

Sakyadhita Newsletter

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UPDATE ON THE FIFTH INTERNATIONAL SAKYADHITA CONFERENCE

**Phnom Penh, Cambodia
December 29, 1997 to January 4, 1998
"Women in Buddhism: Unity and Diversity"**

Sakyadhita is pleased to announce the [Fifth International Conference on Buddhist Women](#) to be held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, from December 29, 1997, to January 4, 1998. The theme of the conference will be "Women in Buddhism: Unity and Diversity." The venue will be a Vipassana center about 25 minutes outside of Phnom Penh. There will be a tour to the historical site of Angkor Wat after the conference, from January 5 to 7.

The Fifth Sakyadhita Conference is being co-ordinated by Hema Goonatilake in Cambodia, Norma Fain Pratt in Los Angeles, and Karma Lekshe Tsomo in Honolulu. As at previous

Sakyadhita gatherings, the program will include morning meditations, workshops, discussions, cultural presentations, chanting from different Buddhist traditions, and friendly chats.

The theme of the Conference, "Women in Buddhism: Unity and Diversity," opens the discussion on a wide range of topics:

- Women in Diverse Buddhist Organizations
- Crosscultural Approaches to Dharma
- Appreciating Manifold Meditation Methods
- Buddhist Ways of Life: Lay, Monastic, Neither - In the World and in Retreat
- Intermarriage: Buddhists & Non-Buddhists
- Diverse Approaches to Peace and Social Action: Engagement & Disengagement
- Buddhist Ways of Nurturing Children

Speakers and meditation teachers have been invited from all over the world:

- Shelley Anderson, "Women and Engaged Buddhism"
- Paula Arai, "Gratitude to Ananda: A Japanese Nuns' Ritual"
- Nancy Dowling, "Buddhist Art in the Cambodian National Museum"
- Rita Gross, "Gender Differences in Spiritual Practice"
- Anne Hansen, "Rebuilding Buddhism in Cambodia: An Historical Perspective"
- Ute Husken, "Buddhist Nuns in the Theravadin Tradition"
- Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, "Buddhist Women and Environment"
- Koko Kawanami, "Burmese Buddhist Women in Transition"
- Bhikkhuni Kusuma, "Inaccuracies in Buddhist Women's History"
- Bhikkhu Mahagoshananda, "Creating Peace"
- Ann Norton, "Female Imagery in Buddhist Art"
- Norma Fain Pratt, "Buddhism and the New Women's Scholarship"
- Bhikkhuni Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "Transforming Women's Role in Buddhism: Strategies"
- Elizabeth Harris, "Buddhism and the media"
- Nancy J. Barnes, "From Angkor to New York: Cambodian Buddhist Laywomen in the New World"
- Patricia Masters, "The First Hwaiian Buddhist: The Life of Mary Foster"
- Bhikkuni Kusuma, "Inaccuracies in Buddhist Women's History"

Costs

The conference registration fee is \$50. Most delegates will be accommodated at hotels in Phnom Penh. Rates will be \$20, \$30, or \$40 per person per day, including hotel room (double occupancy), vegetarian breakfast and lunch, 2 teas, airport transfers, and bus transportation to the conference site daily. Single supplement is \$5 per day. The cost of the tour to Angkor Wat will be \$180, which includes airfare (\$110), entrance fee, hotel room (double occupancy), vegetarian breakfast and lunch, tea, and ground transportation. Single supplement is \$30.

International travel

Efforts are being made to arrange economical international flights. For travel information for participants from North America, contact Carol Brighton, telephone (510) 849-3167 (not 848-3167 as in the

brochure!) or fax (510) 655-4781. For travel information for participants from Europe, contact Rotraut Wurst (Jampa), Stralsunder Weg 22, 24161 Altenholz, Germany, telephone +49-431-322303 or fax +49-431-328208

For further information

Contact Norma Pratt on e-mail at npratt@zaicomm.com or Lekshe Tsomo by fax at (808) 944-7070 (ET) for further information. The mailing address for conference registration is:

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International Association of Buddhist Women
Honolulu, HI 96815
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CHILDREN'S CULTURE AND POPULAR BUDDHISM IN KOREA: THE WORK OF JEBEOM SUNIM

by Hi Kyun Kim

Jebeom Sunim entered the Department of Buddhist Studies of Dongkuk University and graduated with honors. She is now 33 years old and has been active in educating the public about Buddhism since she was 22 years old. She never hesitates to educate others wherever she goes. While preparing to enter graduate school, she worked to create Active Children (Gul Rul She A Line E), a unique Buddhist children's magazine which has been popularizing and revitalizing Buddhism among the youth in Korea. But her main job has been public relations. In six months' time, she managed to get 500 regular subscribers. The magazine's popularity has greatly surprised many people.

The Power of Persistence

When Jebeom Sunim embarked on publishing Active Children, she discontinued all other work, took a leave of absence from the Buddhist institute where she was studying, and postponed preparing for graduate school. Her professors had hoped she would become a professor and a future job as a professor of Buddhist Studies was guaranteed. She would then have had the

opportunity to open a center for Buddhist education anywhere she liked, but the task that called her was publishing the magazine Active Children.

The first edition of this magazine was published at De Won Jeong Temple in January 1990, but due to difficulties managing the financial aspects of the enterprise, the magazine has been published by another company, Buljisa, since January 1992. This still has not solved the magazine's financial problems.

Jebeom Sunim recalls, "I heard that Active Children was having financial management difficulties. I thought 'If I don't help, who will help with the work that Buddhists should do? The first step is to advertise the fact that we have this kind of publication.'" The decision to devote herself to publishing the magazine was easy, because she strongly believed that this is the kind of work Buddhist monastics should do. From that day on, she reduced the amount of time spent on studies and eventually stopped studying altogether. She began to devote all her energy to public relations work for the magazine.

Jebeom Sunim began her public relations work for the magazine on the first day of the second lunar month, March 12, 1991, at Bongeun Temple in Seoul. Her countenance appeared fresh and radiant as she distributed publicity materials and recommended that people subscribe to the magazine. Because there are not many cases of monks and nuns doing this kind of work, except for commemorations of the Buddha's enlightenment or similar Buddhist gatherings, she undertook this work in conjunction with members of the Buddhist Women's Club.

Gradually Jebeom broke through people's stereotypes of monastics, travelling nationwide to every temple to recommend subscribing to the magazine. She did not hesitate to speak out and advocate among Buddhist followers. Holding the magazine high in her hand, she would say: "Do you know how many children's magazines there are in this country? Among them, how many Buddhist children's magazines are there? Christian children's magazines have a history of over 30 years. Buddhist children's magazines are only four years old and there is only one of them -- there is only this one magazine. Do you realize with what difficulty this magazine, the only one, is published? Buddhist followers do not encourage their children to read books, but Buddhist followers should let their children read this kind of book."

Jebeom strongly criticized Buddhist followers for their neglect of Buddhist education. Nobody could convince her otherwise when she insisted that Active Children was badly needed. Her enthusiasm caused some people to immediately fill out the subscription form of the magazine and quite a few people bought the magazine. Sometimes she got subscriptions from only three people among 700, but sometimes she got lucky. When the monk Sanghun Sunim gave a speech at Ulsan Buddhist Education Center, Jebeom was there to publicize the magazine. From the crowd, a Buddhist follower came to her and anonymously gave a donation of over \$1,000.

Jebeom stays only five or six days a month in her office. She travels widely and usually stays away for several days at a time. During that time, she is involved not only in distributing the magazine to temples and organizations all over the country, but publicizes its objectives as well. "Active Children is a cultural movement for children. In the future, additional cultural movements for children need to be started. I am working to discover and publicize such cultural

movements through this magazine."

Now the magazine has a children's drama club and a children's writing club, initiated with the goal of creating Buddhist culture for children. However, so far the impact of Buddhist culture for children is still negligible. The reality is that Western culture is dominant and traditional culture is disappearing. This reality serves as a stimulus to the people who publish and distribute the magazine.

21st Century Monastics in Professional Positions

In the past some people voiced criticism of monastics who worked at jobs that laypeople do, but nowadays many people understand the need and help monastics who do such work. Among the critics, some monastics were even more critical than laypeople, castigating monastics who worked at jobs that laypeople do. The reason was simple. Such work did not meet people's expectations of how monastics should be or accord with their image of the Sangha.

What is the Sangha? Jebeom does not hesitate to voice her opinion: "There are many monastics who study the teachings of Buddhism and travel from temple to temple." However, Jebeom Sunim strongly feels that too many monastics have neglected ordinary reality. She believes that the approach of Buddhism should be changed in the 21st century and that there should be professional jobs and specializations. She says, "Conditions for Buddhist monastics are good. Monastics can specialize in temple studies or can have professional jobs as they like. There are many opportunities, aren't there?"

Every professional job that laypeople do, whether it is publishing, culture, literature, teaching (elementary, junior high, and high school), is also possible for monastics. Buddhist society may be more flexible if monastics work in such fields. Catholic nuns have already made much progress in these kinds of work since 1965. Of course, they have made many mistakes during the last 20 years. However, it is time to rethink our priorities. Catholic monastics already work on an equal basis with laypeople in every level of society. The Vatican seems to have been farsighted in taking this initiative. Catholic monastics have been more innovative -- 30 to 50 years ahead of us Buddhists.

In terms of lifestyle, Buddhist monastics are quite different from Catholic monastics. Catholic nuns may stay in a convent for ten years before taking their final vows, studying and training in discipline. The nuns take an aptitude test to determine objectively which job they are suited for. This is part of the Catholic training. They become professionals who commute to the workplace. They work as nurses, teachers, doctors, hospice workers, social workers, then they all return to the convent when their work is done. They think over the events of the day, express their gratitude through prayer and meditation, and prepare for the next day.

Jebeom believes that this kind of system could be very useful for Buddhists. For this reason, well-disciplined monastics believe that she is an innovator. She hopes that the Buddhist community can be restructured. Monastics should choose one field which they are particularly interested in, rather than each person studying everything from top to bottom. Monastics who teach in the temple should strive to improve their teaching methodology. Monastics who

volunteer in society should enter society after studying their area of specialization thoroughly.

The role of monastics, especially ordained nuns (bhikkhunis), cannot be overemphasized. There are so many areas female monastics can develop and work in: spreading Buddhism to children, orphanages, nurseries, kindergartens, nurses, school teachers, hospices, youth counselling organizations, management, homes for the elderly, consumer protection agencies, environmental protection agencies, parenting organizations, and local development councils, and so forth.

At this point, there may be those who ask, "Then what is the difference between monastics and ordinary people? If monastics do the work of ordinary people, what is the distinction between the laity and the Sangha? When will monastics find time to meditate?" Jebeom Sunim responds, "Monastics are already involved in religion and are spreading the teachings wearing the robes. When monastics do farm work, do people in the villages see monastics only as farmers? If they do farm work with the people in the villages and understand them and help them live according to Buddhist principles, isn't that spreading Buddhism?" Jebeom says that the most important thing is performing the monastic's original task as a monastic. The monastic's original task and the role of social welfare are not two separate things. There is a need for social welfare work itself to be considered the task of a monastic. Jebeom believes that if Korean Buddhism fills this need, it will become more active, dynamic, and confident. This conviction led to her work with Active Children and her achievement of excellence and to surprising results in that work.

A Well-rounded Nursery, the First Managed by Monastics

Jebeom Sunim was deeply moved by her readings in social science. During the darkness of the 1980s, when people in Korea were angry, disillusioned, and began questioning the status quo, social and political upheavals awakened another aspect of her thinking. Especially the tragic incident of October 27, 1980, when armed soldiers in uniforms and boots entered the monasteries, including the Buddha halls, to search for anti-government elements. This shameful incident awakened the historical consciousness of many monastics.

Jebeom Sunim entered Dongguk University in 1982, around the time of that incident. She devoured social science books like a hungry child. She read restricted books every night without sleeping, because she discovered the tragedy of the lethargic monastic environment. She was exasperated at an institution that allowed the calamity of October 27. Her concern was not only because of her youth, but of her integrity that could not ignore such wrongdoing. She now works as an officer of the National Committee of Actively Engaged Buddhists and is a leader of social participation.

Jebeom Sunim's active social involvement was a rejection of a Buddhism confined to the mountains. She felt that the more sedentary Buddhism is, the more alienated it is from the modern day. This kind of thinking encouraged her to generate greater energy for her activities.

Toward the end of 1989, Jebeom Sunim lived for a year at Bokyongkung Temple in Samyangdong, a district of Seoul. The temple grounds are nice and large, in contrast to the poor, crowded villages of the surrounding neighboring. She discussed the situation with Doyoeun Sunim, a nun who was staying there with her. "Let's do something for the village people. It is not

reasonable to use such a large space for just ourselves." Thus, they decided to create a nursery. The two of them were satisfied with only a small corner room for their project.

Jebeom Sunim went out to collect funds, while Doyoeun Sunim took care of maintaining the temple. Jebeom spent ten days visiting various temples in Seoul. She was able to collect about \$4,000 with which to renovate the large rooms of the temple to create a nursery facility. Then she hung a sign announcing "Well-rounded Nursery." Within a few days after the announcement, with two teachers, they had 25 children enrolled. They charged only what it took to maintain the nursery. Well-rounded Nursery, managed by the nuns, was welcome news to the poor village where working couples were worried about the care of their children. When, after only one year, the nursery was forced to close, the mothers in the village suggested that they manage the nursery themselves. Well-rounded Nursery, the first nursery in Seoul to be founded by nuns, is still running in Samyangdong. This is the way that young Jebeom Sunim lives -- working without hesitation for good causes and for Buddhism.

Not Stepping Back from Dharma

Working for Buddhism is possible for both Sangha and laypeople if they have strong faith. Jebeom Sunim gains strength in her life through various practices, such as koan practice. She chants the name of the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara while driving a car or sitting at a desk. She checks up constantly to make sure that her vow to spread Buddhism has not wavered since the time she initially made it. Active Children is an expression of this vow, working to actively spread Buddhist culture among children through such means as children's drama, writing classes, and so on. It aims at providing proper guidance to Korean children through Buddhist cultural activities.

The power of the vow she has taken has made Jebeom strong and unhesitating. She succeeded in getting an average of 500 subscribers per month and sold an additional 800 copies, but refused to give the magazines away for free. She felt it was correct that people buy the copies -- that people would read a magazine they had not paid for.

Some subscribers did not have any children. However, they bought copies of the magazine because of Jebeom's power of persuasion and her advice that they give the magazine to children they knew. Jebeom was convinced that Buddhism has no future in Korea unless it is propagated among Korean children.

The Active Children family (editors and staff) admit that the spread of Buddhism has been greatly furthered through Jebeom's energetic activities. Suk Jung Park, Assistant Director of the magazine, says, "Jebeom Sunim has been able to solve big problems that even lay Buddhists could not solve. We especially felt relieved when she helped substantially to resolve serious business matters." Jebeom is consulted on important matters, advising the director of the larger corporation and the chief editor of Active Children. The chief editor praised her willingness to advise them even on such practical matters as modernizing packing skills.

Gradually her sense of mission became more and more lucid and consistent. Initially her Zen master disagreed with her intention to work on the magazine. She wanted her to become either a

university professor or the abbess of a new temple. But Jebeom's resolution was steadfast. At the time she thought, "Even though this is something that anybody could do, I will do it." Nobody could dissuade her from her intention. Now her Zen master and her temple family are among the biggest supporters of Active Children. Her Zen master even got 50 subscribers from among the temple's lay members. She also buys 50 extra copies each month to distribute.

Up to 1994, Jebeom has been giving Buddhist teachings at her Zen master's temple and other temples in Korea. After that, however, she decided to stop teaching and devote her entire time and energy to publicity for the magazine. She said, "The nature of Mahayana is not to step back from the Dharma. I am not afraid of anything because my whole life is dedicated to the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara. There is no reason to hesitate. I will continue working until Active Children can run on its own. I hope this dream will soon come true. At that time, I plan to return to my studies at the Buddhist institute and work to fulfill my Zen master's expectations."

Jebeom's determination is very strong. Today she does not hesitate to voice her opinions to both monks and laypeople throughout the country, affirming the revitalizing role of Active Children in uplifting Korea's traditional culture and transmitting it to the next generation.

Editor's note: Translated by Hyosun Kwon and Sun Gak Sunim. Reprinted from *Tae Jung Bulgyo*, edited by Hi Kyun Kim.

OPENING THE HEART

by **Bhiksuni Tenzin Palmo**

Buddhism aims at the happiness of self and others, and the two are closely interrelated. It is natural that we desire happiness for ourselves, but it is more difficult to desire happiness for others. And one thing which cuts us off from desiring the happiness of others is fear. We fear that if we are open and vulnerable towards others, we will get hurt. So we put up barriers and retreat behind them. It is this fear and anxiety to protect ourselves which prevents our hearts from opening. What we need to develop is a safe mind -- a mind which is unafraid.

It's not that we don't have love. Love is actually there, but we have to work at opening our heart. All possible love in the world is actually there inside our hearts -- it's just covered up. It's like a very deep stream from a vast underwater source that has been covered up with soil and mud and stones, and looks dry. We don't have to import water from outside. All we have to do is clear away the stones and the earth and get to that source. As we clear away the stones and earth, little dribbles come back. Gradually, as we clear away more and more, the soil gets moister and moister, and eventually, it just gushes out, with sheer frenzy, unstoppable. It is the same with love, which is our true nature. When we clear away the dross from our hearts, love gushes forth,

and there is no room for fear.

Today, I was speaking with a Catholic nun who said that in Christianity we are always told to love our neighbor, to be compassionate and so on, but we are not told how to do it. What she especially liked about Buddhism is that it doesn't just say to love, but has many techniques for learning how to love. In the beginning these techniques may seem rather artificial -- still up in the head. But as we become accustomed to these practices and merge with them, love slowly trickles down from the head and begins to percolate into the heart.

When we simply sit on our cushion, we become filled with ever so much love, but when we get up, or somebody interrupts our practice, we may get angry and think, "Here I am meditating on love. Why are they making so much noise!" So, we have to check: Is this meditation really producing some results? If we do it properly, we will really notice a change. Meditation begins to remove the stones and clear away the heavy earth and mud that has covered up the wellspring of our genuine loving nature.

So, the first quality we want to develop is loving kindness (maitri). Loving kindness is the wish that all beings be happy. We begin the practice of loving kindness by sitting with a calm mind. Then there are various ways to proceed. In the first method we visualize in front of ourselves the person we love most. Traditionally, this is one's parent, particularly one's mother. Sakya Trizin, head of the Sakya tradition, once said that it's really difficult for Westerners to do lesson number one. All sentient beings are like our kind mother, therefore we must love all sentient beings. But many Westerners hate their mother! We must come to terms with this. The important thing is that our parents gave us life. We're here because of them. They might not have intended us, but here we are. When we were small, screaming, and always hungry, our conversation was not in the least bit fascinating. We demanded all their attention, they did not get tired of us; they did not throw us out. They took care of us -- they loved us. Ironically, none of us consciously remembers the time when we got the most love and attention. That's the time when everybody found us irresistible. Later on, at the time we remember, they had changed their opinion! Still, our parents educated us, took care of us, and fed us. On the whole, except for really abusive parents, the kindness of the mother is beyond words. Therefore, unless we have complicated feelings towards our mother or father, they are a good person to visualize.

We want them to be happy. If we imagine our mother being tortured or in great pain or sorrow, we would want to release her. So, a parent is considered a very good object for developing loving kindness. Those who are parents can try to developing loving kindness toward their child. In this way, we develop a heart of loving kindness.

The Buddha compared loving kindness to a mother's love for her own child. Imagine the intensity of a mother's love for her child. We can visualize anyone we love. Sometimes it's a bit difficult to visualize one's spouse or partner, because the feelings that person arouses may be a bit complicated. It may not necessarily be loving kindness which comes to the fore. So, it may be better to visualize someone a bit more neutral. We're not trying to arouse desire or attachment; we're trying to arouse lovingkindness. So, we want to reflect upon a person toward whom we have strong positive feelings. Then think, "May you be well and happy. May you be peaceful."

In the second method, the first person that we generate loving kindness towards is ourself. Traditionally, it is said that we cannot give genuine love if we don't accept ourself. If we are full of self-contempt and self-loathing, we cannot give genuine love. His Holiness the Dalai Lama once remarked that one distinction he noticed between Tibetans and Westerners was that most Tibetans liked themselves -- feel at ease with themselves. But many Westerners have low self-esteem. Therefore, we sit and think, "May I be peaceful. May I be at ease. May I be happy." When we talk about having compassion for all sentient beings, we must remember that we are also sentient beings. Therefore we are also deserving of love and compassion. So, first we give love to ourselves. We sit thinking genuine kindness towards ourself, like a small child -- forgiveness, understanding, and nurturing.

None of us is perfect. If we were perfect, we would all be Buddhas with radiating auras. We wouldn't need to seek help. Everybody has problems -- this is natural. This is samsara, the realm of birth and death. Why are we so proud that we imagine we should be perfect when nobody else is? If we can forgive others, why can't we forgive ourselves? So, first we have to come to an acceptance of ourselves as we are.

In the West people tend to zoom in on their negative qualities and inflate them until the negative traits totally overshadow the positive qualities we have. We end up feeling despondent and hating ourselves. Maybe this comes from our cultural background -- the idea that we are born in sin and the guilt that goes with that. In Buddhism our essential nature is perfect. We all possess Buddha-nature. Our fundamental nature is infinite wisdom, compassion, purity, and power. We are all like the sun -- it's just that we're obscured by the clouds. We are all interconnected in having this Buddha nature. Buddha nature is like the sky -- it doesn't have divisions like yours, mine, his, or hers.

Meditation on loving kindness is like that -- vast and inconceivable. We have our faults, of course, but we don't have to identify with them. We have to recognize them and accept them, but we don't have to cling to them and get so depressed. Each one of us has very beautiful qualities, too. It is not wrong to accept the fact that I get upset very quickly, for example, because on the other hand, I am quite generous. If we don't recognize the good in ourselves, we cannot develop them. Like a plant, if we put them in the shade, they will wither and die for lack of acknowledgment. We need to strike a balance. Otherwise, the spiritual part of us becomes something very heavy and onerous, instead of being something light and joyful that naturally replenishes.

So, when we meditate on loving kindness, we feel loving kindness towards ourself and think, "May I be happy." We feel a sense of peace, well-being, and happiness in our heart. We feel warmth. Then we think of someone we love, and from the depths of our heart wish happiness to that person, too. We can imagine a light going out, transforming the person into happiness. Then we concentrate on someone whom we feel fairly indifferent toward and try to arouse a feeling of wanting that person to be happy, too. How happy we would be if that person were happy!

Then we think of somebody who troubles us in some way, someone disagreeable that we don't really like, someone who is causing us problems. And we try to feel exactly the same feeling for that person. May she be happy! May he be peaceful! We can also watch how we feel while we're

doing this. There may be some resistance, but that's okay. Just recognize it, accept it, and let it go.

Then gradually we extend that feeling out to include the whole country, the whole world -- as many different people that come into mind. We include those who are sick, those we meet on the street, shop assistants, everyone, and generate a feeling of really wanting them all to be happy. We can divide space into north, south, east, west, above, and below and wish all beings within it to be happy. We can think about people in various circumstances, in certain countries, in certain professions, and send them compassion. It helps to be specific. We think, "May they be well. May they be peaceful." Gradually our compassion gets vaster and vaster. Eventually our visualization is vast enough to include all beings and the heart really opens up wide.

Sometimes people think that Dharma practice is something we do when as we sit on a meditation cushion. For example, we practice loving kindness meditation for some time and the rest of the day is a waste of time, filled with worldly thoughts: "Now I'm doing my spiritual practice and the rest of the time is just mundane activity." People feel I have no time for practice. I have even heard lamas say, "I'm so busy, I have no time for practice." Just consider, for example, the six perfections (paramita): generosity, ethical conduct, patience, diligence, meditation, and wisdom. Each one is needed for Buddhahood. Only one of them is meditation. What about the other five? Generosity means giving, openness -- an open heart and open hands. Ethical conduct means being ever so careful with one's body and one's speech, so as not to harm anyone or anything. Patience is the one the Buddha himself called the greatest -- realizing that the people who cause us the most trouble are our greatest opportunity to develop this wonderful quality.

We say that family life, social life, and the work place are obstacles to the practice, but actually they are the practice. When do we think we are going to practice? All of these are Dharma practices. Sitting on the cushion is one part, but only a small part. If we use every single encounter as a practice opportunity, then our whole life is practice. Life is like heavy dough, so we need some yeast. We don't need much yeast, just a little. Understanding every situation we meet as an opportunity for practice is like yeast. If we put it in the dough, voilà! We have this beautiful light dough that we can bake and make delicious bread.

Every situation, every single person we meet is an object of practice. This means developing loving kindness toward everyone we meet. This definitely means our intimate family, too. Sometimes loving kindness is expressed least in the family circle. Notice the way partners speak with each other. Since I left India, I have spent quite a lot of time living with various couples, most of whom I consider well-adjusted. But behind closed doors, they sometimes say things we wouldn't dream of saying to even our worst enemy. And this to the person we are supposed to love.

When we sit and think, "May all sentient beings be happy. May all sentient beings be at their ease," it's very easy to think of all the sentient beings -- all the little sb's -- as being out there somewhere on the horizon. We get up feeling full of love. But who are these sentient beings we are talking about? They are, first of all, the people closest to us: our family, our partner, our children, our friends, people in our work place, people who annoy us. People who annoy us are wonderful objects of practice. It is very easy to be loving to those who are kind to us. This is a

problem for me. People are usually extremely kind to me -- far more than I deserve -- so I get very little opportunity to practice patience. But in India that will change and I look forward to it.

People who annoy us are really objects for developing lots and lots of loving kindness and patience. It is not enough to be loving to those who love us. The Tibetans say that if there are two people -- one stroking us, speaking sweet words, and another cursing us, cutting us with a knife - - we should feel equal love toward both.

In our everyday life, we have infinite opportunities to practice. We should remember that every person we meet is to themselves most dear, whether it is the president or a road sweeper. All of them think they are the center of the universe. When we see a group photo, who is the first person we look for? No one wants others to revile us, be mean to us, or be rude to us. Everyone wants others to be kind, polite, and helpful to us. If we want that, why should we not give it to others? Every single person that comes before us is the most precious being at that moment. At that moment, they are the most important person in the world to us, because they are the reality of the moment. Everyone else is just a thought in our mind. If we remember that and think of that this person is like us -- vulnerable, wanting only to be happy, afraid of being hurt -- then from our hearts, we can say, "May you be well!" And when we smile, we will smile with our eyes, from our heart.

Many people have met His Holiness the Dalai Lama, or at least seen him on film. Of course, His Holiness has infinite qualities, but one special quality is that he is completely with the person who is right in front of him. He looks the person straight in the eye and there is a feeling of total love and acceptance. Whether it is the pope, president, a renowned author, journalist, politician, church dignitary, or whomsoever -- he treats them all the same. And it's like pulling a carpet from under their feet, because they're not used to being treated as just another person. He is so genuine himself that he forces other people to be genuine.

We also need to develop compassion (karuna). Compassion is the wish that beings be free from suffering. Loving kindness is the wish that beings be happy and compassion is the wish that they be free from suffering. Compassion literally means to "feel with." So compassion means feeling empathy with beings who are suffering and wishing to relieve them of their sufferings. In Mahayana, compassion is especially emphasized. Wisdom and compassion together constitute the intrinsic nature of a Buddha.

Sometimes people are afraid to open up their hearts to the sufferings of others, feeling they will be completely overwhelmed and unable to cope. If one has this fear, it is good to reflect on the beings we have met who embody great compassion. Again, we can think of someone like His Holiness the Dalai Lama, because he is the embodiment of the bodhisattva of compassion. He genuinely exemplifies great compassion. He had to leave his country and his people are so oppressed. Everywhere he looks, there are problems -- the troubles of his people in Tibet, his people in India and Nepal, and then the whole world situation. He goes around the world to various conferences and gatherings, and wherever he goes, again and again, there is suffering, suffering, suffering....He has such a tender heart and he weeps. But, along with his tender, open, infinitely loving compassionate heart, he has twinkling eyes and a big belly laugh. When you meet him, he's so full of joy and optimism! That optimism and joy in no way detract from his

vast compassion. We need to rethink our concept of what compassion really means.

If we allow ourselves to become overwhelmed with the enormity of the sufferings in the world, then we just become heavy, gloomy, and unable to effect any kind of transformation. When people come to us with their sufferings and we feel miserable, they may end up feeling worse than before. It doesn't help. There needs to be a balance between genuinely acknowledging and caring for the sufferings of others and being able to transform those sufferings into something workable that can be used to gradually surmount the suffering.

In the Tibetan tradition, compassion is an enormously important quality. There is a practice called tong len, "giving and taking." In this meditation, we visualize sending out light. We eject all the darkness from ourself, getting rid of all the gloom and suffering, and evoke, or bring all light, joy, and goodness into ourself. We visualize someone in deep suffering, whether a very terrible sickness or great sorrow. With the in-breath, we breathe into ourselves all the person's heaviness, sadness, sickness, and grief, in the form of a dark light. We absorb this all into ourself and send out all our own vast reservoirs of goodness, joy, light, and peace to that person.

Sometimes people doing this visualization get overwhelmed. This is not the objective -- the objective is to open up the heart. There are two ways of dealing with this feeling of being overwhelmed. One way is to consider, "Why am I afraid of being hurt?" We sense a tight little knot inside us -- this "me" that we cherish so strongly, and are always protecting, so fearful of being harmed. Then we visualize all the sufferings of others coming into ourselves, absorbing into this dark sense of "I," and dissolving into emptiness. The dark, tight sense of "me" dissolves into spaciousness and emptiness. And from that emptiness comes light. Another way is to visualize Buddha-nature as a little crystal -- very bright and shiny. Buddha mind is vast, indestructible, and brilliant. We visualize all sufferings absorbing into that. Like water hitting a very hot pan, the moment they hit our genuine Buddha-nature, all that suffering transforms into light.

The quality of wishing to exchange oneself for others is so beautiful. When I was about nine years old, I caught on fire. I was wearing a nylon dress and when it touched against an electric fire, I was blazing. Fortunately for me, my mother, who usually worked in a shop, was home with kidney trouble. It was very painful, so she was upstairs in bed. I went rushing up the stairs into the bedroom where she was lying. She immediately wrapped me up in a clean sheet and a blanket. She said that my whole back was burned -- it was one big blister. As I was lying on the bed, I left the body and had a kind of out-of-body experience. I was looking down at my body lying all burnt up. It was extremely painful for a moment and then I lost consciousness. There were beings of light, saying: "Come with us." And I thought, "Oh, great. I'm going to die. That would be interesting. Let's see how it is." I absolutely did not want to go back into this burned body. I wanted to go with the beings of light.

The next thing I knew, I was back in the body and the neighbors were coming in, taking me to the hospital. I remember lying on the stretcher and one of the doctors saying, "You're a very brave little girl, because you must be in tremendous pain." But when I got back in my body, I could notice no pain. When I later asked my mother about this, she told me she thought I was going to die. As I was lying there unconscious, she prayed, "Please, don't let her die. Don't let her

suffer. She is too young to suffer. Give all her pain to me."

We need to be aware that everyone we meet wants only happiness and does not want suffering, just like ourself. And we think, "May I help that being be happy. May I help that being be free from suffering." Kindness is very simple. We tend to think that the spiritual path is something very high, vast, and unattainable. But it is really so simple. All we need to do is be kind in every word and deed.

ZEN AND THE ART OF LAWNMOWER REPAIR:

A Purely Phenomenological Account of a Visit to a Buddhist Temple

by Stephan Hood

I waited for Sdenka till 6:45, then left the house for the temple. She had said that she wanted to go but not to wait if she was running late, which was often with her job and the traffic. So, I set out for the Zen Academy on Bunkerhill. It was a hidden building, but I had noticed it coming home from school one evening about two weeks ago. And it was near the house, so getting there in this overgrown city wouldn't be such a hassle. Among my least favorite things to do is driving, especially driving in a busy city.

Sunset was nearing when I pulled into the parking lot of the Zen Academy. No other cars were there. It was seven o'clock straight up, so I thought for a moment the Monday evening meeting was canceled. But as I pulled around behind the building, I saw a parked car and a man peering over the top at me. I turned my car around and parked under the tin carport that fenced in the property behind the building.

Out of my car I could see it was a big building. It stood tall in an odd place, backed up to a street of single-storey houses on one side and concealed on the other side by an old gas station that was crowded with several rusty cars propped up on cinder blocks. Part of the three-storey structure extended over a parking area under which was the only other car and the man. I approached and asked where I might find Craig Learned. He looked around comically, like Chaplin, then said that's me.

Dressed in sweat pants, slippers and a T-shirt that read Boston with a downtown skyline, he stood next to a riding lawnmower with a rag in one hand and a can of starter fluid in the other. I introduced myself and he asked how I came to know his name and if I knew anything about lawnmower engines. I said I knew Anne Klein, and it so happened Pat Cox too, and that I hadn't messed with one of these in a long time. I squatted down next to the engine and began to examine the carburetor.

"Anne Klein, at Rice, right?" "Yeah, I'm taking her intro to Buddhism course," I said. He sprayed some starter fluid into the carb and began pulling on the starter rope. The engine fired up for about two seconds then quit. "Is there a service tonight," I asked. "Oh yeah. I'm here two or three nights a week and sometimes in the morning," Craig said. I reached over and moved the throttle linkage back and forth a few times. He sprayed some more starter fluid into the carb and heaved on the rope. Again the engine fired up for about two or three seconds. "I understand she is not only a professor but a practitioner of meditation as well." "That's right," I said. "Pat Cox?" Craig asked. "Yeah," I said. "He also gave me your name. I teach at H.C.C. and I'm a grad student at Rice. It seems like it's starved for fuel." "Yeah, I think so," Craig said. I told him that I came here to learn something about Zen Buddhism and he began telling me the story of Kashyapa who, when the Buddha twirled a flower one day, smiled, thus signaling his enlightenment to the Buddha. He pulled the starter rope and the engine turned over but didn't fire. I pointed to a second linkage and said I thought this might be the choke, then pulled it. Craig sprayed more fluid into the carb then pulled on the rope. The engine fired for about three seconds then quit.

"Pat Cox. Of course. He's a really nice guy." "Yeah, he's great," I said. "And you work with Pat at the community college?" Craig asked. "Yeah, I teach English at Central campus. Why don't you put the throttle there in the full open position. I think that might open the choke." Craig pushed the throttle lever all the way down and the choke linkage slid over with the throttle linkage. "That's it," I said. "Now give it a try." He sprayed some more fluid into the carb and pulled on the rope. The engine fired for about three seconds then quit.

Craig told me that one of the things you have to know about Zen is that it's really an attitude of unlearning and not hard and fast learning. It's like you begin every task in your life as if it were the first time. He said it's a back and forth movement of unlearning and learning. All the time. Every day. We could see fuel inside the translucent fuel filter so I asked him if he had a pair of pliers. Maybe, I thought, if we could pull this clamp, we could see if the fuel was getting through the filter and into the carburetor. Together we walked over to his car and he opened the trunk. While digging through two old metal tool boxes he told me that Zen is about attention.

"Concentration is key to Zen," he said. "I've got pliers coming out my ears at home, but wouldn't you know it, no pliers." We moved back over to the lawnmower. Craig sprayed some more fluid into the carburetor and while I pulled on the choke linkage he tugged the starter rope. Like before, the engine revved up high for two or three seconds then died.

He capped the carburetor with the air-filter and we pushed the lawnmower into the building. We pushed off our shoes then washed our oily hands clean in the downstairs bathrooms, me in the men's room, him in the ladies' room. We then went upstairs to the third floor. By this time it was beginning to get dark so as we walked through the halls he would snap on light switch after light switch.

Upstairs, the Academy was a collection of different size rooms, mostly unfurnished but with pillows of various sizes neatly lined up on the floor. We were the only ones in the building and the empty rooms seemed to exaggerate our isolation. We entered the largest room which had a nicely finished wooden tier on one wall with several gold statues on top. The center statue was the Buddha seated cross-legged and flanked by what looked like two female figures. The gold

statues gleamed well against the oakwood tier and the white walls.

"It's customary to make a half bow to the Buddha as we enter this room." Observing Craig, I put my hands together and bowed.

On the lower level of the tier were several clay pots filled with sand. Craig picked up two sticks of incense, lighted them and stood them in one of the pots. I wondered to myself if each stick of incense was for each person in attendance. He said that normally we would begin by reciting some of the Heart Sutra but our attempt at lawnmower repair had fulfilled that obligation.

He showed me the memorial wall, a small section of wall in one corner neatly covered with small blocks of cedar. There were gaps in the arrangement. There might be ten blocks on the top row, four on the next, twelve on the next, two on the next, and so on. But the randomness had a discernible order to it as well. It looked as though an artist had rendered into wood an old computer punch card. Craig explained to me that this feature of the temple wasn't necessarily Buddhist by nature, but was a great source of revenue for the temple. I breathed in the warm smell of cedar and thought of the coat closet in my parents' house and how I used to hide in it on Saturday mornings when my father called me to do yard work.

We moved into an adjoining room, a smaller room with no furniture but a small stand for an incense burner. On the floor were eight large rectangular pillows, each with a smaller round pillow on top and lined up in two rows. Craig took a wooden stick that was hanging on the wall and we both sat down.

He demonstrated the different seating positions and explained to me two types of common meditation practice in Zen. The first method is to count your inhalations and exhalations. Just steadily count them, and try to keep your attention on your breathing. The second method is to be keenly aware of the sounds around you. If you hear a bird, then you simply hear the bird. If you hear a dog bark, then you simply hear the dog bark. You take all this in but you remain still and concentrated. This second practice is very difficult though, he said. I wasn't too clear on the second technique, but I didn't want to ask too many questions. I simply wanted to be there and observe.

Craig told me that three claps with the stick signaled the beginning of a sitting, one clap signaled the end of a session, and three more claps signaled the end of that sitting. He asked me if I practice any meditation. I told him I used to practice some years before. I had been initiated into a spiritual community in Northern India which was similar to Hinduism and Sikhism, but was very non-violent. I demonstrated the position, squatting with both feet flat on the floor. The elbows are placed on the knees, the fingers cover the eyes, the left thumb goes into the left ear and the right thumb pushes the right ear closed. "What do you concentrate on?" he asked. "When you're initiated into it, they tell you five words which you should never write down or tell to anyone. In meditation, you repeat these words in a whisper over and over." "Then don't tell them to me if you took a vow of silence."

Craig pulled his legs together and showed me how to position my hands together with the thumb tips touching. He said we would sit for twenty-five minutes. Sit up straight, not bent over but not

ram-rom straight either, he told me. Now take in a few deep breaths. I inhaled deeply and heard the three claps of the stick against his hand. In my studies I am a very unfocused person. I'm a slow reader who must read everything two or three times just to get the surface meaning. I have eyes that drop in and out of focus constantly -- a problem that still baffles many eye doctors -- and I am plagued with constant headaches which nag at my attention span. Most everywhere I go I carry three pairs of glasses, switching them depending on the mood of my eyes, and in my pocket I have an old metal pillbox filled with asperin.

Perhaps my search for meaning is an attempt to find a way past my handicaps. But I think I am moved by something more. I have tried to renounce meaning and say there's nothing more to life than death. That nothing lies beyond death and life is absent of any real meaning.

But something enigmatic pounds in my head. My good friend Father Mandry called it grace. He told me it was a blessing. But in the world where I live, in my environment, my circumstances, I'm not sure I'd call it a blessing. Whatever it is that urges me on my search, making absurd the working world, the money-making world, the practical world, making my head hurt, I call a curse. I believe G-d has cursed me with his presence. I feel like some social aberration who can't let go.

I sat for twenty-five minutes, counting my breath, listening to a dog bark and the birds sing while the sun went down, doing battle with the silence in my head, trying to control my concentration. I saw the face of my old master who died the day my plane from overseas touched down in the U.S.

Meditation is a craft, like barrel making or book binding or cobbling. It first takes patience. One has to refine the skill over a long period of time. But most importantly, one must have a teacher.

Craig clapped the stick in his hand three times and we quietly stretched our legs. Much less talkative than before, we walked down the hallway, he snapping out the lights as we passed each room. Outside, he told me of the Friday night meetings, and hoped that I would return to sit and to study.

Driving home I thought, where else but in a sincerely spiritual setting can two strangers come together out of the evening dusk and sit shoeless side by side in silence without once thinking this is an absurd situation. It was the longest twenty-five minutes of my life.

"WHY CAN'T A WOMAN BE MORE LIKE A MAN?"

***Women, Men and Angels* by Subhuti**

Reviewed by Ray Wills

All the major developments in human history have been spearheaded by men ... above all the greatest spiritual achievements have all been made by men. [page 44]

How marvellous! How know-it-all to arrive at such a sweeping judgement. Particularly seeing that most 'spiritual achievements', whatever they may be, great or small, go entirely unrecorded. This is the kind of book which makes me want to cry out in dismay at its arrogance.

I long ago reached the conclusion that although Buddhism is usually talked about as though it were a single entity, this is not the case. There are a large number of differing Buddhisms, a plurality. When people ask me, as they do, what Buddhism has to say about this, that or the other, I am inclined to give a response that starts with the statement that there are at least fifty-seven varieties of organised Buddhism -- each of which might well give a differently slanted answer from its own particular viewpoint.

Of course, we are told, Sakyamuni said all views have to be given up eventually, right views as much as wrong views. However, a great deal of clinging to a multiplicity of views seems to go on in many Buddhist organisations. These organisations are inclined to be just as hierarchic, bureaucratic and power-structured as any secular institution. All power tends to corrupt, absolute power absolutely! Let aspiring Buddhists beware. Let all aspirants to awakening be aware.

All this by way of a preamble to a review of *Men, Women and Angels*, an exposition by Subhuti of Sangharakshita's views on women and men in the spiritual life. I am as reluctant to review this book as Subhuti was to write it. He says, "There are many matters in which I am much more interested." On that point we agree -- but not on much else.

The book attempts to set out and justify Sangharakshita's evolutionary theory of spiritual development. This is hierarchic in structure. Subhuti writes: "*Sangharakshita has expressed this hierarchy in more contemporary and Western terms: animal, woman, man, artist, angel -- the aphorism that heads this article refers to the same ordering: 'Angels are to men as men are to women -- because they are more human and, therefore, more divine.'*" [page 28]

Subhuti has much to say about women, almost as much as men, but next to nothing about artists or angels. In the case of the latter, G.K. Chesterton's remark is apt: "Angels fly because they take themselves lightly." Perhaps the angels saw Subhuti coming and all flew away. Women, however, are treated very heavily, pinned to the ground one might say. No playfulness or light-filled humour is to be found here. It's all very disputatious and weighty.

To give you the full thrust of Subhuti's arguments I have to quote extensively.

For those of us who are Sangharakshita's disciples, the position is clear. He does say that women generally have less spiritual aptitude than men ... [page 58]

Actually it is quite possible to recognise relative inferiority in another whilst retaining a very positive and sympathetic attitude to them. [13]

[Sangharakshita] views the 'natural' relationship between the sexes as fundamentally one of tension -- and he does not consider men, by any means, to have always had the upper hand in that struggle. The 'fortunes of war' have gone now one way and now another ... Men have of course sometimes oppressed women (and women, men), just as Jews have sometimes enslaved Gentiles (and Gentiles, Jews!).

[11]

[T]raditional subordination of women to men should not be seen in terms of political oppression, since it is an arrangement that largely suits both parties and reveals the real state of affairs in the traditional relationship between the sexes ... The leadership ... naturally falls to the member of the sex ... whose greater detachment from the immediacy of subjective impulse fits him better for the ordering and planning of its arrangements and future. [86]

Sangharakshita points out ... the woman's form, her 'psycho-physical complex', already gives greater expression to interests and concerns that have little affinity with spiritual life. Her consciousness is therefore, from the outset, likely to be more limited ... [30]

Human reproduction ties women closely to the rhythms of their bodies and motherhood demands the capacity for visceral empathy. The female character that arises from these facts limits many women, whether they are mothers or not ... They are thus characteristically far more anchored to the lower evolution ... [42]

Regardless of the obvious disadvantages, many women with some spiritual aspiration ... still feel that strong urge to give birth. [41]

These biological imperatives play a major part in forming the basic characters of most women ... marked by a practical conservatism ... providing a background of stability and care for growing children ... However, they are not characteristics that, by and large, support spiritual commitment. ...In a way giving birth to and nurturing a child is an achievement -- although it is a largely passive achievement that demands no qualities of individual striving. ...From a spiritual point of view, that whole world of interest ... is quite simply a distraction from the fundamental issues of life -- and a distraction men can never feel in the same way. [40]

Despite the urgency and persistence of the sexual desire, [man's] interest in sex is immediate, short term, and relatively uncomplicated, often with little personal interest attached. If they could have sex at will without any further commitment, many men would be largely content to do so. This relative freedom ... leaves men with energy and interest to spare for other things ... cultural and spiritual effort. [43]

The aggressive drive and initiative required to inseminate a woman ... are precisely the qualities needed to break through from the known to the unknown. The passive, enduring, and nurturing qualities of a woman are precisely opposed to that breakthrough.

[44]

The insistent tug of the body and its concerns does not drag men back into the lower evolution, so they are freer to rise on the Higher Evolution. [47]

One interesting question ... is the extent to which those women who do show great aptitude for spiritual life display masculine characteristics... [23]

For obvious psychological reasons, it is generally more difficult for men to find a healthy cultural or spiritual model in a woman than it is for women to find one in a man ... This should at least be one of the factors reviewed by those whose job it is to select people to lead classes ... [78]

The strongly held views about women and men grasped by Sangharakshita (and also by Subhuti) may be summarised as follows:

- Women and men have the same spiritual potential to realise Enlightenment.
- Enlightenment arises in dependence upon effort and the capacity to work through spiritual steps and stages, perhaps over many years, or indeed lifetimes.
- Women in general have less spiritual aptitude than men.
- Men are better able to actualise their potential for Enlightenment than women.
- Men are more likely to take up the spiritual life in a fuller sense than women.
- Men surpass women in commitment to the spiritual life.
- Separate spiritual communities are necessary for men and women.
- It is better if men teach men and women teach women.
- The domination of women by men is not historical fact but a myth (presumably put about by feminists).

These views are based upon a thesis labelled "the hierarchy of being" for which no proof is offered, rather a welter of explanations in terms of physiology, biology, psychology, social role theory, spiritual traditions etc. We are told that "Buddhists celebrate spiritual hierarchy as central to their understanding of life." Dear reader, let me level with you: not this particular Buddhist. As far as I am concerned with are all members one of another in Buddha nature. I am a non-entity, that is all.

Subhuti believes that the true liberation of women lies in their accepting the views about themselves promulgated, in his wisdom, by Sangharakshita. As a result, once these views are accepted women's "path to supreme Enlightenment lies clear and open." Then, as the last sentence in the book states, "All that is needed is some manly effort" (our italics). Arrogant to the last, one might comment.

I am glad this book has been published. At least now members of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order and others will be able to ascertain what Sangharakshita's views concerning the differing spiritual aptitudes of men and women and their consequences actually are. I trust that full and frank dialogue will ensue. Perhaps a reading of the Kalama Sutta should take place prior

to all dialogues.

Women, Men & Angels by Subhuti (Alex Kennedy). Windhorse Publications, Birmingham, 1995. 97 pages (paperback), net £4.99, ISBN 0 904766 75 6.

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INTERNATIONAL NEWS

SAKYADHITA MEETING IN GERMANY, OCTOBER 1996

German Sakyadhita members met in Hamburg at Semkye Ling, a new Tibetan centre, in October 1996. In addition to members, Nell Willekens, Sakyadhita representative from the Netherlands, also attended.

The meeting discussed Sakyadhita's history and the character of the biannual conferences characterised by interreligious and intercultural exchange, including the need to adapt religious traditions to modern times. Each international conference has highlighted conditions for local (Sri Lankan, Thai and Ladakhi) women and has inspired improvements.

Rotraut Wurst, the German representative, has been active in public relations work, swapping newsletters with other Buddhist organizations and other women's organizations in Germany.

Sakyadhita is not only a nuns' support group. It addresses themes of interest to all Buddhist women in modern society. For example, at the last Sakyadhita Conference, Chatsumarn Kabilsingh spoke about Buddhism and prostitution. A related workshop discussed Buddhism and women's health.

Sakyadhita Germany discussed the possibility of registering itself as a tax-deductible organization in Germany, with its own agenda and legal status. This would make publicity easier. Everyone present agreed to establish such an organization and to expand the circular letters to a newsletter. They decided that an additional membership fee for Sakyadhita Germany would be fixed at the next meeting. The Dutch representative was recruited as the foreign correspondent for the newsletter, with a view to bringing out a newsletter for Sakyadhita Europe in the next few years.

-- Based on a report by Jasmin Bassett, President, Sakyadhita-UK

ON GROWING A THERAVADAN NUNS' SANGHA IN BRITAIN

In 1979 four women arrived simultaneously at the newly established Chithurst Monastery (Cittaviveka) in West Sussex, England to live and practise Dhamma with the developing monastic community of monks there. Two years earlier, the Venerable Ajahn Chah had sent four of his Western disciples, headed by Ajahn Sumedho, to live in England and before long there was much interest and a growing number of people wishing to undertake the monastic training and lifestyle.

Wishing to undertake the nuns' training, those first four women lived within the eight-precept discipline, modelled on the white-robed maechee of the Thai Theravadan tradition. But before long, it became obvious that a more detailed and comprehensive training was required to help the women's community live together and grow spiritually.

Within the Theravadan tradition there is presently no Bhikkhuni ordination available to women - but the ten-precept form of the samaneri was possible, so from that, with the help of a designated senior monk, a way of training appropriate for Western women began to take shape. Eventually, the new training code would draw from both the Bhikkhu and Bhikkhuni Vinayas, and has resulted in what we have called the Siladhara Vinaya training -- a body of some 120 rules and monastic observances based on the ten precepts.

As alms-mendicant nuns we are supported in the traditional way and so are able to train in respect of the four requisites. We observe the traditional Vassa (rains retreat) season and fortnightly Uposathas, reciting our training rules regularly (when there is a sangha of at least four nuns living together).

In our particular tradition, the Vinaya training is afforded great significance. It forms an essential counterpart to the practice and understanding of Dhamma. It serves to create a kind of boundary which can mirror kilesa (mental defilements), creating the opportunity for relinquishing or transforming such afflictive mind-states. Without such a boundary or container, the force of habit will tend to hold sway. In the Pali scriptures, the Buddha, just before his parinibbana, emphasised to Ananda, his long-term attendant:

Ananda, it may be that you will think: "The Teacher's instruction has ceased, now we have no teacher!" It should not be seen like this, Ananda, for what I have taught and explained to you as Dhamma and Discipline will, at my passing, be your teacher."

(Digha-Nikaya 16)

It was in 1984 that Amaravati Monastery was established in Hertfordshire with the intention of functioning more as a Dhamma centre, accommodating the growth of interest in both the monastic and lay Buddhist lifestyles. As well as providing a training centre for the growing nuns' community, it provided more facilities for guest accommodation, a retreat centre and a large library.

The Nuns' Order has been established for 14 years now, and as can be expected of any new

venture of such import, it has been through its ups and downs as we learn through experience (as opposed to ideals) just what actually works, what is supportive, and what is not. This rocky process of birth and coming to maturity is a natural one it seems, and one of essential learning experience too. Many women have come and gone over the years, testing the waters for various periods of time and adding their own unique ingredients to the developing form. We are still a relatively small community, with thirteen siladhara and eight [anagarikas](#), and perhaps the rocky waters are not entirely passed, but the base now feels quite strong -- with a growing sense of stability, maturity and ever-deepening commitment.

It is largely through the benefit of the Vinaya training that a forward-moving growth can take place. When a guiding principle is agreed upon and honoured by the group, then there is the possibility of growing beyond the limitations of individuals' whims and ways, beyond the restrictive and constrictive structures of self-view, to the liberating freedom from "me" and "mine".

The development of our community is now entering a new phase. Since the beginning, the nuns have lived and trained in the double communities of Amaravati and Cittaviveka, sharing the burden of the various duties and teaching responsibilities both inside and outside of the monasteries. Over the years, the monks and nuns have learnt a great deal from each other, gradually developing skilful means of fostering and supporting a mutual respect and spiritual friendship within the brahmacariya life.

Now we have the opportunity to reside for the next two years in one of our branch monasteries in south England and experiment with a small nuns' community living alone there, while still maintaining a Nuns' Sangha at both Cittaviveka and Amaravati. This may spread the community a little thinly for a while, but it seems that a worthwhile commitment to make. It brings into focus aspects of our training that will now need further clarification and definition and as an experience will certainly create some new dynamics to work with as well. But the timing of such a move seems right.

To be able to cultivate the Path of the Buddha in such times and places and with supportive conditions seems extremely fortunate. The way forward is not always easy to discern, but if we continue to allow the guiding principles of Dhamma-Vinaya to effect the transformation of our hearts and inform our actions, then we can trust in the unfolding of the process, with the Triple Refuge as both an inner and outer support.

i Anagarikas are eight-precept nuns who commit themselves for at least two years before deciding on higher ordination.

SINGAPORE

Sakyadhita-Singapore, along with the National Kidney Foundation, held the opening ceremony of a new Dialysis- and Daycare Center for the Elderly on March 29, 1997. This was attended by thousands of supporters and well-wishers. It is the first dialysis center co-sponsored by a

Buddhist organization. Sakyadhita is the first Buddhist Women women'a group to be officially registered in Singapore.

[A WEBPAGE FOR SAKYADHITA INTERNATIONAL](#)

Preparations are under way to establish a World Wide Web presence for Sakyadhita International! Bhikkhuni Karma Lekshe Tsomo is planning to put together a Sakyadhita webpage of resources on women and Buddhism, and has already acquired an URL (web address) for the new page. She is being assisted by Julia Milton, a Sakyadhita-UK member who last summer created Women Active in Buddhism, the Web's first page dedicated to women and Buddhism.

If all goes well, the page should appear on <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~tsomo/> within the next few months. Ideally the page would include, for example:

- membership and subscription information
- how to contact your local, regional or national Sakyadhita representative
- details on national Sakyadhita initiatives in every country we are active
- resources on ordination for women
- the [annual conference](#) (and proceedings from previous conferences!)
- an archive of all back issues of the [Sakyadhita newsletter](#)

In the meantime, if you have Web access you are also welcome to take a look at: the Sakyadhita Los Angeles webpage, <http://www.cpsc.suu.edu/users/henderso/sakya.htm> the Women Active in Buddhism webpage, <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/staff/miltonj/women.htm> (it includes a regularly updated page on the upcoming Sakyadhita conference in Cambodia, <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/staff/miltonj/women.htm>). Please be prompt, though; Julia will be moving to Canada later in the spring and the page won't be there for much longer! If you have experience with writing webpages and would like to help, we would love to hear from you! Please contact Lekshe c/o Sakyadhita, 400 Hobron Lane #2615, Honolulu HI 96815, USA.

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