

SAKYADHITA NEWSLETTER

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Announcing the Fourth International Sakyadhita Conference

Leh, Ladakh - August 1995

Sakyadhita is please to announce that the Fourth International Sakyadhita Conference will be held in Leh, Ladakh, Northern India, in the beginning of August, 1995. The conference will be jointly sponsored by Sakyadhita (International Association of Buddhist Women) and the Ladakh Buddhist Association, with the cooperation of many Ladakhi women's associations.

Situated high in the Himalayas, Ladakh is a mountainous land with an old and unique Buddhist culture. Its snowy peaks shelter fertile valleys and villages over 17,000 feet high. Its people, while adapting modern technology to make their lives easier, are striving to preserve their ancient traditions, especially their Buddhist heritage. Open to the outside world only since 1979, Ladakh offers solitude, spiritual inspiration, majestic mountain panoramas, and gentle people, in addition to commendable tourist facilities.

Program planning is underway. Some suggestions for the overall theme of the conference so far include: "Lifestyle Choices: Lay Practice or Monastic?" "Feminism and Buddhism," "Buddhist Women and Power," with economic, spiritual, social, and institutional power as subtopics. We solicit additional suggestions for the overall conference theme.

After the opening ceremony, one day will be spent on the presentation of papers by invited speakers, with 30-minute discussion groups following. Another day will be devoted to papers solicited from the public. We invite people to submit papers on a topics of their choice. Papers or abstracts of at least 500 words should be received by January 1, 1995, for consideration. Authors of selected papers will be notified by February 1 and will be invited to read their papers at the conference.

The next three days, we will hold workshops to go into each of several topics in more depth. The following topics have been suggested for these workshops:

- 1.Re-establishing the bhiksuni order;
- 2.Buddhist education for the modern day;
- 3.Dharma and family;
- 4.Buddhism and social action.

People who would like to serve as workshop leaders are invited to submit a resume or description of prior experience. The sixth day will be a Sakyadhita meeting and closing ceremony. The seventh day will be devoted to visiting the famous monasteries located around Leh Valley. Another optional sightseeing tour will be planned for those who will be able to stay longer. Meditations will be held each morning and Buddhist ceremonies will be held each evening to give participants insight into the rich variety of Buddhist traditions.

Flights between Delhi and Leh are heavily booked during the summer months. Therefore, those interested in attending the conference must make their plans early. Please send in the accompanying form so that we may keep you informed.

We will try to make accommodations available at a range of prices, such as \$5, \$10 and \$20 per day. We hope to provide vegetarian lunch at the conference site.

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL SAKYADHITA CONFERENCE

Information Request

I am interested in attending the Fourth International Sakyadhita Conference. Please send further information.

Enclosed find my conference registration fee of US\$50

(check or money order drawn on a U.S. bank)

I am interested in presenting a paper at the Conference.

Please send information on flights from Delhi to Leh.

I am interested in accommodations in the following range:

\$5 a day \$10 a day \$20 a day

I can offer the following talents or ideas:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Country: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Please send to:

Sakyadhita

400 Hobron Lane #2615

Honolulu, HI 96815

USA

Report on the Third International Sakyadhita Conference on Buddhist Women

Colombo, Sri Lanka - October 25-29, 1993

by Gabriele Küstermann

A warm reception awaited participants arriving in Colombo for the third International Sakyadhita Conference on Buddhist Women. We experienced two kinds of warmth. First was the warm-hearted welcome of the Sri Lankan women who organized the conference and provided kind hospitality throughout our stay in Sri Lanka. Second was the warm climate of Sri Lanka, with plenty of sunshine during the day and thunderstorms nearly every night.

The inauguration of the conference took place on the October 25 at the huge hall of Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall in Colombo," under the patronage of the President of Sri Lanka, His Excellency D.B. Wijetunga. President Wijetunga and special guests lit the flame that marks the opening of important celebrations in Sri Lanka. In his words of welcome to the audience of 1500, he stressed that Sri Lankan women are well on their way to full emancipation. He reminded the audience that Sri Lanka was the first country in the world to elect a woman, Mrs. Bandaranaike, as Prime Minister. Another encouraging message was delivered by Bhikkhu Bellanwila Dhammaratana of the Buddhist Library in Singapore, who generously sponsored the inaugural ceremony, providing tea for all in attendance and dana (the noon meal) to hundreds of monks and nuns. The President of the Mahabodhi Society of Sri Lanka, Mr. Gamani Jayasuriya, then spoke on the important role women play in maintaining family life and a moral society, especially in view of the pressures of modern life.

The next speakers at the inaugural ceremony were Ms. Kusuma Devendra and Ms. Ranjani de Silva, the gallant President and Secretary of Sakyadhita Sri Lanka, who were responsible for the seamless organization of the conference. Hon. Renuka Herath, Minister of Health and Women's Affairs of Sri Lanka, and Ven. Hye Choon Suk, President of the Korean Bhiksuni Association, then offered their words of congratulations to the assembly. The next guest speakers were the President and Secretary of Sakyadhita International, Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh of Bangkok and Bhiksuni Karma Lekshe Tsomo of Honolulu, and the President of the National Association of Dasa Silmathas of Sri Lanka, Panagoda Mithragnanassari Silmatha.

The women speakers were especially direct in addressing the problems women face as they try to gain greater opportunities and shoulder more of the responsibility for spreading the Buddha's teachings. They explained that Buddhist women need to be free to use their capabilities and potentialities in order to better serve humanity. They especially stressed the deficiencies women face regarding education in the religious field.

The subject of re-establishing the Bhikkuni Order in Sri Lanka, a highly controversial subject in Sri Lanka, fared badly during preparations for the conference. The Ministry of Buddha Sasana (Buddhist Affairs) offered their support to the conference on the

condition that the re-establishment of the Bhiksuni Order not be a subject of discussion! This was naturally an affront to Buddhist women, in view of the fact that the re-establishment of the Bhiksuni Order is wished for by women all over the world, is one of the goals of Sakyadhita. Sakyadhita Sri Lanka refused to agree to avoid the topic and instead, in a diplomatic coup, won the support of the President of Sri Lanka.

The audience was reminded of the famous Buddhist women in Sri Lankan history, particularly the renowned Bhiksunis Sanghamitta and Devasara. It was Bhiksuni Devasara who, together with other bhiksunis, brought the Dharmagupta lineage of the Bhiksuni precepts from Sri Lanka to southern China during the fourth century after Christ. The long-lasting effect was that this lineage is the only bhiksuni transmission still extant in this world in the world today. East Asian countries of Taiwan, Korea and Vietnam reaching from there out to Western countries. In this context, it is interesting to note that this historical event has been recorded by Chinese historians, but so far it was impossible to trace back this event in the historical records of Sri Lanka as - since a certain date in Sri Lankan History - the Theravadin School dominated there and took care that no evidence of other Buddhist schools and Bodhisattava Statues point to the former existence of Mahayana Schools in Sri Lanka.

At the end of the conference, a resolution was handed over to the press and published word by word the next day in the "Daily News" of Colombo. Here, diplomatically the word Bhiksuni Ordination was not applied, but instead the women participants of the Conference demanded "equal opportunities" for women on all levels.

During the conference, this subject was discussed freely. Bhiksuni Ven. Jampa Tsedroen gave her talk during the first plenary session in the afternoon of the opening day on "Challenges in monastic life today" which was discussed with high interest immediately after the talk and throughout the conference in a workshop with an increasing number of Dasa Silmathas participating. Lacking education on this topic the Dasa Silmathas took their chance to question this topic and finally to demand the re-establishment of the Bhiksuni Order in Sri Lanka. But it was also evident that the first thing to do in Sri Lanka is to improve the education of the women interested to become part of the Sangha.

Mr. Senarat Wijayasundera, Lecturer for Pali and Buddhist Studies at the University of Colombo, gave a very interesting talk on "Women in Theravada Countries with Special Reference to Nuns: Problems and Solutions." The talk of Dr. Paula Arai, now Lecturer at the University of Hong Kong dealt with "Japanese monastic women in historical and cultural context."

The Conference theme was Buddhist Women in Modern Society.

Bhiksuni Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, the "heart" of Sakyadhita International compared the experiences of Christian and Buddhist women in her talk and...(Lekshe you better fill this gap yourself with the message you really wanted to give....!)

Dharmacharini Sanghadevi of the "Friends of the Western Buddhist Order" spoke on the "Role of laywomen in Buddhism" in general, but also especially about the opportunities and activities of Buddhist women in the F.W.B.O. and explained the basis of the ordination of a Dharmacharini or Dharmachari, a vow which could be put between the five vows of Lay Buddhists and the ten vows of a novice nun or monk. This kind of a Lay Order has been put into life by its founder Sangharakshita, now living in England.

"Maintaining human values at a time of rapid change" was the subject of the talk given by Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh. She stressed the importance of the belief in the Four Noble Truths, the basics of the Teaching of the Buddha, a belief which is based on understanding and which definitely could help to keep and cultivate high human values in this world if practiced.

President of Sakyadhita Sri Lanka, Dr. Kusuma Devendra gave a talk on "Peace and Conflict Resolution in a Threatened World." This subject has also in Sri Lanka a very sad background. At the moment about 600,000 people from the North of the Island wandered to the South to escape the heavy fights between radical Tamils and Sinhalese forces. The refugees are Sinhalese, as well as Tamils, which shows again very clearly that in these fights of political fanatics all groups of inhabitants are suffering although they do not wish to be involved.

Another talk reminded the audience of the fate of Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Aung Sang Suu Kyi of Burma, who lives in house arrest in Rangoon. In constant fear losing her life, she stays on to call forth the attention of the world public to the abominable state of life, the Burmese people are enduring under the dictatorship of the Generals who seized the power. May all considerate beings in the world include her protectively in their prayers!!

Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo has now been asked to prepare the Conference Proceedings of the 2nd and 3rd International Sakyadhita Conference for publication. It is planned to publish the proceedings in an economic manner in Sri Lanka to make them available for everybody interested in the topics. As soon as the proceedings will come out of press we will report.

After the conference, the participants of 20 countries were invited to a tour by bus to the most holy places of Sri Lanka. Starting from Colombo we went up the hills to Kandy, former capital of Sri Lanka where the Sakyadhita members of Kandy received us accompanied by nicely decorated elephants and a group of drum and flute players who were leading us to the most holy temple where the relic of a tooth of the Buddha is kept. We were lucky enough to be allowed to enter the very center of the temple where the tooth is enshrined. After that the local Association of Buddhist Women treated us with a wonderful Sri Lankan lunch. Their speaker felt encouraged by the activities of Sakyadhita and in turn encouraged Sakyadhita to go on in their efforts to make life of Buddhist women more meaningful.

After that we left for Anuradhapura, the historical starting point of the spread of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Mahinda, son of the great Indian Emperor Ashoka came to visit Sri Lanka in the 3rd century B.C. and brought with him the teachings of the Buddha which were readily accepted and understood by the king of that region and consequently spread all over the Island. A little later only followed by his sister, the Bhiksuni Sanghamitta with a big group of Bhiksunis and established the Bhiksuni Order in Sri Lanka. It was also Bhiksuni Sanghamitta who brought a sapling of the Sacred Sri Maha Bodhi Tree in Bodh Gaya to Anuradhapura. The Sri Lankans claim that the present Bodhi Tree at that place is the same one originally planted there exactly 2300 years ago. Offsprings of this Bodhi Tree again have been planted all over Sri Lanka and are highly revered.

The patron of the conference, H.E. the President of Sri Lanka, pointed out before in his inauguration speech to this anniversary which will be celebrated on Full Moon Day in December 1993 saying: "This event as you would agree is of particular significance to the Buddhist women of Sri Lanka. I have no doubt that they will take the lead in celebrating the event in a fitting manner." In preparing the celebration two golden shining statues of the two royal brother and sister were brought from Thailand to Colombo and led in grand procession from Colombo to Anuradhapura. (see photo of the Statue of Bhiksuni Sanghamitta).

We hope that our sisters in Sri Lanka managed to prevent that the loudspeakers at the Bodhi Tree Temple, announcing constantly names of sponsors of the temple can go on disturbing by this severely the prayers of the many pilgrims coming from all parts of the island as well as from all parts of the world.

The reporter has no doubt that the conference and the favorable and vivid commentaries in press and television will help Sakyadhita Sri Lanka in future to pursue their goals much more effectively. Their calls to the public to sponsor Sakyadhita Sri Lanka with properties to fulfil the goal of establishing schools and institutes for the education of the Dasa Silmathas already had very positive reactions in the week after the conference with two offers. Also the founder and President of the Sarvodaya Movement, Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne, offered to cooperate with Sakyadhita Sri Lanka by putting to their disposal the infrastructure of this organization for education purposes.

I also want to repeat the message of the german born Bhikkhu Ven. Nyanaponika which was printed in the extra edition of the "Daily News" on the Inauguration day of the conference, saying: "This conference is very timely. In the present situation in the world, we cannot afford to be left without the great power for good that exists in Buddhist womanhood and even more so in the renunciation of Buddhist nuns. This potential has too often been neglected or ignored due to indifference or prejudice. The great and laudable objective is to deliberate on ways and means for improving the situation of Buddhist nuns everywhere, their education and their spiritual progress. As a Theravadin monk, I wish to express my full support of these important aims and offer my best wishes for the success of this undertaking . It is my hope that you will not be content with just listening to lectures and formulating declarations, but that you will also decide on action. These are not leisurely times and we cannot allow ourselves delays, but must be determined."

Last but not least the reporter on the conference wants to thank the organizers of this conference and allow her to name here especially our sister Ranjani de Silva for the wonderful atmosphere and kind attention to us foreigners. We all will keep this as a treasure in our hearts and this will warm us up when continuing to work for the common goals in future.

As place of the "Fourth International Sakyadhita Conference," Sakyadhita International favors Ladakh in Summer 1995. As soon as the official invitation is received the Sakyadhita Newsletter will report. Fax: (808) 9447070.

A personal report on the Third International Conference on Buddhist Women

by Elizabeth Harris

Dr. Harris, a scholar of Comparative Religions, presents her personal reflections on the last Sakyadhita Conference, held from October 25 to 29, 1993, at the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

I enjoyed the Third International Conference on Buddhist Women in Colombo, organized by Sakyadhita ("Daughters of the Buddha"): International Association of Buddhist Women. It drew ordained and lay people from over twenty countries and was a true meeting of sisters in the Dhamma. The series of conferences began in 1987 when some 150 women met at Bodhgayca in India for the First Conference on Buddhist Nuns. It was there that Sakyadhita was born. The second meeting was in Bangkok, this time embracing in its title both lay and ordained. The Colombo Conference came about

through the determination of one woman, Ranjani de Silva, who had been inspired at Bangkok to offer Sri Lanka as the next venue.

Doubt and controversy met Ranjani at the beginning. There were members of the Ministry of Buddha Sasana who opposed the whole idea, because they linked it with militant pressure for the re-introduction of the Bhikkhuni Order in Sri Lanka and decided that it was too contentious to touch. There were even some Buddhist women who were wary. Ranjani and her companion, Kusuma Devendra didn't give up, though at times they felt they were hitting their heads against a brick wall. Eventually, widespread support was gained. The result was so positive that Dr. Chatsumarn Kabil Singh, President of Sakyadhita, claimed lightheartedly that Ranjani might need a needle to puncture her ego because of her success.

The opening ceremony was held at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall. Bhikkhunis, samaneras, and silamaniyos were officially welcomed by the President of Sri Lanka, the President of the Maha Bodhi Society, and the Minister of Health and Women's Affairs. The Buddhist heritage of liberality to women was recalled and participants were urged to work for the good of religion and society.

At the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute, the Conference venue, the atmosphere was relaxed and informal. The most striking visual feature in the conference hall was the presence of the silamaniyos, or dasasilmathas. These Sri Lankan women renunciators follow a ten-precept ordination, the only ordination possible for women in Sri Lanka. Ninety-four of them were registered participants. Their yellow and orange robes filled a good section of the hall. Continuous translation into Sinhala was given and, although only a handful spoke in plenary sessions, their concerns dominated many of the small discussion groups scheduled for the mornings and afternoons.

My discussion group contained three vocal and lively silamaniyos eager to talk about their problems, from handling money to improving their English, from the discipline of younger nuns to their hope of a Theravada bhikkhuni ordination. They were articulate and convincing.

The orange robes of the silamaniyo mingled with the maroon robes of the Tibetan nuns from Dharamsala and the Westerners trained in the Tibetan tradition, the brown of the two nuns from Amaravati in England, the light grey of the bhikkhunis from Singapore, the sarees of the Sri Lankan lay women, and informal western styles. The majority of participants were Sri Lankan, but it was Buddhism as a world religion which was present in Colombo, a religion which had adapted itself to every culture it had touched. The largest foreign delegations were from Singapore and Thailand, but there were women from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Korea, India, Russia, Taiwan and Australia, as well as America and several European countries. An important question for me was whether Buddhism could create unity in such diversity.

The Conference theme was "Buddhist Women in Modern Society." Kusuma Devendra wrote in the Conference souvenir issued at the opening: "We believe that women who have the lifebearing capacity and nurturing capacity as wives and mothers are capable of changing the present trends of the world." In a paper given during the conference, she explained what she meant by this, stressing the need for women to develop a higher consciousness which could destroy selfish striving and conflictcreating attitudes. Reformation of the mind and then of the world was the Conference's main emphasis. In this, there was unity. East met West. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, who is from Thailand, touched the heart of it. Speaking on "Maintaining Human Values in a Time of Rapid Change," she described the tragic imbalance in the world between material and spiritual development, and pleaded for Buddhist women to help reverse this by a radical letting go of the self "and everything that is connected to self." She added: "What is the purpose of our coming together? We want to go forward in sisterhood. There is only one word that I can describe-faith. Faith in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha is the key word that will enable us, sisters, to work together for the upliftment of our sisters and Buddhism as a religion."

Refuge in the Three Jewels was also stressed by Dharmacharini Sanghadevi, a member of the Western Buddhist Order from England. Stating that the survival of Buddhism depended on "spiritually vital practitioners," she urged everyone to a lifetime commitment to the Three Jewels and said: "Only if we are able to reach this level of confidence in the Three Jewels will we be able to set up the conditions for the arising of Insight, thus entering the Stream. Only with Stream Entrants and beyond will the Buddhadharma survive." She equated stream entrance with the arising of bodhicitta, which she described vividly as "the eruption of the transcendental within the mundane...an outpouring of boundless compassion into the universe."

In all of this, there was an intense urgency and a vision of a world transformed by the eradication of selfish greed. Individual mind culture was seen as the starting point. All would have agreed with this. Divergence came with the level of social involvement this should lead to. At one end of the spectrum was Kusuma Devendra whose presentation on "Peace and Conflict Resolution in a Threatened World" concentrated solely on conflict eradication in the mind.

At the other end was a vibrant account by Theja Gunawardhana of the political courage of the detained but democratically elected ruler of Burma, Aung Sang Suu Kyi. Stating that "Karuna [compassion] is the foundation of Buddhist practice. Ahimsa [non-harm] is the practice of karuna in the form of moral and spiritual sacrifice," Theja presented Suu Kyi as an embodiment of the power of metta [loving kindness] at the heart of the solar system, and added: "She is the embodiment of political righteousness which the Buddha held tantamount to human righteousness. Both are one. We see how Suu Kyi has grasped the social dimension of the precepts laid down by the Buddha. To her, one-sided emphasis on passively negative aspects of the religious life has no significance. She has in her mahakaruna [great loving kindness] opened her own heart to the trials and woes of human experience."

Others simply stressed the importance of action. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh emphasized that Buddhist women must offer their services "to the betterment of our society." Sanghadevi claimed, "A selfish Buddhist is a contradiction in terms." It was only in the presentation of Ven. Jampa Tsedroen, a German trained in the Tibetan tradition, that the struggle to create a balance between meditation and action was mentioned. For her, it was a major issue: "I am sure you will agree that Buddhists have to support the nonviolent struggle for world peace, especially monks and nuns, but to what extent? We cannot meditate on the Four Immeasurables - love, compassion, joy, and equanimity - and then not take an active interest in the welfare of the living beings next to us. This would make us untrustworthy. But what to do if as a result of this attitude everybody in a monastic community gets so active that one does not find any place for study and meditation? What to do if monks and nuns become even more active than lay people or managers?"

The Conference as a whole did not take up Jampa Tsedroen's concern seriously. There was little analysis of either the socioeconomic and political forces which lead to conflict

or the kind of active involvement appropriate for Buddhists. There was certainly a deep awareness of the reality of dukkha [suffering] on a worldwide scale. There was no triumphalism about human achievement. Consumerism, the ecological crisis, war and the breakdown of family values formed a backdrop to the conference. Yet these problems did not come to the center of discussion, which some saw as a failing. Members of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists from Thailand shared their disappointment with me that the tone of the conference was too academic and avoided talk of practical action in the political and social spheres. Others noticed that the sociopolitical situation in Sri Lanka was hardly mentioned. In private conversations, I was asked about the human rights situation, the war, the ethnic question, and the existence of poverty and malnutrition. Concern for all of this was present, but it was not expressed formally.

If there was one topic which touched social struggle, it was ordination for women. Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, an American nun and Secretary of Sakyadhita, stated in a paper tabled but not read at the conference, "Today, at an international conference in the capital of the modern nation of Sri Lanka, we have been forbidden to discuss the issue of ordination for Buddhist women." At some point in the planning, this stricture might have been present, but by the time the final program was ready, the ordination of women was firmly on the agenda.

The second plenary presentation was by Senarat Wijayasundara of the University of Colombo. Although this paper was titled "Women in Theravada Countries with Special Reference to Nuns: Problems and Solutions," the daily program billed it as: "The Order of Buddhist Nuns - Its Revival: Arguments For and Against." Stating that Buddhism in Sri Lanka was incomplete and defective through the lack of a Bhikkhuni Order, Dr. Wijayasundara outlined six possible ways of reintroducing it. The reaction he provoked, especially among some of the Sri Lankan participants, was emotional. Hands clapped vigorously. Arms waved. A heated discussion followed with calls for decisive action. It was obvious to me that some wanted ordination to become the key conference issue. This was not allowed to happen. Although ordination was openly present on the programme, there was no provision for it to become central, and purposely so. I feel this was partly because of political sensitivities, but it was also due to the fact that ordination was simply not the most important issue for many present. What some felt was central, others dismissed as peripheral. Any fear or hope that the conference would inevitably center on reactivating the Bhikkhuni Order in Sri Lanka was unfounded. Among the foreign delegates, there were some who accepted that the issue was important but did

not feel it should be pursued for its own sake. However, there was another voice which challenged the very root of the ordination concept.

The Pali Canon speaks of a Fourfold Society, consisting of monks, nuns, lay men and lay women, and the wellbeing of society is seen to lie in the healthy functioning of each part. Supporters of Bhikkhuni ordination at the conference unfailingly appealed to the idea. Jampa Tsedroen, for instance, suggested that Sri Lanka could no longer be considered a "central land" in which the Dhamma flourished because the four categories of disciples were not present and it was on this that Dr. Wijayasundara rested his view that Buddhism in Theravada countries was defective. Yet Dharmacharini Sanghadevi of the Western Buddhist Order in England, when speaking on "The Role of Laywomen in Buddhism," posed a radical challenge to the whole concept. She claimed that the socioeconomic classes represented in the Buddhist texts made no sense in a western context and that new structures were necessary. She therefore cast doubt on the relevance of the lay/ordained distinction for the West. The image of "lay women" seemed to speak to her of "blind support" of an often corrupt Bhikkhu Sangha and a conditioning productive of dependence and lack of creativity. She urged Eastern women to cease such support. "There is nothing to be gained spiritually in venerating someone who is not worthy of veneration, and unfortunately not all bhikkhus are so worthy," she declared. She put her own Order forward as a new model: "We have only one set of precepts for both women and men, and therefore only one "ordination," i.e., the Dharmacharini, Dharmacari ordination, which means that in the WBO/TBMS one is ordained simply as a full practising member of the Sangha, not as a laywoman or layman, a nun or a monk or any one of the other three classes of socioreligious persons. Our Order embraces those who live in family situations, those who are single parents, those who are single, those who are celibate. In doing so, it offers a new model to the rest of the Buddhist world."

Sanghadevi's presentation produced reactions both from Sri Lankan women and from Westerners who had accepted the Asian tradition. An American nun, Ven. Miao Kwang Sudharma, walked emotionally to the front after the talk and warned that Westerners should be very careful before tampering with any word of the Buddha. For her, the Fourfold Society concept was central to Buddhism and she embodied this in her yellow robes. Similarly, the Sri Lankan chairperson stressed that bowing down to members of the Sangha did not show blind support of corrupt monks but reverence for the renunciation the robe represented.

The question of ordination, therefore, touched a wider issue- that of the changes a religion undergoes when it moves across cultures to become a world religion. The Westerners present who had shown support for the traditional pattern by taking robes were yet quick to admit that their path in the West was not always easy. Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo claimed that she sometimes felt a greater affinity with Roman Catholic nuns than with some western Buddhist lay women who saw her robes as symbolizing a wish for superiority rather than a commitment to the Dhamma. Ven. Jampa Tsedroen opened her presentation on challenges to monastic life by sharing that there had been times when she had questioned whether nuns and monks had the right to exist. She had decided that they had, but she also stressed that "Westerners cannot and do not want to become Asians. But many of them want to become Buddhists and some even want to become Buddhist monks and nuns. Therefore one challenge-not only of monastic life, but also of Buddhist life today-is to take the essence of Buddhism, separating it from Asian culture, and to transfer only this essence to the West."

From the very beginning of Buddhism's success in the West, this plea has been present. Yet, there were also voices at the Conference which challenged stereotyped cultural polarizations between East and West. For instance, Dr Lorna Devaraja made a powerful case that women in precolonial Sri Lanka had enjoyed more freedom and greater equality with men than her nonBuddhist counterparts in Asia and the West. She stressed that the core of Buddhism was liberating for women and that such liberation had existed in practice in Asian society, challenging any inference that the role of Sri Lankan lay woman was inevitably one of dependence. Examples of Asian women's struggles for greater freedom within society also came from Japan and, as previously mentioned, from Burma, offering paradigms more challenging than some western stereotypes of Asia would suggest. The issues surrounding the creation of a western Buddhism truly able to speak to western society will stretch far beyond the Conference.

A further important area where I sensed divergence of views was in attitudes to Buddhist-Christian relationships. Mr. Gamini Jayasuriya, the President of the Maha Bodhi Society, at the opening ceremony, urged Buddhist women to protect family values and to defend Buddhism by combatting the threat of Christian evangelistic organizations which "subvert the religion and culture of our people, and introduce alien ideas and alien values." This did not become a major theme during the days which followed. Yet I was told that every small discussion group had raised the question of "unethical conversions" as a threat to Buddhism. Mistrust of Christianity was very much present, but it was strongest among the Sri Lankan participants. I wanted to invite two Christian friends to Ven. Karma Lekshe's presentation, "Comparing Buddhist and Christian

Women's Experiences." When I asked a Sri Lankan organizer whether this would be possible, there was hesitation and even reluctance. When I shared this reaction with a foreign delegate from America, there was surprise and disbelief, and I was advised to go straight to the President of Sakyadhita. Eventually, my two friends were warmly welcomed, particularly by the speaker, who had written in her tabled paper: "Buddhist and Christian women have much to share and much to learn from one another... By networking in their local communities, women spiritual practitioners can provide each other with encouragement and support for spiritual values. By linking up on an international level, they can be of great benefit in the modern world... By bridging religious differences, they set an example for the world's peoples to emulate in overcoming strife and discovering our common humanity on the deepest spiritual level."

Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo was not alone in her attitude. Ven. Jampa Tsedroen quoted Thomas Merton with respect as a fellow monastic who had helped her to see that "overactivity is a hindrance to inner development." At several points in her talk on the monastic life, she included Christian monastics in her comments. However, there was a marked difference between Western and Eastern experiences here. From the West came a voice which asserted that Buddhist and Christian monastics shared common problems and could give strength to one another, while remaining true to their religion. From Sri Lanka came the voice of mistrust, based on painful experience of missionary aggression in the colonial period and contemporary allegations of unethical conversion campaigns.

The Conference organizers were determined to present the best side of Sri Lanka to participants. During the Conference, visits were arranged to Kelaniya Raja Maha Vihara and the International Buddhist Cultural Centre at Nedimale. Afterwards, there was a pilgrimage to Kandy and Anuradhapura during which delegates received VIP treatment and a warm Sri Lankan welcome wherever they went. The only Sri Lankan struggle officially highlighted was the need to improve the education and situation of the dasasilmathas. To this end, a resolution was passed at the end of the Conference to work towards a residential training centre for nuns in Sri Lanka.

As a person committed to social action as well as mind culture, I wished there had been more analysis of the forces within "Modern Society" which we were being asked to engage with or to counter. I know that some delegates would have valued more information about the ongoing violence in Sri Lanka and poverty. Although unavoidable, it was also a shame that Sri Lankan participants remained somewhat separate from the

rest. Due to a lack of space, they ate in a different building and usually left in the late afternoon.

The strengths of the Conference, however, outweighed any shortcomings. After this, the third conference, I was aware of a far greater understanding between Buddhist traditions than at the first. At the first conference, sisterhood had been hoped for. In Colombo, it was a fact due to the 6½ years of Sakyadhita's existence. When speakers exhorted us to spread the Dhamma, to find hope in the Dhamma, to revolutionize the world with Dhamma, to join hands with Dhamma women everywhere, there was unity and urgency - the authentic voice of Sakyadhita.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

France: Towards a Bhiksuni Order in the West

Plum Village will host a retreat for sharing experiences on the future of a Bhiksuni Order in the West. The retreat is scheduled for June 25 to 30, 1995, in southwestern France. The focus of the discussion will be how to ensure that communities of nuns flourish in the West.

Plum Village is a Buddhist practice community under the guidance of the Vietnamese Zen master Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh. It includes a group of 25 nuns of Vietnamese, American, and European origin who have been studying and developing community practice life together for many years. These nuns would like to practice and share experiences with nuns of other religions and traditions, with discussions on issues of monastic life.

The retreat will be conducted in English with translation into French, Vietnamese, and possibly other languages. It is open to monks, lay people, Buddhists, and non-Buddhists as well as nuns.

Those interested in attending are encouraged to write as quickly as possible so that more detailed information may be sent and arrangements made. The address is: Nuns' Retreat, Attention: Sister Françoise, Coordinator, Plum Village, Meyrac, F-47120 Loubes-Bernac, France. Tel: (33) 53947540, Fax: (33) 53947590.

France: A Fragrant Mountain Ordination Ceremony

A Fragrant Mountain Ordination Ceremony has been held at Plum Village, the Buddhist community in the southwest of France founded and led by the renowned Vietnamese master Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh. The ceremony, held on August 5 this year, consisted of a transmission of the bhikṣu and bhikṣuṇī pratimokṣa precepts, including transmission of precepts by a council of qualified bhikṣuṇīs.

According to the Vietnamese tradition, a sramāṇerikā (novice nun) may receive the full ordination after two or three years. Nuns meeting this qualification and possessing a letter of sponsorship from their teacher were eligible to receive the full vows during the Fragrant Mountain Ordination Ceremony. Those nuns not currently under the guidance of a master were invited to go two months beforehand to practice with the community at Plum Village under the guidance and sponsorship of Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh.

Retreats for nuns, monks, and lay people are held at Plum Village each year during the summer months. More information is available by writing:

Sr. True Virtue

Plum Village,

Meyrac 47120

Loubes Bernac

France

India: Mongolian Nuns Arrive in Dharamsala

On June 6, four Mongolian nuns arrived in India to begin studies in Buddhist philosophy. Several years ago, the four sramanerikas (novice nuns) were among the first group of Mongolian women to receive the five precepts of an upasika (Buddhist laywoman) in recent history. Ven. Bakula Rinpoche, a highly revered lama from Ladakh and currently Indian Ambassador to Mongolia, served as their preceptor.

Thubten Dolma and Thubten Kunze of Drolma Lhakang, a practice center for women in Ulan Bator, were then among the first group of eight women to receive the sramanerika precepts from Ven. Bakula Rinpoche in 1993. This was presumably the first time in history that Mongolian women received ordination as nuns. Thubten Choden and Thubten Dechen of Naljorma Lhakang, the other practice center for women in Ulan Bator, were among the second group of women to become ordained, also receiving the precepts from Ven. Bakula Rinpoche.

The nuns, ranging in age from 20 to 25, have received from 8 to 10 years of secular education and have each studied Buddhism privately for several years. In April this year, they were awarded scholarships to study at Jamyang Choling Institute for Buddhist Women in Dharamsala, India. Travelling by air for two days from Ulan Bator, via Beijing and Bangkok, the nuns arrived in Delhi to temperatures above 127 degrees Fahrenheit. Undaunted by heat, fatigue, or language difficulties, they set off with water bottles to tour the historical sites of Delhi. New-found friends from Honolulu were duly impressed by their good humor and lively interest in everything, despite the immanent threat of heat prostration.

We nearly lost three of Mongolia's brightest on the platform of New Delhi Station, amidst the clamoring masses of erstwhile travellers. Fortunately we found them, bewildered and terrified, squeezed among the mob of thousands, and enjoyed a reunion of laughter and tears minutes before the train pulled out. After an 18hour journey to Dharamsala by train and jeep, the nuns were welcomed by senior students of the Institute and escorted to their new lodgings - a dilapidated hut of stone and mud nestled in the Himalayan pine forest. Nonplussed, they happily settled in, neatly arranging Mongolia woolens and sheepskins on the beds, prayer books and ritual instruments on the shelves behind.

The next challenge was linguistic, as they struggled to communicate in English or Tibetan - whichever emerged first. Many humorous moments ensued. Throwing grammar to the wind, they proceeded valiantly in their efforts to communicate. Instead of "Fleas are eating me," Thubten Dechen declared, "I am eating fleas." We, of course, advised her not to eat too many! Before long, due to the vagueries of Tibetan verb forms, she began having the same problem with mice. Besides being of linguistic interest, this may give readers some insight into living conditions in the romantic solitude of the Himalayas.

As the first Mongolian women to study Buddhism in India, the nuns were kindly granted a private audience with His Holiness the Dalai Lama soon after arrival. Unfurling blue scarves of greeting in the Mongolian style, the nuns paid their respects to their country's undisputed spiritual leader. They then presented their offerings: natural incense and dried cheese. His Holiness took a keen interest and encouraged them in their studies.

India: Monastic Training Course for Nuns

A course in monastic training for nuns is scheduled for three weeks in February, 1996. For many years, Western monastics, especially nuns, have felt the lack of proper monastic training. Western bhiksunis who attended the Conference of Western Buddhist

Teachers in Dharamsala in March, 1993, discussed this problem with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who enthusiastically supported the idea of Western nuns providing this training for themselves.

Four Western bhiksunis - Thubten Chodron, Jampa Chökyi, Sangye Khandro, and Tenzin Palmo - have subsequently planned to organize a training and educational program at Sarnath or one of the other Buddhist pilgrimage places in India. It will provide Western nuns of the Tibetan tradition with training similar to the strict training in the Chinese tradition which each of these four bhiksunis received during their higher ordination, with extremely beneficial results.

The program is directed primarily at nuns from all lineages of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, but nuns from other traditions are also welcome. Requests from lay women who are seriously considering ordination in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition will be considered on an individual basis. The schedule will consist of two sessions daily, including teachings, meditation, discussions, and time for individual practice. A number of respected Buddhist teachers have been invited to give teachings and training. The chief medium of communication will be English, though translation into other languages can be made upon request.

The purpose of the program is to provide an intensive educational program for new nuns to explore with them the meaning of being a Buddhist nun, providing opportunities for friendship and support. It will serve as a forum for discussing topics and problems encountered by Western nuns that are seldom addressed in a traditional setting.

Traditional Vinaya teachings and instructions on monastic behavior will be given, considered in the light of the present twentieth-century situation. Other topics include:

1. The history and approach of the various Buddhist traditions, with a view to differentiating between the Buddha's teachings and the cultures in which they exist;
2. The experiences of Christian, as well as Tibetan, Korean, Thai, and Western Buddhist nuns;
3. The development of counseling, listening and teaching skills, incorporating Buddhism and psychology;

4.The teachings concerning relying on a spiritual mentor and how they are frequently misunderstood;

5.Topics related to human relations: friendship, self-esteem, apologizing and forgiveness, compassion and assertiveness, jealousy, sexual feelings, guilt and purification, relaxation, doubt, intimacy and independence.

For more information, please contact:

Ven. Thubten Chodron

741 N. 70th Street

Seattle, WA 98103, U.S.A.

Fax: (206) 5457131

or

Ven. Sangye Khadro

Amitabha Buddhist Centre

494D Geylang Road

Singapore 1438

Fax: 657410438.

Russia: Dalai Lama's Visit Postponed

A visit by the Dalai Lama to Russia's two million Buddhists has been postponed because Moscow does not want to upset Beijing.

The Tibetan spiritual leader's trip to Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva regions, where there are Buddhist communities, has been put off until next year.

President Jiang Zemin of China is due to visit President Boris Yeltsin in Moscow in September. The two former rivals for influence in the communist bloc enjoy increasingly warm relations. China is also Russia's biggest arms customer.

Singapore: Sakyadhita Singapore now a charity!

Members are happy to announce that Sakyadhita Singapore's application for registration as a charitable organization was approved in July. This means that more delegates from Singapore will be able to attend the fourth International Sakyadhita Conference in Ladakh. The delegates hope to arrange a tour of Tibet, Bhutan, and Bodhgaya after the conference.

More information on the activities of Sakyadhita Singapore is available from Ven. Sek Bao Shi, recently elected treasurer of Sakyadhita International, at: 70 Jalan Lapang, Singapore 1441.

Sri Lanka: The Continuing Plight of the Dasasilmathas

Despite the tremendous success of the third International Sakyadhita Conference in Colombo, which was attended by the President of Sri Lanka, it is learned that the

Ministry of Buddhist Affairs has cut down the allocation for nuns (dasasilmathas) by fifty percent for 1994. As a result, the nuns do not even have the bus fare to meet in their districts and the district organizations have become defunct. This has proven to be a severe handicap to the nuns and their efforts to improve their education and living conditions. Members of Sakyadhita Sri Lanka are waiting to meet the new officials of the present government to discuss the situation.

Meanwhile, Sakyadhita Sri Lanka has defined its two main objectives as (1) helping the dasasilmathas (2) taking Dhamma to families at the village level. Efforts to achieve the first objective so far include communicating with dasasilmathas at the district level and collecting information about their education and qualifications. Most are keen to improve their knowledge of English, so as a pilot project, Sakyadhita will fund an English language program in Badulla district for an initial period of six months. A twoday workshop at the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute will provide motivation and training for community service, including first aid, preschool teaching, Dhamma counselling, and organization of meditation retreats.

Efforts to achieve the second objective include collaborating with other nongovernmental organizations to provide training in mental health care and Dhamma training, both in the family and in the village community. The Dhamma training programs center on meditation practice and discussions on how to apply Dhamma in daily life. Participants are very happy with these programs and find that they help them solve problems both at home and at work.

As part of this effort, Sakyadhita conducted a fiveday meditation retreat at Kelani Raja Maha Vihara attended by 100 people from all parts of the island, mostly women. Many were inspired to organize similar retreats in their own villages. The women are finding that the monks' attitudes toward Sakyadhita's objectives are positive.

Another program, one in which dasasilmathas have been active, is the care of longterm care patients. Sakyadhita has organized visits to the Home for Incurables at Rajagiriya, where volunteers bathed, cleaned, fed, and attended to all the personal needs of the residents. The chanting of the nuns, broadcast through the public address system, delighted the inmates, who invited them to hold a full night of chanting in November this

year. Similar visits to hospitals, orphanages, and care homes for the elderly are planned.

The needs of Sakyadhita Sri Lanka include transportation (a vehicle or travel funds), English teachers, and a building for establishing a permanent center in Colombo. Inquiries may be addressed to Sakyadhita Sri Lanka, 50 Alwis Perera Mawatha, Katubedda, Moratuwa, Sri Lanka. Telephone: 605489.

Tibet: Buddhist Nuns Sentenced to Prison

Eleven Tibetan Buddhist nuns have been sentenced to prison terms ranging from two to seven years, apparently for attempting a protest, Amnesty International reported.

The international human rights group Amnesty International said the nuns from Garu Nunnery, north of the Tibetan capital city of Lhasa, were arrested on June 14, 1993. The report was not clear on the reason for the arrests, but said unofficial sources in Lhasa speculated the nuns were arrested before they managed to begin a protest.

The nuns were 18 to 25 years of age. The report listed the sentences for eight of them, but said the jail terms for the remaining three were not known. It said the nuns were taken to Drapchi prison outside Lhasa, which holds Tibet's most serious political prisoners. Currently, of the 208 political prisoners there, 49 are nuns, 124 are monks, and 35 are laypeople, Amnesty International said.

United States and Australia: Interfaith Meditation Retreats

A unique Insight Meditation experience is offered to Buddhists, liberal Christians, and participants in 12-step programs, at Resources for Ecumenical Spirituality in the United States and Australia. Retreats often combine Buddhist and Christian practice, mostly Catholic, Quaker, and Theravada Buddhist. They feature integration of both Buddhist and Christian perspectives, especially in their contemplative component and in a spirit of openhearted inquiry. An interfaith contemplative forest monastery, open also to laity, is planned in Missouri, U.S.A.

Books and tapes are available. For further information, please contact: Rev. Dr. Mary Jo Meadow, RES, P.O. Box 6, Mankato, MN 56002-0006, U.S.A.

United States: Sakyadhita Hawai'i Hosts Dalai Lama Visit

His Holiness the Dalai Lama visited the Hawaiian Islands from April 14 to 18 this year at the invitation of Sakyadhita members in Hawai'i, working in conjunction with the EastWest Center, the U.H. School of Hawaiian, Asian, and Pacific Studies, the Spark M. Matsunaga Institute for Peace, and other community organizations.

The Dalai Lama has consistently championed policies of non-violence, even in the face of great aggression, articulating the concept of universal responsibility and its importance for creating world peace. The renowned spiritual leader, winner of the 1989 Nobel Prize, provided inspiration to thousands. His message was especially meaningful to the Hawaiian people, who are engaged in a peaceful struggle for self-determination not unlike the Tibetans'.

The overarching theme for the Dalai Lama's visit was "Compassion for World Peace." On April 14, he was welcomed by spiritual leaders of the Hawaiian people with a traditional Hawaiian blessing and offering ceremony (ho`okupu). The same day, in a special joint session of the Hawai`i State Legislature, he expressed appreciation for the State's successful multiculturalism.

On April 15, he participated in a daylong symposium on the topic of "Local Identity in the Global Community: Creating Peace in the 21st Century." Together with Ms. Pualani Kanahale, a Hawaiian spiritual leader from the Island of Hawai'i, and Dr. Chandra Muzaffar, a Muslim social activist from Malaysia, he shared perspectives on how the tensions that exist between local and global identities can be resolved to achieve peace in the world community. He stressed the important role that women, the first educators of children, play in this task.

On the morning of April 16, His Holiness addressed an interfaith gathering of more than 2,000 people on "Compassion for World Peace." Later that evening, at the Waikiki Shell, his talk on "Is a NonViolent Society Possible?" attracted more than 7,000. It was followed by an intercultural presentation of Hawaiian and Tibetan chants and songs. On April 17th, he travelled to the Island of Hawai`i, where he delivered a talk on "Compassion and Wisdom" at Wood Valley Temple.

Although Sakyadhita members were joined in their organizational efforts by friends of many other faiths, and of both genders, newspaper and television reports made special mention of the predominance of women in the planning. The coordinator of the visit, Karma Lekshe Tsomo, is currently Secretary of Sakyadhita International.

Buddhist Monasticism in the West

by Bhiksuni Tenzin Palmo

A native of England, Bhiksuni Tenzin Palmo began practicing Buddhism in the Theravada tradition, then later travelled to India, where she studied with Kamtrul Rinpoche at Tashi Jong. She has been a Buddhist nun for over thirty years, twelve of them spent in a cave meditating on her own. Having lived many years near a monastery with a hundred Tibetan monks, she has valuable experience to share concerning the monastic life. She now lives mainly in Assisi, Italy.

This presentation was given at a conference of Western Buddhist teachers in Dharamsala in 1993.

First, I would like to make it clear that monasticism is not for everybody nor should it be. However, there should exist the institution of monasticism for that small group of individuals who are drawn to the ideal of a total dedication to the Dharma through renunciation and purity. The information for this presentation is drawn from the Western monastic Sangha of the Tibetan tradition and does not refer to the Chithurst (Theravadin) community.

As we all know, modern society is based to a large extent on greed and the belief that happiness mainly depends on the acquisition of material things and the satisfaction of our desires. Sex and violence rage everywhere nowadays. The monastic Sangha is a group of people whose lives are based on purity, renunciation, restraint, and discipline on reducing wants and desires. This goes directly against the stream of the world. And even Dharma centers are not immune to the idea that more is beautiful.

Traditionally, in the East, the Sangha had the role of preserving and transmitting the Dharma. People in the East supported the Dharma and respected the Sangha. They loved the Sangha and were very proud of them.

In the West this is not the case. For one thing, many of the scholars and meditation teachers who transmit the Dharma are lay people. However, this fact does not mean that the Sangha is useless for the modern world. The Sangha preserves a way of life

based upon Dharma principles. They are a living example that restraint and simplicity bring happiness and peace. They remind us that one can live with no sex, no family, few possessions, no security, and yet be perfectly happy and content.

The Sangha should have the time to devote themselves to study and practice without the material problems of earning a living or the emotional entanglements of personal relationships which are too close. The Sangha has freedom, both physical and emotional, which is often not available to those who have to live a lay life.

Unfortunately, modern attitudes which stem from our Protestant and materialistic background cause Western Buddhists to have a strong sense of superiority of family, close intimate relationships (i.e., sexual) and success in their lives and careers. These values are then projected as desirable despite the fact that they are mostly based on desires and attachments. Many people practice the Dharma within this lifestyle and regard it as a superior practice. Members of the Sangha are consequently seen as escapists, neurotics, parasites, as people unable to face the challenge of intimate relationships, and so on. This is something we know all too well. Renunciation is disparaged and misunderstood. It is seen as a perversion, and the renunciant is regarded as someone who can't make it in the world, because the world has renounced and rejected him or her!

A true monastic lives without any security, depending on the unsolicited generosity of others. This is not being a parasite! This is going forth in faith. Jesus said, "Give ye no thought unto the morrow what ye shall eat and what ye shall wear." That, in a way, is what being a member of the Sangha is all about. Not overmuch concerned with your physical existence, you have faith that the Dharma will provide you with enough for your needs. If from your side you practice in all sincerity, there is the faith that you will never starve and will be supported in every way.

In Dharma circles in the West, the Sangha lives in a kind of limbo. They are neither supported by the lay community, nor even by the lamas themselves. Even when there is some support forthcoming from centers where they work, they are nonetheless secondclass citizens in many ways. They are given poor places to stay, and are treated inferior to paying guests who have lots of money and can support the centers.

The Sangha is always shoved into the background. This is really true. They are given very little personal attention. They receive very little respect or even appreciation for having in fact devoted their whole lives to the Dharma. Centers are mainly geared towards lay people, while the Sangha are shunted to one side and considered unimportant. Quite often they are overworked, running centers with very little training or experience. People have very high expectations, and the stress of maintaining high standards is very difficult with very little training.

The Sangha community consists of imperfect human beings, after all, needing some sympathy and appreciation. But they very rarely get it, actually. Monastics in the West lose out on the pleasures of family life and the worldly life, while at the same time having very few of the joys of a true monastic life, because they are usually not living in a community. Living by themselves, prohibited from doing the things that lay people can do, and not living a monastic life either, they are reduced to a kind of monastic bardo (intermediate realm). It is a very hard life for many of these Sangha in centers. As they often do not live in monastic communities where close relationships are possible, some of them feel very lonely. They feel that they are unable to integrate the ideal of nonattachment with friendship. They feel that affection towards others means only becoming involved again, something unsuitable for monastics.

Unable to balance these two, their practice becomes sterile, causing them to feel alienated from people around them. They often feel that the robe itself alienates them from other people, causing others to act artificially towards them, preventing any close relationships. Some feel uncomfortable wearing robes on the street because people stare, and shout "Hare Krishna;" they feel conspicuous and on show. They feel the robe separates them from others so that they cannot even help people effectively. They get very little support from the lamas. This is true, your Holiness. Western lay people are not even encouraged to esteem the Sangha, at least not the Western Sangha. In traditional Asian societies lay people naturally esteem and support the Sangha; this is not so in the West. The lamas never mention respecting the Sangha as part of their Dharma practice, so the lay people think, "Who are they?" There is no sympathy or appreciation for what they are trying to do.

The lamas take very good care of their Tibetan Sangha, building big monasteries, training the monks, really caring when they ordain them, putting them into a monastery - a whole support system. This is nonexistent for the Western Sangha. The lamas ordain us and then we are just thrown out into the world, with no training, no background, no

encouragement, no support, no guidance, nothing! Just a "get on with it." This is very hard. I am surprised that so many Western Sangha stay for so long and I am not surprised when they disrobe. They start with so much enthusiasm, so much pure faith and devotion, but this gradually goes down and down as they get so discouraged and so disillusioned. And there is no one who helps them. This is really true, your Holiness. It is a very hard situation and it has never happened in the history of Buddhism before. Always the Sangha was cared for and nurtured, while in the West this does not happen. I truly don't know why. There are a few monastic centers, such as the Theravadin centers and Nalanda Monastery, which are doing very, very well. But for the nuns, what is there? Frankly, there is simply nothing.

To end on a higher note, I make a prayer that this life of purity and renunciation which is so rare and precious in this world, this jewel of the Sangha, may not simply be thrown down in the mud of indifference and contempt.

(His Holiness wept in response to this presentation.)

This article is reprinted from Sangha, a publication of the International Mahayana Institute. It is available by writing to: The Editors, Sangha, GPO Box 1981, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Glorious Honor for Humble Nun Chen Yen

by William Hu

A Buddhist nun, Cheng Yen, won the prestigious Magasaysay Award this year for her outstanding social services. This is the story of Cheng Yen, who started out 25 years ago with a handful of followers, but today is the head of a multi-million dollar charity organization with more than 1.3 million members.

Cheng Yen is a 54-year old Buddhist nun, respected and adored by more than a million followers who regularly make donations to the Buddhist Tzu-Chi Cultural Enterprise Center which she heads.

Taiwan experienced a rare economic slowdown last year, but even so the Tzu-Chi Center received more than NT\$2.3 billion (US\$90 million) in donations contributed by more than 1 million believers. The contributions are used to help needy people, and to run the Buddhist General Hospital and a Junior College for Nursing operated by the center.

Cheng Yen was born in Chingshui Township, Taichung County, Taiwan, 1937. Her original name was Chin Yun; Cheng Yen is her religious name. She was adopted by her uncle while she was a child and since then has regarded her uncle and aunt as her parents. Her adopted father owned many movie theaters in central Taiwan and she started helping him with his business at the age of 20.

In 1952, when she was 15, her mother suffered an ulcer and a perforated stomach. The doctor told them that she must have an operation to save her life. At that time such an operation would have been risky and Cheng Yen, in an attempt to relieve her mother's condition, began chanting the name of the Buddha. She made a pledge to the Buddha that she was willing to reduce her own life by 12 years if her mother could be cured.

She then had the same dream for three consecutive days, in which she saw a small temple with a large door in the middle and two small doors on both sides, with an image of the Buddha across the hall. Her mother was lying on a bamboo cot beside the Buddha and Cheng Yen herself was fanning the fire in a stove to boil her mother's herbal medicine.

Suddenly, in her dream, she saw a white cloud floating in through one of the smaller doors, and on the cloud was a beautiful lady. She looked up and saw the lady take out a packet of medicine from a vase she was carrying, but she said nothing. Cheng Yen knelt down and received the medicine from the lady and then watched her disappear. Cheng Yen opened the packet and gave the medicine to her mother.

For three days she had the same dream, and, by coincidence or not, her mother was cured without having to go through an operation. At that time, she became a vegetarian, but still did not understand Buddhism.*

Five years later, one day in June of 1960, when her father was 51 years of age, he suddenly complained of a headache. He also vowed to become a vegetarian. Later, he walked to his office at the Kuang Hwa Movie Theater with Cheng Yen following closely behind. When they reached the movie theater, he started complaining about his headache again and lay down on a couch. She immediately sent for a doctor who took his blood pressure and, after finding it too high, gave him an injection.

A little while later, his blood pressure dropped and she sent for their private pedicab to take him home. She helped him walk upstairs, but by then he was unable to speak. They sent for a doctor again, and the doctor said it would have been better if they hadn't moved him. A day later, her father died and she was full of remorse for the next few days: '...Why did I have to move him to our home? If I had not, he would not have had a stroke and he might still be alive.' Ever since that day, she always wondered where her father, or rather the spirit of her father, was.

One day she visited the Fung Yuan Temple. A nun gave her a religious book and said to her, "Read this and you will understand where your father went." Actually, nothing was said about her father in the book except the general remark "...with mortals, if there is birth, there is death."

Later on she visited the temple often and finally she thought of becoming a nun. But she kept rejecting the thought, because now that her father was dead and her mother in poor health, she had to take care of the family business and her younger brothers and sisters.

She asked a nun at the temple one day, "Which kind of woman is the happiest?"

The nun replied, "The kind that can carry a grocery basket," without further explanation.

She said, "I carry a grocery basket everyday, but why am I so unhappy?"

"Come back when you understand my meaning," said the nun.

Cheng Yen returned home and spent her days as always: buying groceries in the morning and then taking care of housework and their family business, but the questions still haunted her. "If a woman can carry a grocery basket, and has a purse full of money at her sole disposal, will she be happy? Is that what the nun meant?"

She kept on pondering, and one day she finally realized that "carrying the basket" meant taking up social responsibilities and preaching love and kindness to everyone. Thus, despite her mother's objections, she left home and became a nun.

In 1966, Cheng Yen witness a tragedy in a hospital in Hualien. A young girl who had had a miscarriage was refused admission to the hospital because she could not afford to pay a deposit. Although suffering from a loss of blood, she was sent away. Cheng Yen summoned her 30 followers and asked each of them to save 50 cents a day from their grocery money, saying that if they did this, they would save about NT\$5,000 a year, enough to save the life of a girl who couldn't afford to pay the deposit required by most hospitals.

From this 50 cents a day, the Buddhist Tzu-Chi Charity Fund was founded in 1966. Cheng Yen went on with her work quietly, collecting donations from her followers and other Buddhists, and wisely using the funds to relieve the poor, the sick, and the needy.

More and more people learned of her religious and charitable efforts, and donations started pouring in. By 1985, she had collected enough donations to set up a sizable Hospital, the Buddhist General Hospital in Hualien, in Eastern Taiwan.

During the past five years, the number of her followers has grown tremendously to more than 13 million persons and donations reached a high of more than NT\$2.3 billion last year. This year the amount is certain to reach a new high.

The Buddhist Tzu-Chi Cultural Enterprise Center now runs the Buddhist General Hospital and a junior nursing college, publishes two periodicals, and coordinates a massive network of charity and relief organizations. Cheng Yen has also achieved worldwide acclaim, culminating in the Magasaysay Award which she received this year for her outstanding performance in social service.

Cheng Yen accepted the award, but donated the prize money for the relief of earthquake victims in the Philippines and flood victims in China.

Cheng Yen is a philanthropist, a social worker, but most of all, she is a pious and humble Buddhist nun.

This article is reprinted from Dynasty magazine, published by China Airlines.

*Note: Vegetarianism is highly stressed among Chinese Buddhists. It expresses compassion for all living beings and is considered a mark of spiritual sincerity.

CROSS-CULTURAL FUNDRAISING

Jewels of the Dharma: Spiritual Dances for Women's Cultural Preservation

by Samantha Tavares

Music, dance, chants, and other art forms are traditional ways through which women in many countries have promoted their spiritual and cultural beliefs.

In African and Latin American cultures, women have been responsible for propagating both traditional and innovative folkloric art forms to ensure the preservation of their unique spiritual values. A common characteristic of these diverse cultural projects is a focus on developing women's awareness of their potential for growth and change within societies which may not encourage the direct expression of women's spiritual beliefs.

On March 19, 1994, the Afro-Jazz Dancers sponsored a fundraising performance at the University of Hawai'i in Honolulu, to help promote and support the Jamyang Choling Institute for Buddhist Women.

The performance included eleven chant and dance pieces from Brazil, Panama, Haiti, West Africa, Cuba, and other African and Latin American countries. All the chants and dances utilized the spiritual power of African drums to foster concentration and altered states of consciousness in the participants and spectators.

The Afro-Jazz Dancers are women dedicated to propagating the chants, dances, and religious traditions of African and Latin American countries. Although these women have relocated to Hawai'i from their native countries, they try to preserve the spirit of these art forms. The group was founded by Adela Chu, a Panamanian/Chinese dancer who has for many years combined the spontaneity of Latin American and African dances with spiritual insights from the Chinese Buddhist tradition.

This fundraising event is a symbol of Latin American and African women's intentions to support the spiritual development of their Tibetan Buddhist sisters who are, like them,

struggling to preserve their cultural traditions in Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, and other regions of the Himalayas.

It is the hope of the Afro-Jazz Dancers that their efforts serve as a model for other women's spiritual groups who could also volunteer their talents to promote and support the spiritual development of our sisters from Jamyang Choling Institute for Buddhist Women.

Announcements

The Sakyadhita newsletter welcomes contributions by its readers, in the form of articles, letters, drawings, or announcements. We especially encourage items of interest to Buddhist women, both lay and ordained.

Please remember to express your support for Sakyadhita by sending in your membership for this year.

This issue was compiled by Karma Lekshe Tsomo, with the kind assistance of Ann Frederick. Produced by Touch the Earth.
