

Sakyadhita Newsletter

Winter 1997 Vol. 8, No. 2

FOCUS ON THERAVADA

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5TH SAKYADHITA CONFERENCE IN CAMBODIA

It is not too late to register for the 5th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women from December 29, 1997, to January 4, 1998. We have been receiving good news from Hema Goonatilake, our Conference Co-coordinator in Cambodia. She sends encouraging reports of political stability and greetings from the large numbers of people who are helping put the Conference together.

The site of the Conference is the Vipassana Center for Culture and Meditation, an oasis of peace and quiet just 15 minutes from Phnom Penh, the capital city. Built in the Angkor style of architecture, with splendid tropical courtyards and flowered pathways, the Center hosts many

international conferences. It was the site of the Cambodian National Conference of Laywomen and Nuns held in 1994.

The Queen of Cambodia will grace the opening ceremony to be held at the Royal Palace. Leading Buddhist women from Cambodia and around the world will share their ideas on a wide range of interesting topics. Workshops will be linked with lectures to stimulate personal reflection and discussion. The tour to Angkor from January 5 to 7 will be a valuable window into the arts and culture of Cambodia.

Topics for discussion include diversity in Buddhist practice (meditation, scholarship, ordination, practicing with limitations), Buddhism and social transformation (untouchability, women and violence, Buddhism and the media, interfaith dialogue), Buddhism and family (domestic abuse, sexual conduct and misconduct), and diversity in Buddhist women's experience (Burma, Cambodia, China, India, Hawai'i, Japan, Nepal, and Thailand). The format will encourage women to talk, listen, meditate, and share their dreams.

CONFERENCE INFORMATION:

Contact Norma Fain Pratt

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NORTH AMERICA CONFERENCE 1998

North American Women in Buddhism:
Unity and Diversity

The need for a North America Conference on Women and Buddhist Women has long been felt. A four-day conference connecting traditional Buddhist values and Western feminist concerns is scheduled for June 3 to 7, 1998, at Pitzer College near Los Angeles, California. Open to faculty, students, and the community at large, it will be co-sponsored by Sakyadhita and the Center for Educational Studies at Claremont Graduate University.

Goals:

- Encourage dialogue between scholars of religion and practitioners of Buddhism

- Create a meeting place for women from various Buddhist traditions
- give Asian immigrant women an opportunity to speak to a broad audience about their Buddhist experience
- Examine the importance for Buddhist women of feminism, world peace, ecumenism, environment, spiritual well-being, sexuality, class and race relations, political involvement, and ordination
- Bring Buddhist women together to develop projects in cooperation with international Buddhist women's communities

Scholarly and Experiential Dimensions:

*Noted scholars and practitioners from around the world will give presentations and lead workshops and discussion groups.

*Participants will meet regularly to exchange ideas on issues raised at the Conference and to experience various forms of Buddhist meditational practice.

*Participants will have the opportunity to express their own journeys in sessions dealing with spiritual growth.

Media:

*An exhibit of books on Buddhism, women in Buddhism, and women's issues.

*Films and slide presentations will offer visual expressions of Buddhist women's experience in North America and internationally.

Be sure to save the dates!

UPASIKA KEE NANAYON

AND THE SOCIAL DYNAMIC OF THERAVADIN BUDDHIST PRACTICE

by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

Upasika Kee Nanayon, also known by her pen name, K. Khao Suan Luang, was arguably the foremost woman Dhamma teacher in 20th-century Thailand. Born in 1901 to a Chinese merchant family in Rajburi, a town to the west of Bangkok, she was the eldest of five children--or,

counting her father's children by a second wife, the eldest of eight. Her mother was a very religious woman and taught her the rudiments of Buddhist practice, such as nightly chants and the observance of the precepts, from an early age. In later life she described how, at the age of six, she became so filled with fear and loathing at the miseries her mother went through in being pregnant and giving birth to a younger sibling that, on seeing the newborn child for the first time "sleeping quietly, a little red thing with black, black hair"-- she ran away from home for three days. This experience, plus the anguish she must have felt when her parents separated, probably lay behind her decision, made when she was still quite young, never to submit to what she saw as the slavery of marriage.

During her teens she devoted her spare time to Dhamma books and to meditation, and her working hours to a small business to support her father in his old age. Her meditation progressed well enough that she was able to teach him meditation, with fairly good results, in the last year of his life. After his death she continued her business with the thought of saving up enough money to enable herself to live the remainder of her life in a secluded place and give herself fully to the practice. Her aunt and uncle, who were also interested in Dhamma practice, had a small home near a forested hill, Khao Suan Luang (Royal Park Mountain), outside of Rajburi, where she often went to practice. In 1945, as life disrupted by World War II had begun to return to normal, she gave up her business, joined her aunt and uncle in moving to the hill, and there the three of them began a life devoted entirely to meditation. The small retreat they made for themselves in an abandoned monastic dwelling eventually grew to become the nucleus of a women's practice center that has flourished to this day.

Life at the retreat was frugal, in line with the fact that outside support was minimal in the early years. However, even now that the center has become wellknown and well-established, the same frugal style has been maintained for its benefits in subduing greed, pride, and other mental defilements, as well as for the pleasure it offers in unburdening the heart. The women practicing at the center are all vegetarian and abstain from such stimulants as tobacco, coffee, tea, and betel nut. They meet daily for chanting, group meditation, and discussion of the practice. In the years when Upasika Kee's health was still strong, she would hold special meetings at which the members would report on their practice, after which she would give a talk touching on any important issues that had been brought up. It was during such a session that the talk recorded here was given.

In the center's early years, small groups of friends and relatives would visit on occasion to give support and to listen to Upasika Kee's Dhamma talks. As word spread of the high standard of her teachings and practice, larger and larger groups came to visit, and more women began to join the community. When tape recording was introduced to Thailand in the mid-1950's, friends began recording her talks and, in 1956, a group of them printed a small volume of her transcribed talks for free distribution. By the mid-1960's, the stream of free Dhamma literature from Khao Suan Luang--Upasika Kee's poetry as well as her talks--had grown to a flood. This attracted even more people to her center and established her as one of the bestknown Dhamma teachers, male or female, in Thailand.

Upasika Kee was something of an autodidact. Although she picked up the rudiments of meditation during her frequent visits to monasteries in her youth, she practiced mostly on her

own without any formal study under a meditation teacher. Most of her instruction came from books--the Pali Canon and the works of contemporary teachers--and was tested in the crucible of her own relentless honesty. Her later teachings show the influence of the writings of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, although she transformed his concepts in ways that made them entirely her own.

In the later years of her life she developed cataracts that eventually left her blind, but she still continued a rigorous schedule of meditating and receiving visitors interested in the Dhamma. She passed away quietly in 1978 after entrusting the center to a committee she appointed from among its members. Her younger sister, Upasika Wan, who up to that point had played a major role as supporter and facilitator for the center, joined the community within a few months of Upasika Kee's death and soon became its leader, a position she held until her death in 1993. Now the center is once again being run by committee and has grown to accommodate 60 members.

Much has been written recently on the role of women in Buddhism, but it is interesting to note that, for all of Upasika Kee's accomplishments in her own personal Dhamma practice and in providing opportunities for other women to practice as well, sociohistorical books on Thai women in Buddhism make no mention of her name or of the community she founded. This underscores the distinction between Buddhism as practice and mainstream Buddhism as a sociohistorical phenomenon, a distinction that is important to bear in mind when issues related to the place of women in Buddhism are discussed.

Study after study has shown that mainstream Buddhism, both lay and monastic, has adapted itself thoroughly to the various societies into which it has been introduced--so thoroughly that the original teachings seem in some cases to have been completely distorted. From the earliest centuries of the tradition on up to the present, groups who feel inspired by the Buddha's teachings, but who prefer to adapt those teachings to their own ends rather than adapting themselves to the teachings, have engaged in creating what might be called designer Buddhism. This accounts for the wide differences we find when we compare, say, Japanese Buddhism, Tibetan, and Thai, and for the variety of social roles to which many women Buddhists in different countries have found themselves relegated.

The true practice of Buddhism, though, has always been countercultural, even in nominally Buddhist societies. Society's main aim, no matter where, is its own perpetuation. Its cultural values are designed to keep its members useful and productive--either directly or indirectly--in the ongoing economy. Most religions allow themselves to become domesticated to these values by stressing altruism as the highest religious impulse, and mainstream Buddhism is no different. Wherever it has spread, it has become domesticated to the extent that the vast majority of monastics as well as lay followers devote themselves to social services of one form or another, measuring their personal spiritual worth in terms of how well they have loved and served others.

However, the actual practice enjoined by the Buddha does not place such a high value on altruism at all. In fact, he gave higher praise to those who work exclusively for their own spiritual welfare than to those who sacrifice their spiritual welfare for the welfare of others (Anguttara Nikaya, Sutta 95)--a teaching that the mainstream, especially in Mah y na traditions, has tended to suppress. The true path of practice pursues happiness through social withdrawal, the goal being an undying happiness found exclusively within, totally transcending the world,

and not necessarily expressed in any social function. People who have attained the goal may teach the path of practice to others, or they may not. Those who do are considered superior to those who don't, but those who don't are in turn said to be superior to those who teach without having attained the goal themselves. Thus individual attainment, rather than social function, is the true measure of a person's worth.

Mainstream Buddhism, because it can become so domesticated, often seems to act at crosspurposes to the actual practice of Buddhism. Women sense this primarily in the fact that they do not have the same opportunities for ordination that men do, and tend to be discouraged from pursuing the opportunities that are available to them. The Theravadin Bhikkhuni Sangha, the nuns' order founded by the Buddha, died out because of war and famine almost a millennium ago, and the Buddha provided no mechanism for its revival. (The same holds true for the Bhikkhu Sangha, or monks' order. If it ever dies out, there is no way it can be revived.) Thus the only ordination opportunities open to women in Theravadin countries are as lay nuns, observing eight or ten precepts.

Because there is no formal organization for the lay nuns, their status and opportunities for practice vary widely from location to location. In Thailand, the situation is most favorable in Rajburi and the neighboring province of Phetburi, both of which--perhaps because of the influence of Mon culture in the area--have a long tradition of highlyrespected independent nunneries. Even there, though, the quality of instruction varies widely with the nunnery, and many women find that they prefer the opportunities for practice offered in nuns' communities affiliated with monasteries, which is the basic pattern in other parts of Thailand.

Upasika Kee Nanayon (1901-1978)

The opportunities that monasteries offer for lay nuns to practice, in terms of available free time and the quality of the instruction given, again vary widely from place to place. One major drawback to nuns' communities affiliated with monasteries is that the nuns are relegated to a status clearly secondary to that of the monks, but in the better monasteries this is alleviated to some extent by the Buddhist teachings on hierarchy: that it is a mere social convention, designed to streamline the decisionmaking process in the community, and based on morally neutral criteria so that one's place in the hierarchy is not an indication of one's worth as a person.

Of course there are sexist monks who mistake the privileged position of men as an indication of supposed male superiority, but fortunately nuns do not take vows of obedience and are free to change communities if they find the atmosphere oppressive. In the better monasteries, nuns who have advanced far in the practice are publicly recognized by the abbots and can develop large personal followings. At present, for instance, one of the most active Dhamma teachers in Bangkok is a woman, Amara Malila, who abandoned her career as a medical doctor for a life in a

nun's community connected with one of the meditation monasteries in the Northeast. After several years of practice she began teaching, with the blessings of the abbot, and now has a healthy shelf of books to her name. Such individuals, though, are a rarity, and many lay nuns find themselves relegated to a celibate version of a housewife's life, considerably freer in their eyes than the life of an actual housewife, but still far from conducive to the fulltime practice of the Buddhist path.

Although the opportunities for women to practice in Thailand are far from ideal, it should also be noted that mainstream Buddhism often discourages men from practicing as well. Opportunities for ordination are widely available to men, but it is a rare monk who finds himself encouraged to devote himself entirely to the practice. In village monasteries, monks have long been pressured to study medicine so that they can act as the village doctors or to study astrology to become personal counselors. Both of these activities are forbidden by the disciplinary rules, but are very popular with the laity--so popular that until recent times a village monk who did not take up either of these vocations was regarded as shirking his duties. Scholarly monks in the cities have long been told that the path to nibbana is no longer open, that fulltime practice would be futile, and that a life devoted to administrative duties, with perhaps a little meditation on the side, is the most profitable use of one's monastic career.

On top of this, parents who encourage their sons from early childhood to take temporary ordination often pressure them to disrobe soon after ordination if they show any inclination to stay in the monkhood permanently and abandon the family business. Even families who are happy to have their sons stay in the monkhood often discourage them from enduring the hardships of a meditator's life in the forest.

In some cases the state of mainstream Buddhism has become so detrimental to the practice that institutional reforms have been attempted. In the Theravadin tradition, such reforms have succeeded only if introduced from the top down, when senior monks have received the support of the political powers that be. The canonical example for this pattern is the First Council, called with royal patronage in the first year after the Buddha's passing away, for the express purpose of standardizing the record of the Buddha's teachings for posterity. During the days of absolute monarchy, reforms that followed this pattern could be quite thorough and on occasion were nothing short of draconian. In more recent years, though, they have been much more limited in scope, gaining a measure of success only when presented not as impositions but as opportunities: access to more reliable texts, improved standards and facilities for education, and greater support for stricter observance of the disciplinary rules. And, of course, however such reforms may be carried out, they are largely limited to externals, because the attainment of the Deathless is not something that can be decreed by legislative fiat.

A modern example of such a reform movement is the Lay Nun Association of Thailand, an attempt to provide an organizational structure for all lay nuns throughout the country, sponsored by Her Majesty the Queen and senior monks in the national hierarchy. This has succeeded chiefly in providing improved educational opportunities for a relatively small number of nuns, while its organizational aims have been something of a failure. Even though the association is run by highly educated nuns, most of the nuns I know personally have avoided joining it because they do not find the leaders personally inspiring and because they feel they would be sacrificing

their independence for no perceivable benefit. This view may be based on a common attitude in the outlying areas of Thailand: the less contact with the bureaucratic powers at the center, the better.

As for confrontational reforms introduced from the bottom up, these have never been sanctioned by the tradition, and Theravadin history has no record of their ever succeeding. The only such reform mentioned in the Canon was Devadatta's attempted schism, introduced as a reform to tighten up the disciplinary rules. The Canon treats his attempt in such strongly negative terms that its memory is still very much alive in the Theravadin mind set, making the vast majority of Buddhists reluctant to take up with confrontational reforms no matter how reasonable they might seem. And with good reason: Anyone who has to fight to have his/her ideas accepted inevitably loses touch with the qualities of dispassion, selfeffacement, unentanglement with others, contentment with little, and seclusion--qualities the Buddha set forth as the litmus test for gauging whether or not a proposed course of action, and the person proposing it, were in accordance with the Dhamma.

In addition, there have been striking instances where people have proposed religious reforms as a camouflage for their political ambitions, leaving their followers in a lurch when their ambitions are thwarted. And even in cases where a confrontational reformer seems basically altruistic at heart, he or she tends to play up the social benefits to be gained from the proposed reform in the effort to win support, thus compromising the relationship of the reform to true practice.

Experiences with cases such as this have tended to make Theravadin Buddhists in general leery of confrontational reforms.

Thus, given the limited opportunities for institutional reform, the only course left open to those few men and women prepared to break the bonds of mainstream Buddhism in their determination to practice is to follow the example of the Buddha himself by engaging in what might be called personal or independent reform: to reject the general values of society, go off on their own, put up with society's disapproval and the hardships of living on the frontier, and search for whatever reliable meditation teachers may be living and practicing outside of the mainstream. If no such teachers exist, individuals intent on practice must strike out on their own, adhering as closely as they can to the teachings in the texts--to keep themselves from being led astray by their own defilements--and taking refuge in the example of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha in a radical way.

In a sense, there is a sort of folk wisdom to this arrangement. Anyone who would take on the practice only when assured of comfortable material support, status, and praise--which the Buddha called the baits of the world--would probably not be up to the sacrifices and selfdiscipline the practice inherently entails.

Thus from the perspective of the practice, mainstream Buddhism serves the function of inspiring individuals truly intent on the practice to leave the mainstream and to go into the forest, which was where the religion was originally discovered. As for those who prefer to stay in society, the mainstream meets their social/religious needs while at the same time making them inclined to view those who leave society in search of the Dhamma with some measure of awe and respect, rather than viewing them simply as dropouts.

What this has meant historically is that the true practice of Buddhism has hovered about the edges of society and history--or, from another perspective, that the history of Buddhism has hovered about the edges of the practice. When we look at the historical record after the first generation of the Buddha's disciples, we find only a few anecdotal references to practicing monks or nuns. The only teachers recorded were scholarly monks, participants in controversies, and missionaries. Some people at present have taken the silence on the nuns as an indication that there were no prominent nun teachers after the first generation of disciples. However, inscriptions at the Theravadin stupa at Sanchi in India list nuns among the prominent donors to its construction, and this would have been possible only if the nuns had large personal followings. Thus it seems fair to assume that there were prominent nun teachers, but that they were devoted to meditation rather than scholarship, and that--like the monks devoted to meditation--their names and teachings slipped through the cracks in the historical record inasmuch as true success at meditation is something that historians are in no position to judge.

So, for the period from canonical up to modern times, one can only make conjectures about the opportunities for practice open to men and women at any particular time. Still, based on observations of the situation in Thailand before Western influences made themselves strongly felt, the following dynamic seems likely: Meditation traditions tend to last only two or three generations at most. They are started by charismatic pioneers willing to put up with the hardships of clearing the Buddhist path. Because the integrity of their efforts takes years to be tested--not all pioneers are free from delusion and dishonesty--their role requires great sacrifices. In fact, if largescale support comes too early, it may abort the movement. If, over time, the pioneers do embody the practice faithfully, then as word of their teachings and practices spread, they begin to attract a following of students and supporters. With the arrival of support, the hardships become less demanding, and as life softens, so does the practice. Within a generation or two it has deteriorated to the extent that it no longer inspires support and eventually dies out, together with any memory of the founder's teachings.

In some cases, before the tradition dies out, its example may have a reforming influence at large, shaming or inspiring the mainstream at least temporarily into becoming more favorable to true practice. In other cases, the practice tradition may influence only a limited circle and then disappear without a ripple. For those who benefit from it, of course, the question of its historical repercussions is of no real consequence. Even if only one person has benefited by realizing the Deathless, the tradition is a success.

At present in Thailand we are watching this process work itself out in several strands, with the major difference being that modern media have given us a record of the teachings and practices of many figures in the various meditation traditions. Among the monks, the most influential practice tradition is the Forest Tradition, which was started against great odds at the end of the last century by Phra Ajaan Sao Kantasilo and Phra Ajaan Mun Bhuridatto, sons of peasants, at a time when the central Thai bureaucracy was very active in stamping out independent movements of any sort, political or religious. We have no direct record of Ajaan Sao's teachings, only a booklet or two of Ajaan Mun's, but volume upon volume of their students' teachings. Among women, the major practice tradition is Upasika Kee Nanayon's. Although she herself has passed away, the women at her center still listen to her tapes nightly and keep her teachings alive throughout society by printing and reprinting books of her talks for free distribution.

Both traditions are fragile: the Forest Tradition is showing signs that its very popularity may soon lead to its demise, and the women at Khao Suan Luang are faced with the problem of seeing how long they can maintain their standard of practice without charismatic leadership. On top of this, the arrival of the mass media--and especially television with its tendency to make image more consequential than substance, and personality more important than character--is sure to change the dynamic of the Buddhist mainstream and the practice, not necessarily for the better. Still, both traditions have at least left a record to inspire future generations and to show how the Buddhist path of practice may be reopened by anyone, male or female, no matter what forms of designer Buddhism may take over the mainstream and inevitably lead it astray.

(This introduction to *An Unentangled Knowing*, by Upasika Kee Nanayon, printed for free distribution by Dhamma Dana Publications, Barre, Massachusetts, is reprinted with permission.)

SAKYADHITA WEBPAGE

Buddhist women are entering a new phase of global networking with the newly created Sakyadhita website. With more than 2000 visits in just three months, this site is becoming a lifeline for information on Buddhist women. The webpage includes: * back issues of the Sakyadhita newsletter * membership information* schedule of retreats and teachings by and for women* books on Buddhist women* biographical sketches of women teachers * information on ordination* projects to benefit Buddhist women Future plans include book reviews, reviews of monasteries in Asia open to women, and links to other websites and resources of interest to Buddhist women. Check it out! Internet address: <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~tsomo> Sakyadhita expresses its heartfelt gratitude to Julia Milton and Brian Wagner for their enthusiastic efforts to make these valuable resources available to Buddhist women. Please send your ideas!

INTERNATIONAL FULL ORDINATION CEREMONY IN BODHGAYA, INDIA

February 15 to 23, 1998

Applications are now being accepted for a full ordination ceremony for bhikshus and bhikshunis to be held at the Chinese Temple in Bodhgaya, India from February 15 to 23, 1998. Nuns will receive ordination from both bhikshuni and bhikshu orders, in a dual ordination ceremony, in accordance with the Dharmagupta Pratimoksa. The ceremony will be conducted in Chinese, with English interpretation. Senior Acaryas from both Theravada and Mahayana traditions are invited to witness the ceremony, and to give their advice and blessings.

The Sangha (monastic order) originated in India more than 25 centuries ago when the Buddha ordained his first five followers. The establishment of the bhikshu order was followed by the establishment of bhikshuni order five years later when Mahaprajapati Gautami, the Buddha's foster mother, took full ordination together with 500 female companions. Thus the four sections of the monastic order--bhikshu, bhikshuni, shramanera and shramanerika--were complete.

The bhikshu and bhikshuni lineages that had been established in India were transmitted to Sri Lanka by the elder Venerable Mahinda and Venerable Sanghamitra, the son and daughter of King Asoka. These lineages were subsequently transmitted to China during the 3rd and 5th centuries, respectively. Through successive generations, the bhikshu and bhikshuni orders have played an important role in propagating Dharma around the world. However, the lineage of bhikshuni ordination was interrupted in India by foreign invasions. In Sri Lanka, it also ceased to exist with the fall of Anuradhapura during the 11th century. With this, Buddhism lost half of its propagational force.

At the 4th International Monastic Seminar held at Fo Kuang Shan in Taiwan in May 1997, more than 20 participants from the Theravada, Mahayana and Varjrayana traditions jointly requested Ven. Hsing Yun, founder of Fo Kuang Shan Temple, to hold a higher ordination for bhikshunis in Bodhgaya. Remembering the kindness of the Indian and Sri Lankan missionaries who transmitted the bhikshuni lineage abroad, the Chinese feel that it is their duty to return the lost bhikshuni lineage to its ancestral lands. This ordination will give nuns from India, Sri Lanka, and many other countries the opportunity to receive higher ordination.

Buddhist novices between the ages of 20 to 55 are qualified to apply. Application requirements include: the completed application form; photocopy of passport or official identity card; two recent passport-sized photographs; a medical certificate verifying that the candidate is in good health; a letter of recommendation or approval from one's (ordained) teacher. Candidates must provide their own airfare (some financial sponsorship available), arrange their own visa applications, and prepare the three robes (kasaya) and almsbowl. Meals and accommodation during the ordination will be provided. Send applications to:

Bodhgaya International Full Ordination Organizing Committee

c/o Asian Buddhist Cultural Center, Temple Street, Bodhgaya, Gaya, Bihar, India

Phone: 91631400478, Fax: 91631400824, Attn: Ven. Bhikshuni Chueh Men

BE MINDFUL AND SET YOURSELF FREE

Melissa Prichard

Mindfulness is a concept that is often thrown around in conversations by both Western "wannabe Buddhists" and serious meditation practitioners. Exploring how mindfulness is described and interpreted in the Pali canonical texts is important in understanding why mindfulness has recently been highlighted in Western "guide books" to Buddhist meditation. The value of mindfulness in obtaining realization and the appeal it has for Westerners makes it a popular concept worthy of investigation by both novice and experienced meditators.

The word "mindfulness" is an English translation of the Pali word *sati*. In Pali, one of the meanings of *sati* describes it as an activity. Mindfulness is the activity of being aware of what is presently happening within and outside the body in exactly the way it is happening. In other words, mindfulness is seeing things as they really are in the present moment. Mindfulness is essentially observing things without judgment and without criticism. When one is being mindful, one is supposed to accept whatever one is observing without judging and without allowing personal opinions to affect one's pure awareness. This state of pure awareness allows an individual to directly observe impermanence, suffering and selflessness, without the mind being clouded by thoughts and judgments. A direct experience of these "three characteristics of experience" is important for gaining insight into their significance.

A second meaning of the Pali word *sati* is bare attention. Mindfulness is bare attention to what is going on, without holding thoughts or concepts in the mind. Mindfulness acknowledges experiences without comparing or categorizing them. Mindfulness is the immediate experiencing of occurrences without the lens of conceptualization. An example of mindfulness as bare attention might be an awareness that the sensation of sadness is occurring within you, without thinking "I am sad" or placing a value judgment on that sadness. This bare attention of things that are occurring within and around a person is devoid of conceptualizing a direct personal connection with a thought or a sensation. When one coughs, instead of thinking "I have coughed," one merely notices the coughing as an action or sensation, without the concept of "I" attached. This bare attention allows for observation without the distorts of personal judgments or preconceptions about an event.

Mindfulness is also being aware of change. When mindful, one watches the arising and falling of emotions, thoughts, and physical occurrences.

This observation of change leads to direct insight into the nature and existence of impermanence, both in the universe and the individual. Meditators take note of changes in the external environment and reactions to change. While being mindful, meditators take note of how external events are reflected and experienced by people. Ultimately they learn to free themselves from attachments, from self, and from expectations of permanence.

Mindfulness is a tool for Buddhist practitioners to perceive impermanence, suffering, and selflessness as the deepest truths of existence. These three truths are not presented in Buddhism as dogmas requiring blind faith; rather, they are presented as being universal and self-evident to a person who investigates them. Mindfulness is a tool for investigating these truths because, as Bhikkhu Henepola Gunaratana says, "Mindfulness has the power to reveal the deepest level of reality available to human observation."

The importance of mindfulness is mentioned many times in the Pali canonical texts. In the Visuddhimagga, the Buddha is said to have taught that "Mindfulness manifests as protection, and there is no exertion or restraint of the mind without mindfulness." This text explains that mindfulness manifests as protection because it protects the mind from desires arising from the sense faculties. For example, a person whose "eye door is not closed by the doorpanel of mindfulness" is vulnerable to desire for things seen. If a person closes the eye faculty with the doorpanel of mindfulness, however, then that person is still aware of what is happening, but is less likely to grow attached to or have desire for what is seen. In other words, mindfulness allows for pure awareness through open sense faculties, but prevents the arising of desire and attachment for what is seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and felt through the sense faculties.

Mindfulness is also said to manifest as protection because, as the Visuddhimagga explains, once mindfulness is well-established, it becomes part of a person. Once mindfulness is developed in a person, it will "descend into or enter into whatever subject that person adverts to, reacts to, gives attention to, reviews or appears to." Mindfulness is something that individuals develop and incorporate into their daily lives, to be utilized whenever needed.

The Visuddhimagga says that mindfulness is essential to the exertion and restraint of the mind. It also explains that a "mind reinforced by mindfulness is not perturbed by negligence." According to the Buddha, when one is mindful, one's mind does not become dull or unaware of what is occurring. Once mindfulness is

incorporated into daily life, the act of being mindful influences every action. Mindfulness helps in the restraint of the mind because it guards the sense faculties and acts as a restraint on the mind's tendency to desire and become attached to things viewed through the senses. When a person is mindful, the mind is less likely to lapse into agitation or idleness. In fact, the Buddha taught that pure equanimity is the basis of mindfulness: it counteracts the tendency of the mind to get worked up over some things or not pay attention to others.

In the Mahasatipatthana Sutta, the Buddha states "The only way to purify your mind, overcome sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief, to reach the Noble Path and to realize nibbana is through the Four Foundations of Mindfulness--mindfulness of the body, feelings, consciousness, and phenomena. For example, when mindful of the body, "a bhikkhu dwells contemplating the body in the body, ardently, clearly comprehending and mindful, removing covetousness and grief in the world." Energy and effort must be exerted to ensure complete awareness of everything that is in the body.

It is interesting to note that the Mahasatipatthana Sutta makes a point of distinguishing clearly between mindfulness and concentration, although the Visuddhimagga does not. Mindfulness is described as the state of mind which allows for concentration; mindfulness precedes and is necessary for concentration. However, mindfulness also continues after one has begun to concentrate, so mindfulness also occurs simultaneously with concentration. An example given to explain the difference between mindfulness and concentration is of a rock being thrown against a mud wall. Mindfulness helps the mind notice that the rock being thrown, whereas concentration allows the mind to focus on the rock once it becomes stuck in the wall.

The two concepts--concentration and mindfulness--have their origins in the Pali texts, but now they are being highlighted by Western Buddhists. Both concentration and mindfulness are championed as methods for achieving insight and realization. Samatha meditation is usually explained as a method to develop concentration, a way of focusing on one thing so as to rest the mind. Vipassana meditation, on the other hand, stresses mindfulness. It uses concentration as a tool to break through illusion and see things as they really are.

Interestingly, most Theravadin guide books on meditation written for Western readers place more emphasis on mindfulness than on concentration. In his book *Mindfulness in Plain English*, Bhikkhu Henepola Gunaratana states that concentration meditation has many drawbacks, while mindfulness is free from drawbacks and leads directly to wisdom. Although Gunaratana states that concentration is necessary and should be developed along with mindfulness, he also makes it clear that mindfulness is the "real" tool for realizing enlightenment. In *The Mind and The Way*, Ajahn Sumedho describes at length the importance of being mindful, but does not even mention the need for developing concentration. Nor does Bhikkhu Khantipalo's book *Calm and Insight* directly mention the importance of developing concentration along with mindfulness.

It is unclear why authors of Buddhist meditation guide books for Western readers stress mindfulness over concentration. According to the Pali texts, the Buddha taught that being mindful is important but he also taught that concentration is equally as important. Mindfulness differs from concentration because mindfulness is the ability to notice all things that are present in a situation, while concentration is the focusing on one particular thing in a situation. Mindfulness and concentration are both essential to Buddhist meditation, especially Theravadin. The Buddha never taught that developing mindfulness could, in any way, replace the need for developing concentration. However, if one were to read most recent English language books on Theravadin meditation, one would get the impression that developing mindfulness is more important than achieving concentration.

One reason why mindfulness is being stressed in Western Buddhism may be as simple as the fact that mindfulness needs to be developed before one can work on concentration. Therefore, beginning level books on meditation would emphasize developing mindfulness before they would begin to describe concentration practice. Another reason why the importance of mindfulness may be stressed in Western books is that mindfulness is more suited for Westerners than concentration. Quite frankly, in modern Western countries there are so many distractions that it is easier to be mindful than to try and concentrate on an object. The West has few meditation halls or places where people can go to work on concentration free from distractions. Therefore, concentration meditation is very difficult for the beginning Western Buddhist, who is not very familiar with meditation, to try to concentrate on an object in the middle of a busy city park or a crowded cafe. It would make sense that if an author is trying to appeal to a Western reader, then he or she would stress a meditational practice (mindfulness) that would be easier for Westerners to incorporate into their daily lives.

Mindfulness is a meditational practice that is essential for the Buddhist who is striving for realization. Mindfulness allows for the direct experience of impermanence, suffering and selflessness the deepest truths of existence. This direct experience helps a practitioner realize that

the concepts of impermanence, suffering and selflessness are indeed truths of our existence and impetus for the need to escape samsara. Even though mindfulness is an important practice, attention to this practice should not overshadow the need to develop other meditational practices such as concentration meditation. The Buddha taught that meditation can take many forms and all forms are important in the quest for enlightenment. Therefore, one should try and incorporate different forms of meditation in their daily practice and, most importantly, be sure and dedicate time every day to meditation.

Melissa Prichard, a law student from Guam, wrote this article for a class on Meditation Traditions with Antioch University's Buddhist Studies Program in India.

THE PLIGHT OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN BURMA

Shelley Anderson

Burma is suffering from one of the longest civil wars of this century. Burmese women and their children bear the brunt of this suffering. Over 200,000 refugees have fled to Thailand to escape, most of them women and children.

Why do the women flee? Burma suffers under a military dictatorship called SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council). Women and children are forced by the dictatorship to build roads and rebuild buildings. They are not paid for their work and are beaten if they do not work hard enough. In the war zones, ethnic minority women are forced by SLORC soldiers to carry heavy loads of ammunition and supplies through the jungle. At night these women and girls are raped by the soldiers. In some cases, women and children have been used as mine sweepers or as human shields during fighting.

The lack of democracy and development means that many women do not have access to decent health care and many children cannot attend school. Poverty means that thousands of Burmese women and girls each year are forced into prostitution in Thailand.

Burmese refugees inside Thailand are not officially recognized as refugees by the United Nations. The refugees cannot legally hold jobs inside Thailand or have no fields to farm. The women are forced to rely on charity from a handful of relief agencies. There are no hospitals and few schools in the camps. Since late 1994, refugee camps along the Burma-Thai border have been attacked by Burmese troops; homes and precious stockpiles of rice have been burned and refugees killed.

Despite the problems, Burmese women refugees are trying to organize smallscale income-generating projects, and to set up nurseries and schools for their children to learn about human rights and ways to build democracy.

Everyone can do something to help women and children in Burma. One way is to help relief groups that work directly with Burmese refugee women and children. These groups provide training in health care and community development, organize income generating projects and small agricultural projects, and set up nursery schools in

the camps. Two such groups are: Women's Education for advancement and Empowerment (WEAVE), PO Box 58, Chiangmai University, Chiangmai 50200 Thailand, and Burmese Relief Center (BRC), PO Box 48, Chiangmai University, Chiangmai 50200, Thailand.

Other ways to express your support are: writing letters through Amnesty International to help free prisoners of conscience in Burmese prisons; supporting the Burmese Women's Union (PO Box 42, Mae Hong Son 58000 Thailand) to inform women of their human rights; organizing talks, videos, and slide shows about Burma for your church or union; finding markets for handcrafted products made in the refugee camps; and boycotting goods manufactured in Burma and refusing to vacation in Burma. Money from foreign investments and tourism help keep the military dictatorship in power. Almost half of the Burmese government's budget goes to the military which is waging war against Burma's ethnic minorities.

Shelley Anderson is with the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, a network of women and men in over 50 countries that works for non-violent social change. Contact IFOR, Spoorstraat 38, 1815 BK Alkmaar, Netherlands. Fax: 31-72-5151-102, email: ifor@gn.apc.org.

"It's women and children who suffer most in situations of conflict."

Noble Peace Prize Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi,
Leader of Burma's democratic movement

BEING HUMBLE: WOMEN'S FLAW OR VIRTUE?

Sister Sucinda

One woman simply laughed when I ask her whether being humble is women's fault or a virtue. Her response seems to signify that developing humility is a "Catch 22" in women's spiritual life. The notion of humility is thus a matter worthy of investigation.

First, let us ask what it means to be humble? According to the Random House Dictionary, the word "humble" has a variety of meanings, including:

- 1) not proud or arrogant
- 2) insignificant, inferior, or subservient
- 3) low in rank, position, or status
- 4) courteous, respectful.

These different connotations reveal one reason for the confusion concerning the notion of humility. In any case, humility may not always be regarded as a virtue or encouraged in modern society. Being in a low position is commonly taken to be a flaw, and since women are generally in lower positions than men, it appears to be a flaw of women. Nobody wants to feel insignificant or inferior. Usually human beings try to avoid such experiences. "Self-realization" is currently the big issue. It seems that strong egos are needed to get along these days and being humble goes against the grain.

Though ThÈrÈse de Lisieux lived only 100 years ago, she lived in quite a different age. She said she wanted to be "Jesus' toy," just a tiny plaything, like a ball. If we take this as a metaphor for the dedication of her whole existence, for giving up all selfish concerns, "little ThÈrÈse" is a wonderful example of being humble. As Jesus' toy she was able to tolerate tremendous pain without complaint and to accept death in her early 20s. When she was younger, she had wanted to die a martyr. In the end, she found herself dying a humble death, in bed, of tuberculosis--the most ordinary disease of her time.

Not getting what we want in our lives and getting what we do not want--pain, loss, disease, and death--are humiliating experiences. But, as the Zen teacher Charlotte Joko Beck pointed out in one of her talks, only a person who cannot be humiliated is truly humble: "[One] who is humble does not require anything." With this as a measure, we can determine within ourselves whether we are humble or not.

Given this understanding of humility, we may find that the underlying assumption in our question concerning humility in women is somewhat misphrased. How much of the mental suffering women experience in daily life is related to feeling hurt or to being humiliated? How many women have discovered that their attempts to gain and enhance self-esteem have been frustrating? Women often discover that there is no real stability or security for this dear self of ours. Feelings of inferiority may alternate with feelings of superiority, and neither one of these feelings can be accurately labeled humility.

The Buddha taught that measuring or comparing oneself with others is a manifestation of conceit, of delusion, and of not seeing things as they are:

"If one regards oneself as superior, equal, or inferior by reason of the body, which is impermanent, painful and subject to change, what else is this but not seeing things as they are? If

one regards oneself as superior, equal, or inferior by reason of feelings, perceptions, volitions, or consciousness, what else is this but not seeing things as they are?

If one does not regard oneself as superior, equal, or inferior by reason of the body, the feelings, perceptions, volitions, or consciousness, what else is this but seeing things as they are?

(From The Discourses of the Buddha, Khanda-Samyutta, No. 49)

Does this passage mean we should forget all ideals of equality between men and women? Does it suggest that there no basis for equality? In the Satipatthana-Sutta, the sutta on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the Buddha teaches us to contemplate "internally and externally." We are taught to look within ourselves and compare how much the fundamental conditions of the body, feelings, mental states, and mental objects (such as the Four Noble Truths) are the same for everyone. We are taught to recognize that all human beings, even all sentient beings, are the same, in the sense that all are the same in their essential nature. This means that pride and conceit arise in the same way for all of us. As long as we cling to the notion of a self, there are delusions, humiliations, and sufferings, that is, as long as we are not truly humble.

When we talk about differences between women's and men's opportunities to participate in religious life, we need to keep this teaching in mind. For example, in 1887, when ThÈrÈse de Lisieux was not permitted to enter a Carmelite monastery, she went to Rome to see the Pope. She humbly asserted herself before him.

Humility is not servility. It does not necessarily mean we resign ourselves to any situation. Sometimes humility may be expressed in a forthright manner. Only a woman with an attitude of being "no thing" (anatta) can move forward in dignity. This is evident in the life of Aung Sang Suu Kyi, for example. In the movie "Beyond Rangoon," we see her step forward in the cause of liberty, even when all the soldiers' guns are directed towards her. Not fearing humiliation gives rise to composure and courage.

We can also learn from the life of Visakha, who lived during the time of the Buddha. She became of Stream-winner (the first stage of sainthood) as a girl of seven, after listening to a Dhamma talk given by the Buddha. She also became was one of his main benefactors. Later, after marriage, she refused to obey her father-in-law when he asked her to entertain naked non-Buddhist ascetics and criticized him for not giving alms to Buddhist renunciants. Her behavior was very bold for a woman of that time and she risked being expelled from her husband's house. In the end, as a result of her noble and straightforward attitude, Visakha's father-in-law listened to the Buddha's teachings and himself became a Stream-winner.

It is important to take into account one's motivation. Women wish to participate in religious ceremonies and study and teach the Dhamma for the benefit of many, not just for themselves. There are open-minded men who realize that by excluding women, part of the truth is kept hidden. They are able to see that knowledge is something

to be shared. True knowledge is not an ego-trip, but grows through acknowledging our mutual interdependence--seeing things as they are. As Bertrand Russell pointed out, "Aristotle could

have avoided the mistake of thinking that women have fewer teeth than men by the simple device of asking Mrs. Aristotle to open her mouth."

Skill in means is one of the 38 blessings that the Buddha describes in the Mangala Sutta. Therefore, there is no good reason why women should not be trained, be skilled, and take responsibility. Nuns are thriving in Taiwan. The "Taiwanese model" is an encouraging example of what nuns are able to contribute, not only to monastic life, but for benefitting beings widely, in many ways, according to their individual faculties.

To cherish equality among men and women depends on understanding others' points of view. For women, it includes seeing men as they are, neither idealized as omniscient gurus or omnipotent saviors, nor with suspicion as "arrogant guys." We should avoid inflicting on others what we ourselves experience as painful. Recognizing negative tendencies such as competitiveness in ourselves allows us to recognize that others suffer from it as well. This kind of reflection can help decrease competitiveness and other negative tendencies.

Tibetan Buddhism teaches a "mind training" (lojong) that can be summarized in eight verses. One of these asks us to respect everyone we meet, whether man or woman. It asks us to estimate ourselves as inferior and to regard others highly. Another verse teaches learning to tolerate loss and allow others to win, even when they are treating us badly. What else is there to win in spiritual life but the stream that leads us surely out of samsara? Why not rejoice when others go first?

Sister Sucinta is a nun ordained in the Theravadin tradition who is a resident at the Bhavana Society in West Virginia.

REALIZING THROUGH LOSS

Rosanna Hsi

Love speaks a language of oneness. Caring for my dad during his last days, I learned to care for myself. The experience revealed to me the truth that my dad and I are one; in loving myself I was in reality loving him. Further, I found application of the Buddhist teachings (Dharma) very helpful in getting me through this, the most difficult time of my life. I realized that our noble calling to become Buddha means living the teachings in our daily lives.

In October 1991, I returned to Hong Kong to be with my dad, who had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. Because I am the eldest of six children, my parents can normally depend on me, but this time the emotional burden was too great. Drained by depression, and physically, mentally, and emotionally debilitated, I crumbled. My brother, a neurologist, offered me medications. I found myself at a crossroads: Would I depend on medication, or take

responsibility for my well-being? In my dilemma, the oft-repeated words of flight attendants suddenly came to me: We are to put the oxygen mask on ourselves before helping others. These seemingly simple words held a profound truth: unless I myself were well, I would be of no use to my dad. I tossed the medications in the drawer and devised a holistic program that would benefit me physically, emotionally, and spiritually--a daily schedule of swimming, meditation, and prayer.

Vigilance in this program brought positive improvements in a short time. Swimming energized me for the entire day, while meditation and prayer connected me to the source of my inner peace, sustaining and replenishing me with a deep sense of strength and calm. The physical and spiritual benefits I received had a healing effect on my dad as well. My energy became focused on taking constructive steps to improve the quality of his home care and to do everything possible to make him happy and comfortable. The centeredness I experienced was the source of empowerment for both of us. To ease his discomfort, I visualized love and light surrounding him, replacing his aches and bringing him a deep, restful sleep. Perhaps the most helpful healing effect on my dad came from my praying for him and repeatedly chanting the name of Amitabha Buddha. My belief that praying was the most constructive way of expressing my love for him was confirmed when, before he died, he chose to become a Buddhist.

In the course of my study of Buddhism, I had found the application of non-attachment most difficult. Now, on the verge of losing my dad, I was again challenged. How could I practice non-attachment toward him, someone I loved so much? How could I let go mentally and emotionally? Shortly after the shock of the Kobe earthquake, I remember asking a Chinese abbot in desperation, "Isn't there anything we can attach ourselves to?" "Nothing," he replied, "except the karma of our deeds. Everything else is impermanent." Now as I sat by my dad's death bed holding his hand, the truth of those words was confirmed. The Buddha's enlightened wisdom on non-attachment and impermanence lightened the burden of my suffering and eased the pain of my loss. Prayer gave me a continued sense of centeredness and peace.

It has now been five years since my dad passed away, yet the memory of him is kept fresh by the blessings he has left behind. The sense of completeness I had with him is a source of great comfort. He was a quiet and isolated man, but through years of persistent effort I had succeeded in reaching him--most directly by massaging his neck and tense shoulders. His eyes would close and his lips would soften into a smile showing how much he enjoyed this. The healing touch of massage connected us in a way that transcended words. He talked animatedly about his horses, the passion of his life, and about swimming and boating, passions we shared. I gained a sense of completeness from all the time we spent together and from our love and appreciation for each other.

Another blessing I received from my dad was the gift of taking care of myself. The program of swimming, meditation, and prayer, to which I still adhere faithfully, has blessed me with physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Now when I minister to those in need, I feel continuously replenished with physical and spiritual resources. My experience with my dad can be applied to other caregivers whose compassion sometimes knows no limit. We can find ways to take care of ourselves in order to serve others better.

Through the application of the Buddhist teachings during the painful time of losing my dad, I gained an insight of what it means to be a Buddhist. I see my noble calling of becoming a Buddha as a two-fold path. The first step is being fully human--of living a life exemplifying virtues of selflessness, kindness, love, and integrity. Only when we are complete as human beings are we on the path of Buddhahood. The second step is the marriage of the teachings and living. We can actively choose to walk the path of Buddha here and now by living his teachings in our daily lives: to live with compassion in loving and caring for others as if they are my mother and father; to live in equanimity; to live in non-attachment; to be aware of the consequences of our choices. As I work out what it means to be human and to be a Buddha, I am aware that it is ultimately a harmonious balance of being truly human and truly a Buddhist. Every moment is an active choice on the path.

Rosanna Hsi is a native of Hong Kong. She welcomes your feedback: 3869 Pokapahu Place, Honolulu, Hawai`i 96816, Ph: 808-734-4557.

VIPASSANA MEDITATION AS PRACTICED IN BANGLADESH

by Jharma Barua

In Bangladesh we practice a form of meditation called Vidarshana or Vipassana Bhavana ("practice of insight"). A yogi is one who practices meditation to achieve the path (magga) and fruit (phala). The five most important things for a yogi are (a) a qualified teacher; (b) firm faith; (c) good discipline; (d) transparent honesty; and (e) unflagging diligence.

To understand Vipassana Bhavana, one must understand the true nature of mind and body. There is not just one consciousness (citta) and one body (rupa) that continues from birth to death. Citta is only a flash. It comes into being and dies as soon as it has given birth to the next citta; this also dies as soon as it has given birth to the next citta. This mental process of citta taking birth and dying is endless. Similarly, the body is not just one from birth to death. The body is composed of extraordinarily tiny particles (paramanu) which die as soon as they come into being. Like citta, these particles are also in flux. The impermanent nature of mind and body is called anicca.

Vipassana means "perceiving clearly and positively." Therefore Vipassana Bhavana means meditation perceiving the impermanent nature of one's own mind and body. When one perceives the impermanent nature of one's own mind and body clearly and positively, one spontaneously realizes that the mind and body are not dependable and cannot give happiness. This realization is called realization of the unsatisfactory (dukkha) nature of one's own mind and body.

When one perceives anicca and realizes dukkha, one also spontaneously realizes that the mind and body are uncontrollable, appearing and disappearing in accordance with their impermanent

nature. No one can achieve the paths and fruits of meditation without perceiving anicca and realizing dukkha and anatta (no-self).

A yogi who cannot control the body and speech will never be able to control the mind. Therefore, to control the body and speech, the yogi must take the following eight vows: (1) to refrain from killing; (2) stealing; (3) sexual intercourse; (4) telling lies; (5) taking intoxicants; (6) taking meals in the afternoon; (7) dancing, singing, playing music, using scents, flower garlands, and cosmetics; and (8) using luxurious chairs and beds.

Other preliminaries to meditation include: (1) Making the following wish three or four times: "May the eight vows which I have taken be helpful to me for acquiring Vipassana insights, paths, and fruits; (2) Offering oneself to the Buddha; (3) Contemplating the following for a few moments before meditation: (a) Nibbana (the end of sufferings) is good; (b) Magga (the path which brings about the end of sufferings) is also good; (c) I am now on the path, which the Buddhas, Pacceka Buddhas, and Arahats have tread; (d) May all living beings near and far have peace of mind.

The actual practice of Vipassana Bhavana is as follows: Concentrate on the abdomen. Watch as it rises and falls. If the rising and falling are not noticeable, put the palm of your hand on the abdomen for a few minutes. Once you notice the rising and falling, take away your palm. Be fully aware of the rising and falling. Inhale and exhale as usual.

While trying to concentrate, some thoughts may appear in your mind. For example, if you find you are planning, mentally note, "planning, planning, planning." If your mind is wandering, mentally note, "wandering, wandering, wandering." If a part of your body is aching from too much sitting, concentrate on the spot that aches and slowly note, "aching, aching, aching." The ache may disappear after some time. When you want to sit, note "wanting to sit." When you want to sleep, note, "wanting to sleep." When lying on your bed, concentrate on every movement of your body and note, "lying, lying, lying." It is not possible to concentrate when you are asleep. However, as soon as you are awake, be aware of it and note, "becoming awake."

When your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind come in contact with a sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, or thought, you must be aware of the contact at once. Never concentrate on the sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, or thought. As soon as a sense organ comes into contact with its appropriate object, you must divert your body and mind. Do not allow it to become distracted by any outside object. If you practice faithfully, earnestly, and diligently like this, following the instructions, you will proceed through one stage of insight after another until finally you reach the path and fruit. In this way, may you achieve samadhi!

Jharma Barua is Vice-President of the Bangladesh Buddhist Women's Association, Chittagong

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

"Why Can't a Woman be More Like a Man?"

A Response

The publication *Women, Men and Angels* [by Subhuti, Windhorse Publications, 1995] has indeed provoked "full and frank dialogue" with in the FWBO [Friends of the Western Buddhist Order]. But such discussion will only be fruitful if it is undertaken on the basis of mutual metta and respect and with an open mind as to how one's own views might be challenged. Ray Wills' review did not attempt to look behind the views expressed in the book to wider questions which surely do need to be address: Are there differences, spiritually speaking, between men and women? Do they need different emphases in their spiritual practice if it is to be effective? If so, what should we do about it? In some circles it seems to have become almost taboo to ask such questions, presumably because people are afraid of coming up with unpalatable answers. Personally I strongly disagree with much of what Subhuti says in *Women, Men and Angels*, but I do think it is important to address the question of gender without preconceived views about what range of answers we might come up with.

In the FWBO, the issue of gender is squarely addressed, and one of the results is that we have very positive conditions for women Dharma practitioners. I live with Buddhist women, and meet weekly with a "chapter" of women Order members to encourage, support, and challenge each other on the Path. My experience has been of excellent teaching and spiritual guidance from both women and men, and I was ordained by a woman preceptor at a women's retreat center, into an Order in which men and women take the same precepts and where all opportunities and responsibilities that are open to men are also open to women.

It might seem paradoxical that such good conditions are to be found in a movement whose teacher believes that women generally are "at somewhat of a disadvantage, at least at the commencement of spiritual life" (to take a more measured quote than those selected in the review). But I believe that these supportive conditions stem from the very fact of our willingness to confront the question of gender differences and to try to offer both women and men the structures and support they need for effective spiritual practice. It is with this aim in mind that Subhuti wrote the book, a point that Wills overlooks.

I hope that women readers will assess the Buddhist traditions that are available to them on the basis of what conditions they actually offer for women to study and practice the Dharma and not be overly influenced by emotive book reviews. I would also respectfully suggest to Subhuti that issues in the spiritual life that particularly concern women may be more helpfully addressed by women than by men. I particularly recommend another recent Windhorse Publication, *The Moon and Flowers*, edited by Kalyanavaca, in which 19 women members of the Western Buddhist Order discuss various concerns of contemporary women--such as motherhood, abortion, career,

feminism, friendship--from a Buddhist point of view. They also provide a much broader picture of women's experiences of spiritual practice within the FWBO.

Dharmacarini Dharmacandra

(Letter shortened for publication.)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

JAPAN

International Conference For Peace in the World

An International Peace Conference was held in Hiroshima, Japan, on October 5, 1997. Attended by more than 1200 people, the Conference was organized by Rev. Ryugen Tanaka, herself a victim of the nuclear explosion over Hiroshima. Assisted by dozens of devoted followers, this indomitable nun of the Shingon tradition not only gathered nuns, monks, and laypeople from 11 different countries, but also united many Japanese Buddhist sects with her call to become "Messengers of Love and Peace."

The urgency of her message became undeniable as participants toured the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and visited many peace memorials: for the 182,000 identified dead, for the unknown victims, for the indentured Korean armaments workers, and the childrens' peace memorial.

The Buddha taught, "Hatred ceases not by hatred, but is overcome by love alone," and urged followers to reduce the internal weapons of greed, anger, and ignorance. Contemporary Buddhist leaders such as H.H. Dalai Lama repeatedly stress that developing inner peace is essential for creating world peace, and teach how to eliminate the self-centered attitude that gives rise to attachment, aversion, and resultant conflicts.

Rev. Tanaka has created an International Temple for World Peace near Hiroshima. She reminds us that if we join our prayers, hopes, and dreams together, peace will be possible. As she puts it, "One light can become tens of thousands of lights."

U.K. AND GERMANY

We are pleased to announce that the national branches of Sakyadhita in Germany and the U.K. have begun publishing their own newsletters. In Germany, "Sakyadhita Frauen im Buddhismus (Women in Buddhism)" is available from Jampa, Stralsunder Weg 24161 Altenholz, Ph: 49-431-322303, Fax: 49-431-328208. In the U.K., "Yogini Link" is published by Jasmin Bassett, 16 Nunsstreet, Lancaster LA1 3PJ, England. Please contact these representatives to obtain copies and send news of interest to Buddhist women.

SRI LANKA

Revival of the Bhikkhuni Order in Sri Lanka

A seminar on the revival of the Bhikkhuni Order in Sri Lanka was convened by Ms. Indrani Iriyagolle at the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress Hall, Colombo, on April 5, 1997. An audience of 200 people, including Bhikkhu Sangha members, attended the seminar designed to inform the public of the need to revive the Order.

Speakers included Prof. Chandima Wijayaabandara, Prof. Lily de Silva, Amarasiri Weeraratna, Indrani Iriyagolle, and Ranjani de Silva. A talk delivered by Dr. Hema Goonatilake, titled "Restoration of the Bhikkhuni Order," aroused much enthusiasm and dialogue on how to accomplish this goal. A special committee will continue research and support for this cause.

International Buddhist Women's Institute

Sakyadhita members in Sri Lanka have united to establish an "International Buddhist Women's Institute" which will provide Buddhist education as well as training in social service and counselling to nuns and laywomen. Networking with national and international women's organizations, it will work for peace and harmony among all living beings.

Encouragement for this venture, buildings, staff, and funding, are being provided by Ven. Vipulasara Thero. Sakyadhita International President Ranjani de Silva will begin training ten young nuns immediately. For further information write her at 50 Alwis Perera Mawatha, Katubedda, Moratuwa, Sri Lanka, Fax: 941-611434.

RETREAT CENTERS FOR WOMEN IN ASIA: A QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of this questionnaire is to obtain information about Asian monasteries that could be appropriate for Western women. These women may wish to study/practice meditation intensively for a period of time or may be considering ordination. Our hope is to compile responses and make the information available to all. The questions below are meant to tweak your memory and to try to cover as many bases as possible. It may well be that there are questions that are relevant which are not included here. Perhaps the best way to describe your experience does not flow with this questionnaire. Please feel free to answer these questions in whatever format seems best for the situation you experienced. Your help will be an aid to other women who also wish to study/practice meditation in an unfamiliar setting. Any information will be welcome. May you be well and happy!

1. Your name and address. Information about you that's relevant. (Long-term meditator, new meditator, experience with other monasteries, etc.)
2. Name of monastery/nunnery you are describing.
3. Complete address, including country.
4. How to get there. Describe transportation method and route.
5. Teaching method. Describe the teaching method used in as much detail as necessary. Describe the primary teacher and your comments about this teacher. If the teacher is not "on-site," where is she/he located?
6. Language. What is the primary language spoken in this monastery? Is English spoken? Is there adequate translation available? Are other European languages spoken and are translators available? Is being understood a problem that can be overcome? Describe limitations as you have experienced them.
7. Facilities. Describe the facilities in general and give personal/practical information. What would a Western woman find appealing/objectionable?
8. Community. Describe the community. Number of women/nuns currently in residence. Is the number stable and/or are there long-term practitioners. Length of stay for residents (Range: e.g., two-week residents, ten-year residents). Is there Dhamma study? Are there costs for staying or hidden expenses one should be aware of? Is there a "feeling" of community or is there a feeling of isolation? Describe.
9. Atmosphere. Typical schedule. Describe the meditation schedule as typically practiced. Is the atmosphere conducive to meditation? Are there experienced long-term residents one can consult? Are there individual kutis/huts?
10. Sexism. Many monasteries are very patriarchal in nature and the male chauvinism can feel insurmountable. If you have experienced this, or more subtle forms of prejudice, please describe in as much detail as necessary.
11. Surrounding environment. Describe the outside community. Is it near a city? Is it noisy to the point where meditation becomes difficult?

Please return questionnaire to: Ellie Waters 52 Sanborn St. Unit 205, Reading, MA 01867 USA Email: metta2@aol.com