retreat centre just below the ancient Buddhist caves of Bhaja between Pune and Bombay.

"Just prior to the start of the private ordinations, as the women were making their way to the shrine room and sitting on their cushions, I went outside and stood on the mound in front of Saddharma Pradip where an eight-spoked Dharmachakra wheel made from chunks of locally-found white quartz lay on the ochre earth. From the mound I gazed up at the caves of Bhaja. The evening sun setting over the western hills was throwing a rosy radiance onto the rocks, and almost as though on fire the stone stupa beamed down into our tranquil valley from the great

Chaitriya Hall.

"In that moment I was struck by a charge of history, carried by a wave that came from the Buddha himself two thousand and five hundred years ago to the monks or nuns who had once lived and practised in those very caves, beneath that very stupa; from all the great sages down to my own teacher, and to this momentous present, when two women were about to commit themselves to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. In that moment I experienced the revival of Buddhism as a mighty, boundless and potent force, realising how much I, and any Buddhists, have a part to play, not only in the revival of Buddhism in India, but in making the Dharma available throughout the world. I felt unequivocally humbled, yet unusually calm, in the light of this majestic tradition."

Though I have now left India after eight years of working there, am still very much in contact with the women whose heroic strength and determination to develop themselves against great odds continues to grow and flourish.

Notes:

BUDDHISM AND ORGAN TRANSPLANTS

by Karma Lekshe Tsomo

There are many contemporary social issues that need to be investigated from a Buddhist point of view. One of these is the question of organ transplantation. Since organ transplants were not medically possible until very recently, there are no explicit statements on this question to be found in the texts. What might we infer from the texts and what do the living Buddhist traditions have to say about this vital ethical concern?

When I returned to the United States after spending fifteen years in Asia, there were many colloquial English terms that were new to me. I often had to ask people to explain the significance of one or another slang expression. Sometimes, for example, I heard young people riding motorcycles referred to as "organ donors." I asked a friend why this term was used. My friend explained that people with young, healthy bodies riding motorcycles without helmets were prime candidates for donating their vital organs for transplantation using modern surgical methods. Therefore, these foolish young people were facetiously called "organ donors." Re-acculturation to modern American life was full of enlightening experiences such as this.

On another occasion, I went to the Honolulu Police Department to apply for a driver's license. The spectre of a Buddhist nun driving a motor vehicle in an Asian Buddhist country would be met with incredulous horror, for sure, but in America driving is practically essential. Like most patriotic Americans, I had been driving cars since I was sixteen years old, so now when someone kindly offered a used car to facilitate work for Sakyadhita, I resigned myself to the inevitable. A surprise awaited me at the HPD, however: I was asked whether I wished to have "organ donor" marked on my license. That experience started me thinking about possible Buddhist views on a very new problem.

To begin with, all Buddhist schools agree that nothing is dearer to a sentient being than its life.¹¹ In fact, reverence for life is taught in practically all religious traditions and can itself be deemed a definition of spirituality as, for example, among the native Hawaiian people. Buddhism in particular teaches us to cherish life and to protect the life of even the smallest living creature. To refrain from taking life is the first precept for Buddhists, both lay and ordained. To protect the lives of animals, to say nothing of humans, is said to ensure long life, both in this and future lives. It is said to be the karmic cause of good health, beauty, and rebirth in a pleasant place. To save the lives of living beings by purchasing them from the butcher is a time-honored custom among Buddhists in Tibet, China, and other Mahayana countries.

Nowadays, with the globalization of practically everything, I thought it would be a good idea to consult Buddhist followers of various traditions to see how they felt about the idea of organ transplantation. So I spoke with Japanese, Chinese, Burmese, Vietnamese, Tibetan, Canadian and American Buddhists on the subject. When I asked "How do you feel about the idea of people donating their organs when they die?" the response was always spontaneously positive. Every person I questioned, of every Buddhist persuasion, believed that giving organs was clearly an act of compassion as well as an act of generosity. When I asked "How do you feel about the idea of donating your organs when you die?" the response was still always positive, even if there was a very slight hesitation or perceptible glassing over of the eyes in a few cases.

From the Buddhist point of view, the body, being merely a collection of five aggregates (form, feelings, perceptions, karmic formations, and consciousness) has no usefulness after death. Theravada followers tended to emphasize this point of the teachings. They told me that at the time of death, the consciousness leaves the body and there is no harm in touching, washing, or cutting the body, since it is nothing but a heap of dead skin, bones, flesh, and other rotting ingredients. It seems to be the custom in Thailand, for example, to wash the dead person's body and dress it in fresh (usually white) clothes. Nevertheless, it also seems to be the custom to leave the body lying in state for a certain length of time, whether it be one, three, or eight days, depending on the country, the status of the person, and the wishes of the person's family.

Mahayana informants answering my query tended to emphasize the teaching on the precious human rebirth. Since a human rebirth is difficult to attain, easily perishable, and the most desirable state in which to make progress toward enlightenment, they saw donating bodily organs as an excellent way to contribute to human happiness. By donating a liver or kidney, we may extend another person's life and give the person a chance to practice Dharma and "take the essence" of the human opportunity. To put the welfare of another human being above one's own by giving away an organ would be the ultimate act of self-sacrifice and an excellent opportunity for practice.

Since the Mahayana path stresses the conjunction of wisdom and compassion as essential for attaining enlightenment, no chance for developing these two qualities should be missed. The bodhisattva ethic is to sacrifice oneself for others, including postponing one's own enlightenment for their sake. We find many examples of such heroism in the past lives of the Buddha when he was practicing on the paths and stages as a bodhisattva. In the Jataka tales, we read of him giving his eyes and his flesh. One of the most well-known instances was when he gave his body to the hungry tigress at the spot now called Namo Buddha in Nepal. We also find examples of self-sacrifice in the lives of the Buddhist saints. For example, we read the famous story of Asanga

who cut flesh from his own thigh to entice maggots away from the vermin-infested body of a dying she-dog. By this act of great compassion he achieved the direct vision of Manjusri.¹²

In China, textual references to sacrificing the body were often taken literally. Occasionally a young monk would burn off a finger or two as an offering to the Buddhas and a symbol of his dedication to the welfare of sentient beings. Even today in Chinese Buddhist communities, sacrificing the body for the welfare of others is symbolically enacted by burning small cones of incense on the heads of bodhisattva candidates. After all, it is reasoned, if a person makes a commitment to descend to the lowest hells for eternity to benefit even one living creature, she should be willing to undergo a few minutes of discomfort on their account. Once in a while this custom even led to self-immolation. I remember seeing signs posted around a particularly tempting site at Pu-tou-shan, the sacred "Potala mountain" of Avalokitesvara¹³ in China, that said "Please do not immolate yourself here" and "Sacrificing of fingers and other body parts forbidden."

For the reasons explained in connection with the preciousness of the human rebirth, however, suicide is certainly not sanctioned in Buddhism. To take the life of any sentient being, especially a human being, including oneself, violates the cardinal principle of Buddhist ethics. While taking the life of sentient beings is prohibited, we nevertheless find numerous references in the Mahayana texts to giving up one's life for others. To sacrifice one's life with the *bodhicitta* motivation (the wish to achieve enlightenment for the sake of others) is particularly excellent. To make such a vow, however, one's resolve must be strong and unwavering. Otherwise, there is a danger of regretting one's decision at the crucial time--the actual moment of death.

There is a story, for instance, of a *rak a*, or wrathful being, who came to test a practitioner's resolve. When he asked for his eyes, the practitioner plucked them out without hesitation. When asked for his right arm, he sawed that off and offered it, too. When he offered it to the *rak a* with his left hand, the only one he had left, however, the *rak a* got offended.¹⁴ At this, the practitioner lost his temper, destroying all the merit of his virtuous deed of generosity. Thus, we see that the motivation behind our actions must be both positive and stable.

In the "Chö" practice of the Tibetans, we also find the symbolic offering of the body. This is a visualization practice which, though vivid and realistic, generally does not entail the actual giving of organs and limbs. This symbolic ritual of offering our body parts to others is regarded as a very effective means of cutting through mental defilements, especially attachment to our physical components. In addition, it is seen as an excellent method for cultivating the perfection of generosity. In the Tibetan tradition, particular attention is given to an awareness of death and impermanence. That "death is definite, but the time of death is indefinite" is repeatedly reaffirmed. Only one breath separates us from the next life. If we do not reflect on death in the morning, we will waste the day; if we do not reflect on death in the evening, we will waste the night. Attention is similarly given to the actual process of dying. As in other Buddhist traditions, the so-called "self" is considered merely a name given to the grouping of the five aggregates. At the time of death these aggregates dissolve without leaving a trace. Only the very subtle, momentary stream of consciousness, imbued with imprints of the actions we have created, "travels" from this life to the next.

The state of mind at the moment of death is therefore considered of crucial importance in

determining the quality of the next life. For example, to die in an angry state of mind will lead to a hellish rebirth. Thus, we find manuals such as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* which help to direct the dying person's consciousness through the *bardo*, or intermediate state between this life and the next. Such guidebooks describe in vivid detail the stages of dissolution of the mental and physical elements during the death process. By learning to recognize these stages, including the terrifying visions and bizarre experiences that might be encountered, we can train our minds intelligently and learn to die consciously. Unless we are mindful during this process and can skillfully control our minds, we will simply be "thrown" by our karma into the next state of rebirth which, judging from our present performance, is likely to be an unfortunate one.

The length of the *bardo*, or intermediate stage, varies depending upon the person and situation. It is said to last anywhere from an instant to a period of forty-nine days. In the case of a sudden accidental death, the elements are said to dissolve quickly, the consciousness leaving the body and taking another rebirth almost immediately. In the case of an ordinary person dying a natural death, the *bardo* experience lasts from one to three days on the average. Among Tibetans, surviving family members will normally request a divination to determine the appropriate time for performing the sky burial or cremation. This is to ensure that the person's consciousness has already departed from the body. The family will also seek advice as to what prayers should be said for the benefit of the deceased.

In the case of serious Dharma practitioners, the *bardo* may last longer, affording numerous possibilities for realization and even enlightenment. It is in this sense that life is seen as preparation for the moment of death. If one has practiced meditation well and purified the mind of defilements, the clear light nature of the mind and the emptiness of all phenomena may be recognized during this interim and the individual liberated from bondage within the cycle of existence.

During my twelve-year stay in the Tibetan community of Dharamsala, India, cases of practitioners remaining in a state of meditation for several days after their heartbeat and breathing had ceased were quite common. One such person, my Tibetan calligraphy teacher, was a monk of Nechung Monastery named Sonam. Friendly and easy-going, he appeared to be just an ordinary monk doing Dharma practice and strolling to the bazaar everyday. When he remained for three days in meditation after death, however, everyone realized that he had actually been a great practitioner. Another well-known example, of Gyalwa Karmapa remaining in meditation after clinical death in Mt. Zion Hospital in Illinois, has been medically documented. Another astonishing case was that of the senior tutor of H.H. Dalai Lama, Kyabje Ling Rinpoche. When he passed away in Dharamsala some years ago at the age of 82, he remained in meditative equipoise for thirteen full days, an event that was witnessed by countless people.

Tibetans, in any case, reason that it is important not to touch or distract a dying person, lest the person become upset or distracted and the death experience be disturbed. Greed for possessions, grasping at loved ones, and especially anger are to be avoided at all costs. Once the pulse and breathing have stopped, it is thought best to leave the body quiet and alone; prayers and positive thoughts for the person's welfare may be generated from another room. Interestingly, the law in California and a number of other states allows a body to be left in repose for three days after clinical death. In fact, we find that most religious traditions tend to leave the body lying in state for some days, and a period of three days is quite common.

If we accept, then, that consciousness does not end at the time of death, that a "person" may have valuable spiritual work to do in the intermediate period before the next life, and that it is best not

to touch the body of a person undergoing this transition, we are faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, it is beneficial and an act of compassion to donate one's eyes, liver, and kidneys. On the other hand, it is important to evolve spiritually and to achieve a positive rebirth in order to benefit others physically and mentally. We are faced with the irony that, while a full-fledged bodhisattva may easily give up the entire body with no hesitation, a bodhisattva-in-training who has not perfected this selfless resolve may be wiser to avoid risking a disastrous rebirth due to undergoing organ transplantation at the time of death.

When I first asked Lama Karma Rinchen, the spiritual director of Kagyu Thekchen Ling in Honolulu, whether he thought it was a good idea to donate one's organs at the time of death, he immediately answered in the affirmative. "Definitely," he said, "That is an excellent compassionate bodhisattva action." When I questioned him as to whether the dying person's consciousness might not be disturbed by getting an organ cut out, he said, "That's OK. The doctors can wait for a few days." When I said the doctors have to cut the organ out immediately in order to save the organ recipient, he gasped, appalled. "Fresh? They want it fresh?!?" In the end, he concluded that for an ordinary person who believes the mind dies with the body, it is fine to go ahead with donating the organs. But for a Buddhist practitioner, it might be better to wait until the bodhicitta resolve is strong and stable. He himself would like to donate his organs anyway.

Admittedly, it is the quality of life that is critical, not necessarily the quantity. Tibetans say that virtuous people should live long, but that a short life is better for non-virtuous people, since there will be less time to commit negative actions. This leads to reflection on the quality of life of the organ recipient, the motivation for wishing to extend life, and the person's state of mind while waiting for a suitable organ to become available. If greed, grasping, and attachment are motivating factors in wishing to extend life, these unwholesome mind states will affect the recipient's quality of life and quality of death. Can we imagine the mental state of a recipient whose transplant is unsuccessful? Moreover, honestly speaking, it must be a great temptation for medical practitioners to terminate the life of an organ donor prematurely in order to ensure a successful transplant.

Possibly in reaction to the extraordinary methods currently being used to prolong life artificially, there are many who advocate natural death, death with dignity, and mindful dying. Ven. Prabhava Dharma Rishi of the International Zen Institute in Los Angeles, among others, has long dreamt of creating a Buddhist hospice setting which provides facilities conducive for spiritual practice at the time of death. She envisions creating a serene, meditative environment for the dying person and a nirvana hall simulating the Pure Land where a person can calmly make the transition to an enlightened realm undisturbed by medical paraphernalia.

This discussion leads to the larger issue of extending life. When we speak of using extraordinary means to extend life, what does extraordinary mean? Does that include blood transfusions? Who makes the decisions? Who physically pulls the plug?

Medical professionals make decisions such as these on a daily basis. For example, although it is general practice to attempt saving the life of a dangerously premature infant, there are a number of variables that enter into the equation. For the parents these factors may include the number of other children in the family, expense, and even gender. Economic variables may include whether necessary surgeries are being performed at private or public expense. Might it be that expensive surgeries are justifiable when the insurance company pays, but not in welfare cases? What about cases of multiple health problems? If an infant requires heart surgery (to the tune of \$100,000), it should be warranted regardless of economic status, but what if the child is blind, has Down's

syndrome, and has missing limbs as well? What if the father is alcoholic and abusive, the mother is a prostitute with AIDS, and the child needs to be on oxygen indefinitely requiring constant nursing attention? These are some of the sticky wickets that health professionals are required to negotiate every day.

Another complex aspect of this issue that needs to be investigated is the nature of mind, its relation to the physical constituents, and the state of mind (located at the heart, traditionally, for Buddhists) in the case of organ transplants. What psychological adjustments or temperament changes are entailed when another person's organ is transplanted into one's own body? These important bio-ethical questions need to be looked at from various religious and cultural perspectives, as well as the physiological and economic.

Last but not least, the issue of organ transplantation needs to be appraised in the larger global context. The irony of spending \$100,000 or more to extend a life when the earth faces disastrous overpopulation cannot be ignored. That is a hefty expenditure to be made for a single human being when 40,000 children starve to death every day and the number continues to increase exponentially. What is the wisest and most compassionate way of dealing with these harsh realities? What would the Buddha say?

SAKYADHITA: DAUGHTERS OF THE BUDDHA

Sakyadhita, the name of the International Association of Buddhist Women, means "Daughters of the Buddha." The objectives of Sakyadhita, as expressed at its founding meeting in 1987 in Bodhgaya, India, are to promote world peace through the practice of the Buddha's teachings, to create a network of communications for Buddhist women throughout the world, to promote harmony and understanding among the various Buddhist traditions, to encourage and help educate women as teachers of Buddhadharma, to provide improved facilities for women to study and practice the teachings, to help establish the Bhiksuni Sangha where it does not currently exist, to provide support for women who are interested in ordination, and to conduct research on monastic discipline and the role of women in Buddhism. We are committed to pursuing the Buddhist ideal of positive human development and especially hope to advance the spiritual welfare of the world's women. We appreciate your support.

(This issue of Sakyadhita has been compiled by Karma Lekshe Tsomo, Alanda Wraye, and Toby Wraye. Illustrations by Barbara Falconer, Jurgen Manshardt, and Karma Lekshe Tsomo.)

1 I.B Horner, Women Under Primitive Buddhism (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989).

2 S.R. Goyal, A History of Indian Buddhism (Meerut: Kusumanjali

Prakashan, 1987), p. 292-298.

3 Karma Lekshe Tsomo, *Sakyadhita: Daughters of the Buddha* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1988), p.42.

4 Diana Y. Paul, *Women in Buddhism Images of the Feminine in the Mahayana Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

5 Paul, p.195.

6 Ibid., p.236.

7 Alex and Hideko Wayman, *The Lion's Roar of Queen Srimala*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1990) p.25.

8 Sakyadhita, p.40.

9 The "ex-" denotes that untouchability was theoretically abolished by law in 1947, though very little has changed in actual practice.

10 Hilary Blakiston, *But Little Dust*, Allborough Press, Cambridge, 1991.

11 In the Buddhist context, a sentient being is any being with consciousness. Thus fish are sentient beings, but not plants, though plants may have sentient beings closely associated with them.

12 Manjusri represents the wisdom of all the Buddhas.

13 Avalokitesvara (Chinese: Kwan Yin, Japanese: Kannon, Tibetan: Chenresig) represents the compassion of all the Buddhas.

14 In India, there is a stigma attached to the left hand since it is used for certain unclean bodily functions.