Sakyadhita Newsletter

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Contents

BUDDHIST WOMEN OF AUSTRALIA

Enid Adam

Buddhist Society in Australia, the one in the city. In that association, Marie Bowles, the writer, became a founding member; and Natasha Jackson, became the editor of the first Buddhist magazine in Australia- "Metta." Through this magazine, the influence of Buddhist women in Australia became widespread. In 1957 Sister Domadina came to Australia again, but this time know one knows why, she received a visa with a stipulation that she was not to teach. Her influence at that stage, therefore was only on visiting groups which had resulted from her visit the first time.

In the 1970-1980's men led the Buddhist movement in Australia. But in 1990 a new phase began, and women came well and truly to the fore. The first movement was the building of a huge temple south of Sidney, Nan-Tien. This is run very successfully by nuns from Taiwan. It is the largest complex in the southern hemisphere. To this Mahayana center, a large congregation came for a Buddhist conference. 20,000 delegates were housed there, and accommodated with facilities. The influence of Nan-Tien, extends locally, Australia-wide and worldwide as well.

These enterprises are run totally by bhikkhunis who are doing a wonderful job. The arrival of two Tibetan nun masters from Nepal, opened a new center in Queensland, Chenrezig Institute which has a nunnery attached to it. The nuns are noted there for their high quality study, meditation, and being very active socially. They operate a hospice. As Australia's population is

getting older with more need for hospices and hospice care, they go into people's homes. So far they have helped over 500 people, mainly non-Buddhist.

Another Buddhist person who's been a leading light is Savanna Bauziki who was the first woman to become a roshi in the Diamond Sangha in Hawaii. She has operated women's groups and tries to make Buddhism women-friendly in Australia using women's talents. In western Australia, where I live, the local Theravadan Buddhist monastery has been there for monks very successfully for nearly 20 years, but they have never managed to train a woman.

Women have gone and tried, but they have been kept in the shadow of the monks. The difficulty lay in that the abbots have been Thai trained, and these Australian women who are used to some sort of equality, felt like second-class students in the monastery. Some left, or went overseas for ordination. The master since, has realized the problem, and at present, they are building the first Theravadan nunnery in Australia. The abbot, Sister Vayana, has been appointed and is living in a caravan while the center is being developed.

The last Buddhist person I'd like to mention is Elizabeth Bell who lives in Victoria. Not only in Buddhist societies, but also in the communities is Buddhism being recognized. In the Australian government, at the end of last year, Elizabeth Bell was given the Order of Australia," the highest honor a woman can obtain for her services in Australia. So, now women are poised to play a leading role in Australia in the forthcoming millennium, and I have every confidence that their contribution to Buddhism will be invaluable.

Learning Discipline in a Hong Kong Monastery

Bhikshuni Jampa Chodron

An Australian Buddhist nun shares the search for meaning that led her to a strict, traditional Chinese monastery in Hong Kong. Faced with an alien culture and an utterly different value system, she reluctantly relinquished all expectations in her sincere quest for mental balance and spiritual awakening. Counter to all expectations, she gradually discovered the advantages of monastic life as she learned constructive methods for developing inner discipline.

My name is Jampa Chodron and I come from Perth, Western Australia. In 1994, I was ordained as a novice nun by the Tibetan master Khensur Losang Thupten Rinpoche and began living at Chenrezig Institute in Queensland, Australia. In November,1997 I went to Taiwan to take full ordination as a bhiksuni in the Chinese Dharmagupta tradition. My ordination Master was Jing Xin Jang Loa. The 32-day ordination ceremony took place at Sun Moon Temple near Kaoshiung, Taiwan.

Unlike most other Western nuns practicing in the Tibetan tradition, I decided not to go straight back to my Tibetan-style nunnery. Instead, I decided to find a Chinese monastery where I could immerse myself in experiencing the way of life of a fully ordained nun (bhiksuni). It took several months of searching before the winds of karma blew me to Po Lam Chan Si, a modest yet flourishing monastery on Lantau Island in Hong Kong.

Po Lam means “jewel in the forest,” which was a perfect name for the place. The instructor there was Master Shing Yat, who was a heart disciple of the famous Chinese Chan Master, Xu Yun (Empty Cloud). He took me to Master Shing Wai of Happy Valley, for which I am extremely grateful.
I visited Po Lam Monastery briefly on two separate occasions before settling in for the summer rains retreat in 1998. To get to Po Lam, one must walk for about an hour.

Starting out from Hong Kong's famous big Buddha statue, one first passes through an arch with a Chinese inscription that reminds people of the value of letting go of the dust of samsaric life. The way to Po Lam follows a tree-lined mountain path on an island in the South China Sea.

As I approached the monastery, I was struck by its absence of walls, fences, and gates. Next, I encountered the beautifully tended organic vegetable plots and the smiling faces of the handful of monks and nuns in their worn-out grey patched robes who were tending them. I was also greeted by several very friendly monastery dogs.

Po Lam is a very down-to-earth place. Everything is simple and natural, without glamour or glitz. We drew our water by bucket from a spring, where water bubbled out from a rock. There are about twenty bhiksus and forty-five bhiksunis living there, and the numbers of residents fluctuates on special occasions. The nuns and monks live in separate quarters, of course, but come together for sutra recitations, meals, and other special events. I think its quite unique to live in a monastery with complete Bhiksu and Bhiksuni Sanghas functioning harmoniously side by side.

It never ceased to amaze me how efficiently they could expand every resource to feed and accommodate hundreds of guests, then pack everything back up again as if nothing had ever happened.
During my ordination, I was told that the main reason for taking the bhiksuni precepts and following the monastic discipline is to help settle the mind. With a calm, settled mind, we can achieve samadhi (meditative stabilization) and even liberation in this life. By observing the lives of the residents at Po Lam, I became convinced that this is possible.

While preparing the daily vegetables, the nuns and monks often asked me, "Why are you here? What's the purpose of becoming a bhiksuni?" This was a way of constantly reminding me that the purpose of monastic life is free ourselves from cyclic existence (samsara). This goal really appeared to motivate the monastics and to be foremost in their minds.

I moved into Po Lam Monastery just a few days before the summer rains retreat. That year, the rains retreat was not slated to last three months, as it usually does, but for four months instead, due to the way the months were arranged that year in the Chinese lunar calender. The retreat opened and was organized strictly in accordance with all the traditional Vinaya procedures and ceremonies. I believe that I was the first Western bhiksuni ever to attend the retreat there.

The daily schedule was very long. In the morning, we woke up at 3:30, held morning prayers from 4-5:00, meditation from 5-5:30, chores until 8:15, two sessions of sutra recitation with a short tea break in-between, then lunch from 11:15-11.45. After lunch we did chores and rested until 1:15, held two more sessions of sutra recitation until 4:00, evening prayers from 4-5:00, then rested, bathed, and washed our clothes until walking meditation from 6:15-6:30, and sitting meditation 6:30-8. After this, we could do another 15 minutes of walking meditation or sit right through from 6:30-9:00, which many people did. All bathing and washing was done from a bucket and hot water was heated in a huge pan fueled by a wood fire.

As full as the day was, many nuns sat in meditation all night and did not lie down at all! Others did prostrations during every spare moment or recited sutras well into the night. Their enthusiasm and relaxed cheerful attitude were deeply inspiring and created a very conducive environment for practice. We performed all the required rituals and ceremonies prescribed in the Bhiksuni Vinaya and recited the pratimoksha (rule of discipline) and bodhisattva precepts every fortnight. All the prayers and daily recitations were in Chinese or Cantonese, and although I had copies of the texts in English and could understand the meaning, I chose to recite in Chinese, since it felt more harmonious to chant with everyone else.

I learned to play some of the instruments which accompany the prayers and was invited to join in when appropriate. I was also given classes in Chinese calligraphy and had opportunities to experience many aspects of traditional Chinese culture. During the retreat, we recited many classical Chinese texts, including the Surangama Dharani, Ksitigarbha Sutra, Lotus Sutra, and Flower Ornament Sutra. The Diamond Sutra was recited twice daily when we were not in retreat.

Talking was generally not encouraged, nor was going out, writing letters, or reading anything other than Dharma books. There were certainly no televisions or radios. I had brought a cassette player, thinking it might be handy to record and memorize the prayers, but was reminded that it is better to learn the slow, organic way and not clutter up my mind and living space with so many things.

Many ancient Chinese monastic traditions were upheld in this monastery, such as the re-dying of all new robes, keeping only the prescribed number of robes, and observing seniority of ordination in the seating order. These traditions were not observed in a rigid, superimposed way, but out of respect for the old ways and by seeing the value of this kind of practice. We were

requested to take special care of the monastery's belongings, as well as our own things. We were reminded to be mindful while dressing, sitting, walking, eating, and placing our shoes outside the door, and to quietly open and close all doors. Bathing and toilet etiquette was especially important, with separate water containers and cloths used for washing the upper and lower parts of the body.

Sometimes the bhiksus and bhiksunis did group chores together. For example, once a year for about ten days, everyone went up to the mountains to cut, dry, and store enough grass to cook food for the next year. This was a really big event. All the cooking at the monastery was done by the bhiksunis, who volunteered for the job because they really enjoyed it as a means of practice. Everyday two beautifully simple, purely organic Chinese vegetarian meals were prepared in the extremely simple kitchen over a wood-fire stove and served very efficiently to the group. In the evening, a “medicine” meal of noodle soup was offered for those who needed it.

Dining was a very formal and well-organized affair. At every meal we wore monastic robes and recited prayers together, both before and after taking food. On the weekends, lay devotees from nearby Hong Kong often brought different kinds of offerings: clothes, shoes, medicines, flashlights, books, and toiletries. All our needs were met. If we received money donations, we often pooled them and, as a group, used them to liberate animals, purchase Dharma books, rebuild temples in China, or relieve the sufferings of victims of natural disasters.

The accumulation of money was definitely not encouraged and the correct prayers of expiation (manatta) were taught and performed for receiving and handling money.
After the summer rains retreat, a group of bhiksus and bhiksunis went to Wu Tai Shan, the famous holy mountain of Manjusri, to attend a gathering of more than 1000 monastics from all over China. This was a very important event, because it signaled that Buddhism was beginning to flourish again in China.

I was allowed to stay on at Po Lam after the rains retreat finished and then made a short trip to China before starting the winter retreat. In China, I went first to Nan Hua Temple in Guangahou to observe the ordination of about 250 bhiksunis. Next, I visited Yun Mun, a monastery for monks and nuns founded by Master Xuyun. One of the bhiksuni precept masters I met was a nun who had been forced to disrobe during the Cultural Revolution, but later re-ordained. With stalwart commitment and determination, she rebuilt her monastery, which is perched high on a cliff overlooking a winding river and distant mountains. She now lives there with several bhiksuni students. There are surely many bhiksunis in China with inspiring stories such as hers.

On the holy island of Putoshan, the abode of Kuanyin in China, I visited a Buddhist Institute for Bhiksunis. Nearby, there is a seaside cave where Kuanyin is said to appear to those who are pure in heart. Wherever I went in China, people were delighted to see a Western monastic and I felt very happy to be ordained.

When I returned to Po Lam Monastery, we began a winter Chan meditation retreat. Usually a Chan retreat lasts for seven days, and occasionally for 49 days, but this retreat was ten weeks long. During the retreat, we meditated for nine to ten hours a day. The day was structured so that we could either walk or sit for short one-hour sessions or sit for three four-hour-long sessions each day, which many did. Generally, however, not much instruction was given at this temple.

This was intentional, because the master encouraged us to contact our own inner wisdom, implying that everyone there instinctively knew how to practice. The master expected us to be self-disciplined and to take responsibility for our own development, an approach I really appreciated.

Among the teachings I applied during the retreat were koans from Master Xuyun's Dharma Discourses for the Seven Day Retreat: "Who drags this corpse around?" and "Who recites the Buddha's name?" Fortunately, I had been meditating for more than 25 years, had studied the Graduated Path to Enlightenment (Lam Rim) in the Tibetan tradition for nine or ten years, and had completed several solitary retreats. With this previous training, I was able to settle my mind with relative ease. During this retreat, I can honestly say that I experienced the deepest sense of peace within myself ever, for which I am very grateful.

But impermanence is a truth of life and when the winds of karma blew again, they blew me to Taiwan, where I was invited to attend a 49-day breathing (nimitta) retreat with Pak Aw Sayadaw from Myanmar. The retreat took place in a monastery in Keelung and was attended by about 200 bhiksus and bhiksunis. While there, I met Ven. Sik Hin Kit, the Abbess of Po Lam Canada, a branch of the monastery in Hong Kong. She generously extended an invitation to me to attend her 1999 summer rains retreat.

Po Lam Canada was extremely well organized and run completely by those who live there. At this monastery, there were no bhiksus and only ten bhiksunis, including the two founding bhiksunis and about eight others. Because of the monastery’s small size, I had many opportunities to become involved in all aspects of monastic life. I was especially delighted to learn more about the ritual instruments and to be able to play them in the morning, evening, and at other prayer ceremonies.

One of the senior bhiksunis taught me Chinese calligraphy, which I really love. We recited the Bhiksuni Pratimoksha and bodhisattva precepts every fortnight and also recited a daily confession ceremony (pravarana) as a group. This was extremely beneficial for my personal growth, because it strengthened my resolve to work towards enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. It also meant that we could purify any violations of our precepts on a day-to-day basis and strive to live according to the precepts as purely as we could. One of the drawbacks of the monastery was that, because there were only a handful of people, there was always a lot of work to do, and so our meditations and sutra recitations often got cancelled, which made me feel a bit sad.

Personally, I cannot think of anything more valuable than to live in a monastic environment and to practice according to the bhiksuni precepts. I find the monastic way of life incredibly rewarding and also be very challenging at times, taking me into painful areas within myself. Working across cultures, language barriers, and styles of practicing Buddhism has not always been easy. Yet it continuously amazes me how the profound insights of the Buddhadharma teach us what to adopt and what to abandon in order to proceed toward enlightenment. The Buddha discovered where ego lies hidden and how we can purify ourselves of the obscurations to discovering our own Buddha nature.

The wisdom contained in the precepts reveals itself only through studying and living by them. This is a gradual process and I feel grateful to live the monastic life, which is a conducive environment for the process. If we can follow the Buddha's path and purify our body, speech, and mind, then we can make steady progress toward enlightenment, however slowly. I pray that Chinese bhiksunis will have more opportunities to share their courageous and inspiring stories with others. May all women everywhere have the opportunity to receive bhiksuni ordination and have the freedom to practice Buddhism without obstacles!

Answering the Call to Realize Buddhahood

Rosanna Hsi

When my husband became trapped in a hotel fire in Manila in 1985, I never dreamed the disaster would become a blessing in my life. Peter saved himself by climbing down bed sheets tied to the balcony railing, but the terror of the experience seemed to touch a chord of thought in him, and on his return to Honolulu, he asked me to accompany him in the study of the Buddhist sutras. As we began our adventure, I felt challenged in long-held assumptions but also exhilarated by the transforming power of its wisdom. For well over 15 years now, Buddhism has served as a guiding light on my journey of spiritual growth. The gifts from the great mentor Sakyamuni Buddha have affected me, my family, my marriage, my life philosophy and my whole worldview.

Sakyamuni Buddha’s message to us is that a Buddha nature lies latent in all sentient beings. That nature is unrealized because of self-attachment and the impurities of greed, aversion and ignorance. Response to the noble call to Buddha enlightenment required a new perspective and a firm decision to take full responsibility for my internal housecleaning and purification and to free myself from suffering through the practice of selflessness and the compassion of Buddha.

Buddhism speaks of transforming affliction into realization. Suffering, it says, is a lesson as yet unlearned; once learned, it enables us to change a crisis into an opportunity, to seek blessing in

adversity. How can I alleviate the destructive emotions that afflict me, I wondered. When I became willing to take a good look inside, I was surprised at what I found. All those feelings of anger and of the will to dominate that I had thought were my self were in reality nothing but the ego fighting for its survival. This insight enabled me to see ego in a different light. It now became important to serve rather than to dominate, to listen rather than to strike out in anger, to be compassionate rather than to feel hurt. Such an approach to inner search and learning gave me a tool to tackle future challenges and to take responsibility for my happiness.

If Buddhism gave me insights, it also transformed my marriage. Twenty-five years ago Peter and I were both stubborn and explosive, often fighting to the bitter end to have our own ways. Our self-attachment was costing our happiness. Buddhism, however, enabled us see through the illusion of the self, to let go of it, and not to take ourselves too seriously. The fire in Manila has impacted us with the Buddhist emphasis of impermanence. We realized that life is just a few breaths away. The experience of the fire sharpened our appreciation of life and of each other. As we grew in flexibility, humor, and willingness to make amends – making way for our Buddha nature – we regained our health and happiness. As karmic helpmates, our goal is to further our spiritual growth on the path of Buddha attainment. We have become increasingly thankful for the saving grace of the dharma.

Being kind and gentle to myself helped me to show loving kindness to others. Buddhism calls for compassion – an offering of love and respect for all sentient beings, great and small. Buddha himself exemplified its meaning when he sacrificed himself to feed the hungry tiger and her cubs. Compassion challenges us to practice a love that embraces everyone irrespective of race, creed, or culture; to empathize with their suffering; and to help them as brothers and sisters. Today's globalization increases the opportunity to include everyone as our neighbor and to treat all people as one great family, with respect and loving-kindness. Every moment offers us an opportunity of giving, whether it is monetary or ministering, to those suffering from sickness and despair, through kind words and deeds. Since charity begins at home, sometimes it is our loved ones that most need compassion. For example, my mother's rash words have hurt various members of the family. When I realized that her invectives came from inner unhappiness, I invited my brothers and sisters to join me in offering her compassion instead of resentment. I am thankful for the chance to extend our unconditional love to her.

Compassion further invites us to be respectful and kind to the planet earth and to live with it in peace and harmony. For example, to cultivate a consciousness for preservation of life and natural resources in our daily lives through the choice of our purchases and lifestyle.
Buddhism teaches that wholesome and unwholesome deeds reap their rewards. The entire teaching of Buddhism hinges on the universal law – the karmic cycle of cause and effect. There is no escape from the karmic consequence of our actions. We will reap what we sow. Our actions sow seeds that come to fruition in time and under the right conditions. Since at death we bring with us only the karma of our actions, in reality we are now writing our life's script.
Bodhisattvas are always mindful of their actions, while unenlightened human

beings scarcely see the connection between their decisions and the negative experiences that befall them. Buddhism has nurtured me with continuous spiritual awareness, making me more conscious of each choice I make through my words, actions, and intentions. My understanding of karma has been a pillar of strength in my life. Answering the call to realize Buddhahood continues to motivate me to cultivate selflessness and compassion.

My steadfast walk on the path of enlightened awareness has brought me the bliss of inner peace and happiness. “World peace,” the Dalai Lama said, “must develop from inner peace.” According to a Buddhist saying, it is rare to be reincarnated as a human being and also rare to learn the Dharma teaching. I am grateful to be blessed with both and to share them.

MEMBERS’ FORUM
New Sakyadhita Officers Named

Karma Lekshe Tsomo (President) received a Ph.D. in Comparative Philosophy at the University of Hawai`i in 2000 and is Assistant Professor of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of San Diego. She has served as the secretary of Sakyadhita since its founding in 1987 and has co-coordinator of nine national and international Sakyadhita conferences on Buddhist women. Since 1987, she has been director of Jamyang Foundation, a project which has established eight education programs for Himalayan women in India. Her publications include Sakyadhita: Daughters of the Buddha; Buddhism Through American Women's Eyes; Innovative Buddhist Women: Swimming Against the Stream; Sisters in Solitude: Two Traditions of Monastic Ethics for Women; and Buddhist Women Across Cultures: Realizations.
Hema Goonatilake (Vice President) received a Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies at the School of Oriental Studies, University of London, in 1974. From 1974 to 1989, she taught at the University of Kelaniya in Sri Lanka. From 1989 to 1994, she served as Senior Advisor at the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in New York. Since 1995, she has worked in Cambodia with the Heinrich Boell Foundation, the Buddhist Institute, the Cambodian Foundation for Education, and the Association of Nuns and Laywomen of Cambodia. In 1998, she was co-coordinator of the 5th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women held in Phnom Penh. She has published over 100 articles and lectures internationally on topics related to Buddhism, gender and development, and human rights.
Carol Stevens (Secretary) received a B.A. in Graphic Design at San Jose State University in 1954. She has raised three children and worked as a teacher, artist, and writer. From 1984 to 1989, she worked as a special events organizer for the American Cancer Society in Honolulu. From 1989 to 2000, she worked a public relations specialist, fundraiser, and event organizer at Queen’s Medical Center, where she also taught tai chi. Upon her retirement, she started a new career as an equine photographer and volunteers for a number of non-profit organizations. She has been a student of Buddhism for many years and has served as Sakyadhita membership secretary for two years. Her interests include karate, reading, and meditation.
Rebecca Paxton (Treasurer) received a B.A. in Art at Mills College in 1985 and an M.A. in South Asian Studies (Sanskrit) at University of California at Berkeley in 1993. For many years,

she worked as a graphic designer and as an interior designer. She has studied different styles of yoga in the U.S., Europe, India, and Nepal. For the past five years, she has worked as a Svarupa Yoga teacher, Yoga therapist, and Sanskrit teacher. In addition, she has served as an editor and financial consultant on a variety of Sakyadhita projects. Her interests include meditation, comparative religion, and comparative philosophy.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Center for Research on Korean Buddhist Nuns

The Center for Research on Korean Buddhist Nuns was founded in 1999 by Ven. Bongak, a faculty member of Joong-Ang Sangh University and one of ten Buddhist nuns (out of 81 seats) elected to serve on the Board of the Korean Buddhist Chogye order. The Center's aim is to promote research on Korean Buddhist nuns, as well as Buddhist nuns of other traditions.
The initial project of the Center will be to publish a collection called Collected Materials of Korean Buddhist Nuns. Since Buddhism was introduced to Korea in the 4th century C.E., Korean Buddhist nuns have maintained an unbroken lineage of learning and practice through traditionally organized monastic life, yet, surprisingly, no in-depth study on Korean nuns exists. Bongak Sunim hopes that this initial study will encourage future research on the biographies of Korean Buddhist nuns. She also plans to hold an international conference of scholars engaged in research on Buddhist nuns.
Scholars interested in the project and/or becoming a member should send a copy of thier CV and a brief note of intention to the Center for Research on Korean Buddhist Nuns. Names and address of others who may be interested can be sent to the same address.

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Tradition or Equity?
Thailand Confronts the Ordination of Women

Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, a 57-year-old professor of philosophy at Thammasat University in Bangkok, Thatland, received the ten precepts of a sramanera (novice nun) in Sri Lanka earlier this year. The new nun received the Buddhist name Dhammananda, which means “Bless of the Dharma.” The ordination unleashed a storm of controversy, which comes as no surprise to the newly ordained nun. Her mother, Ven. Voramai Kabilsingh, received ordination as a bhikkhuni (fully ordained nun) in Taiwan in 1972, but has never received formal recognition from the monastic hierarchy in Thailand, which is exclusively male.

Conservatives, primarily monks and laymen, believe that women cannot be ordained, even as novices, because there are no bhikkhunis to ordain them. The belief remains firm, even though orders of bhikkhunis, numbering almost 30,000, exist in China, Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, and other countries. Dhammananda’s ordination opens the door for the establishment of an order of fully ordained nuns in Thailand, something that the Thai Buddhist establishment is obviously not ready to accept.

“I hope that allowing female ordination will shore up women’s status in religion, and most of all, help strengthen the religion,” Dhammananda said. In a world where gender equity has become a leading concern, equal opportunities for women in the world’s religions are yet to be achieved. Which will prevail – traditional patriarchal religious structures or basic human rights?