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Sakyadhita

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"My barn having burnt to the ground, I can now see the moon."
— Mizuta Masahide (17th century Japanese poet and samurai)

DEALING WITH DIVISIVENESS

by Margaret Coberly

Around 600 CE, the Chinese Chan master Sengcan said: "The struggle between 'for and against' is the mind's worst disease." Yin does not hate yang; they are complementary. Human beings need to reach out and make strenuous efforts to avoid polarization and begin to understand our differences. People who think differently from ourselves are not absolutely wrong. Of course, we must uphold our principles and work for social justice. At the same time, rather than becoming self-righteous, we need to seek common ground with the whole human family, even the most challenging, and find ways to make the world a more compassionate place.

There seems to be greater divisiveness in the world than ever before. The differences among groups are so intense that they have become scary. Humans have always had a tribal nature, according to the evolutionary point of view. Quite naturally, we form into groups of like-minded people. Sometimes people in a group even bear a similar physical appearance. Research supports the idea that people are drawn to what is familiar because it is less threatening. In other words, the more people feel they are the same, the more they feel safe and not threatened.

Even so, humans seem mentally hard-wired to compete. Although this can take the form of war and discord, humans have also devised recreational ways to compete and still live together peacefully. Competitive sports certainly comes to mind. We see this in the way people join together in support of one national team or another.

It is becoming increasingly clear that people also join together to support certain views, either toward more expansive thinking or toward a fear that old ways may change. People who are more insular may be inclined toward a nationalist perspective and deep roots in community, institutions, and tradition. Those who are more broad-minded naturally incline toward open borders and perspectives, and greater global awareness.

Among the critical issues facing humanity today are immigration and diversity. Diversity is good in that it allows for innovation and benefits the economy. Because of our tribal nature, however, ethnic diversity can also affect social structures and erode trust. These arguments have led to a war of words, fomented by a surge of negative advertising and fake news on television and social media. Many people no longer staunchly support what they believe in, but instead are fighting against the

disgusting, contemptible Other. Everyone seems to think they are right. The more we demonize each other, the more ramped up the divisions among us become. This is a critical turning point in human history – a forced confrontation with our deepest prejudices. We can either spend time being unhappy about the way things are going, or take a more positive perspective and decide to actively work for the common good.

But how? How can we constructively participate in actions for the common good? This can take many forms, even as small as breathing out kindness to the world or kissing a plant. It can be volunteering in our local community to help the less fortunate or joining environmental action groups. Activities like these provide opportunities to align with the many others who are already working for the welfare of the planet instead of harboring illusions about their own personal prosperity.

Yesterday at the grocery store, I spotted an old woman slowly and carefully backing out of a parking stall. I stopped and waited, glad to have found a space. Finally, after much struggling with the steering wheel, she managed the task and we exchanged friendly waves as her car lurched forward. Just at that moment, another car raced in front of me and appropriated the space. As I watched the young man get out and slam the door, I felt angry and wanted to reprimand him. But oddly, just then I remembered something Lama Thubten Yeshe said: "Once you've created the karma to experience a certain result, that's where you're headed." The young man was gripping a phone in the palm of his hand and was so absorbed in texting that he didn't even notice his behavior. Worse, its result was entirely lost on him. At least, that time, I remembered about karma and got to choose my reaction. I drove past him with a smile on my face.

On another occasion at the supermarket, people in line behind a man in the express lane who had a cart loaded with at least 30 items were getting really agitated. Some truly hateful thoughts arose in my mind. In an attempt to balance my unwholesome karma, I let an elderly woman behind me go in front. Just at that moment, a checker opened a new line and motioned me over. Again, "Once you've created the karma to experience a certain result, that's where you're headed!" These vignettes illustrate how Dharma teachings can help us cope with even the most difficult, seemingly uncontrollable emotions. Our task is to mindfully put them into practice.

EMPOWERING TIBETAN AND HIMALAYAN NUNS

by Namgyal L. Taklha

What was life like for nuns in Tibet before 1959? To answer this question, I recently interviewed a few elderly nuns from Tibet. They told me that the lives of nuns in Tibet were spent cleaning their simple rooms, preparing their meals, making prostrations, memorizing prayers, and praying.

Another popular activity was nyung ne, a retreat practice of fasting and prostrations that was introduced to Tibet in the 11th century by an Indian nun from Uddiyana named Gelongma Palmo. The practice was transmitted to Gelongma Palmo by the Bodhisattva of Compassion (Sanskrit: Avalokitesvara, Tibetan: Chenrezig) and is undertaken by many nuns.

The nyung ne retreat involves fasting and multiple daily sessions of prostrations and recitation of the six-syllable mantra: Om Mani Padme Hung. On the first day, the practice involves taking only one vegetarian meal and water. On the second day, no food or water is taken. The rest of the retreat alternates these two patterns. The purpose of this intensive spiritual practice is to purify obscurations and defilements and to accumulate merit.

In those days, many nuns were admitted to a nunnery by their parents when they were very young. A few older ones joined a nunnery on their own initiative. The parents of young nuns would sometimes offer their daughters or wards as disciples to an older nun. If there were many daughters in a family, one or two would be sent to join a nunnery. Sometimes a girl who was physically or mentally challenged would have her head shaved and be given maroon robes and yellow blouses to wear, and then be identified as a nun and kept at home.

When girls or older women joined a nunnery, they had to build their own living quarters or live with another nun. They were responsible for getting their own provisions and cooking their daily meals. They did not receive support from the nunnery, except for butter tea in the morning, which was served during the prayer assembly. On special holy days, sponsors might offer tea, meals, or a monetary offering.

Poorer nuns did much of the work in the common kitchen. They looked after the sheep, dzo (a cross between a yak and a cow known for its excellent milk), and cows belonging to the nunnery. They took the animals to higher ground for grazing during the day, brought them back in the evening, and milked them. The nuns fetched water for the common kitchen, which could be quite

some distance away. They collected firewood or dried animal dung for the kitchen and were then given some tsampa (roasted barley flour), tea, and maybe some butter.

Many nuns from far-away places, such as Jangthang (a nomad region) and Kham (eastern Tibet) faced difficulties getting enough food. If they were lucky to have relatives in Lhasa, their needs would be supplied. If not, nuns from aristocratic or well-to-do business families in the nunnery supported poorer nuns. In exchange for doing their cleaning, washing, and cooking, nuns with means fed the poor nuns, gave them clothing, and gave them some pocket money, too. These nuns were like maidservants. Sometimes their benefactors were kind and taught them to read and write.

Generally lamas (gurus, or teachers) and monks managed the nunneries. A senior nun was chosen to represent the monk. She looked after the day-to-day affairs of the nunnery. This nun did not make any decisions without consulting the lama or monk in charge. A nun from Gari Gonpa near Lhasa told me that, when a nun wanted to take a long leave, she had to send an application to the lama or abbot (khenpo) in charge. After the application was approved with a seal, the nuns requested a respected local oracle to go into a trance in order to reapprove the leave.

Previously, no special Dharma classes or Tibetan language classes were available to nuns. If they were lucky, a literate nun would give them lessons in reading and writing. The younger nuns learned under the supervision of a senior nun who taught them to read and write. The emphasis was on memorizing prayers, which the nuns recited at the daily prayer assemblies. If public teachings were held in Lhasa or nearby, the nuns were able to go to attend them, but this did not happen often. Due to their lack of education and meager financial support, as well as their low social esteem and their attempt to be humble, the nuns hesitated to break out of their isolated existence. These factors combined to pose a major obstacle to their advancement and recognition in society.

In Tibet and other Himalayan Buddhist regions, it was the custom for girls to be quiet, obedient, and submissive. Being humble was a message put in the minds of most women, especially nuns. These qualities became embedded in them. I was very talkative and mischievous when I was young. My nanny used to say, " If you are so naughty and talkative, you will not find a husband." The expectation for girls was to find a good husband.

In Ladakh and other Himalayan regions, one daughter was often made a nun and kept at home to do all the manual work in the house. An educated nun from Ladakh told me that, until things changed about a decade ago, nuns were actually the slaves of their families. Another nun, who was a pioneer in opening a modern nunnery in Leh, Ladakh, faced much opposition and non-cooperation from the community. Today, however, the nuns of this nunnery receive a good education. A few are qualified traditional physicians who take care of the sick and needy, and also assist in family problems.

On September 19, 2004, I became the director of Drikung Kagyu Samtenling Nunnery in Dehra Dun, northern India. My brother, His Holiness Drikung Chetsang Rinpoche, requested me to look after the nuns. A few young monk staff members and some nuns at the nunnery also asked me to come and take charge of the nunnery administration. I took up the job on voluntary basis. A senior monk had previously been in charge of the nunnery and the consensus was that a woman would be a better administrator.

The first rule I made was that no monk or man could visit a nun in her room. Visits were always possible, but the meeting had to take place in a common area or in the garden. Modern education is very important for nuns, so this became a priority. Exercise and a healthy diet were equally important. Most important of all, the nuns became the administrators of their own nunnery.

Traditional education is very important for nuns. They were already studying Tibetan language and Dharma. But they also needed to acquire more general knowledge. In particular, they needed to learn to read, write, and speak English and Hindi. They also needed to know simple calculation. One day, I took a couple of the older nuns from Tibet to the hospital. On the way, they wanted to buy some fruit. Sadly, they were not able to calculate the cost, and I had to help them out.

These days, the nuns are encouraged to attend classes in Buddhist philosophy and debate. At first, a couple of senior monks thought that philosophy and debate were not appropriate for nuns and were discouraging. We decided to continue the classes, however, and now the nuns are doing very well in debate.

The nuns needed to learn to express themselves and not be shy in answering questions. When I first arrived, they kept their

heads down and would not utter a word. When I asked a few nuns their names, they looked down, giggled, and said their names so softly that no one could hear them. I thought this was terribly sad. I asked them, " Why aren't you looking at my face and telling me your names in a louder voice? " There was no response.

After I settled down to work, I requested the nuns vote for a senior nun who would become the assistant director of the nunnery. We organized workshops for the nuns on empowerment and public speaking. We also invited nuns from other nunneries belonging to different Tibetan Buddhist schools. The chief guests were all nuns. Our first guest was H. E. Khando Rinpoche from Mindoling Monastery. We also invited Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo from Drukpa Kagyu Dongyu Gatsel Nunnery, Tsunma Lobsang Dechen from Dolma Ling Nunnery, and a Chinese nun professor from Taiwan. It is important for our nuns to see that nuns can become leaders.

During important functions, it was the custom for the heads of the various departments of Drikung Kagyu Institute (DKI) to come and present the mandala offering to His Holiness Drikung Chetsang Rinpoche. During one teaching, I told the assistant director, Tsunma Yeshi Drolma, that now she should offer the mandala on behalf of the nuns instead of me.

The big day came and the large hall was packed. As the heads of the DKI departments slowly walked toward His Holiness's throne, Yeshi-la refused to get up. People were looking at me. I got up and went over to Yeshi-la and told her to please go up to

present the mandala, but she refused. I told her that there was no way that I would present it. Tears swelled up in her eyes and she would not budge. I asked the disciplinarian, who was sitting next to her, to go up and she also refused. Tsunma Kunchok Palmo, an M.Sc. graduate was sitting nearby and she also refused. I went back to my seat and continued to sit there. Slowly, Yeshi-la got up, made prostrations, and went to join the small group presenting the mandala offering. When the ceremony was over, I went up to her and asked her, "Was it difficult?" She was beaming. She said, "No," and started giggling. Since then, during all ceremonies the nun director offers the mandala.

Previously, nuns sat at the back of the hall during teachings. I requested His Holiness Drikung Chetsang Rinpoche, the head of our lineage, to let the nuns sit on one side and the monks on the other side. We had senior nuns who are well versed in the teachings. Why should they sit behind some young monks who have just joined the monastery? He gave instructions allowing the nuns to sit on one side of the prayer hall in the temple. Initially, the nuns would not come up in the front and kept sitting at the back. I had to tell them that they must now come forward. When the nuns did not come forward, the director of the monastery, Kusho Choenyi-la, came up to me and said, "We have made the seats for the nuns so that they need not sit at the back, but they refuse to come up in the front!" Now, the nuns sit in front.

We encouraged the nuns to join workshops and conferences organized by other nunneries and the Tibetan Women's Association. We also encouraged teachers and others from abroad to visit the nunnery. Meeting and mixing with people who are from other places is very important for helping the nuns to open up and learn about the outside world. This also helps the nuns to improve their English.

After two years, I retired as director and a nun was elected to the position. I continued to assist the nuns as their advisor. Yeshe Drolma-la, the first assistant director, missed one year of studies because of her responsibilities. Thereafter, it was decided that nuns elected to the post of director should serve in the position for only one year because they are still students.

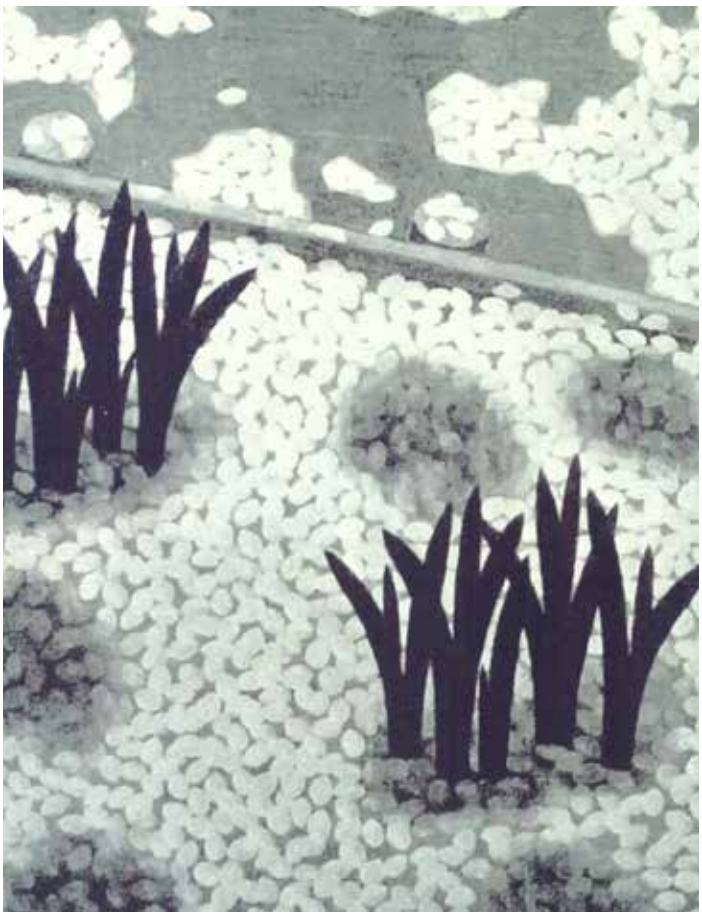
At first, after I retired, I visited the nuns every week, just as I had done during the early stages of my work. Gradually, I began going to the nunnery every two or three weeks. There is a trained accountant who serves as secretary in the office and the nuns do a very good job of running their nunnery now, although there is still some hesitancy to serve as the director.

We now have 74 nuns at Drikung Kagyu Samtenling Nunnery. Every Sunday, we have a computer class, an art class, and a class for training in ritual. On their own initiative, the nuns began a publications department. They also started a vegetable garden and took part in cleaning campaigns in the nearby villages.

This summer, ten nuns expressed a wish to take computer and English courses in Dharamsala instead of going home or spending their summer break elsewhere. This is a good sign that they wish to expand their knowledge. It gives me much pleasure to see the nuns maturing, outgrowing their shyness, and gaining confidence and trust in themselves. Last year, two nuns graduated from the Kagyu College and obtained their Acharya degree. They went for further studies on a program at Sera College in South India. Now they have returned to Kham to teach in a Drikung nunnery there.

Five nuns graduated from our institute this year. One of these nuns wishes to enter the three-year, three-month, and three-day retreat. This will be the first time that a nun who has graduated with an Acharya degree joins this retreat. Another nun, Yeshe Dolma, will go to assist Khenmo Drolma at the first Drikung Nunnery in the United States. Of the three other graduates, Tsunma Kunchok Tsekyi has been selected to become the first nun to serve as director for two years. In the next election, the term for director will be extended to three years. The other two nuns who graduated will teach at the nunnery.

My wish to see the nuns administer their own nunnery is now a reality. This big step is possible thanks to His Holiness Drikung Kyabgon Chetsang Rinpoche, our teachers, the staff at the nunnery, and all who have supported us. Without the leadership of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who has repeatedly expressed his support for gender equality and has been especially concerned about the education of Buddhist nuns, I doubt that we would have come this far. The nuns have also been very supportive of each other. This August, I will retire from my position as advisor to Drikung Kagyu Samtenling Nunnery. A few senior nuns will be elected to form an advisory board at the nunnery. I wish the nuns well, and I am confident that they will do a good job.



BUDDHISM, GENDER, AND NATURE
by Emma Tomalin

Ecofeminism began to emerge from the late 1970s, promoting the view that there is "a connection between the domination of nature and the domination of women."[1] While "ecofeminism does not lend itself to easy generalization" since it "consists of a diversity of positions, and this is reflected in the diversity of voices and modes of expression,"[2] an emphasis upon overcoming dualistic thinking is a shared characteristic across different expressions of ecofeminism. Not all expressions of ecofeminism engage with religious identities, but strong parallels exist between

ecofeminism and feminist critiques of religion that have grown in popularity from the 1960s. In particular, feminist criticism of religion drew attention to the ways in which masculine ways of viewing the world and the divine, including the relationship between the material and the spiritual (or, materiality and spirituality), relied on dualisms that subordinated women.

Despite its early popularity, ecofeminism was criticized for essentializing and romanticizing women's roles as close to nature. "The accusations and pressures with which ecofeminism was assailed were such that many erstwhile ecofeminists no longer called themselves such."[3] More recently, ecofeminism is undergoing a resurgence as advocates defend it against critiques of essentialism. Advocates argue that ecofeminism is needed now more than ever because it provides a "deployment of radical ideas, strategies and politics which re-connect the human and more-than-human world."[4] through a recognition that "nature must be included in theorizing and acting against constellations of injustice and exploitation."[5]

In a climate of renewed interest in ecofeminism, it is noticeable that Buddhists have not really engaged with it to any great extent. Buddhist responses to ecological concerns are generally written by men or focus on what monks are doing, for example, the so-called "ecology monks" in Thailand, Cambodia, Burma and Sri Lanka, where some monks are ordaining trees in order to protect them.[6] Overall, we know much less about the environmentalist activities of female Buddhists, lay or ordained, whether in Asia or the West. Even at the Sakyadhita conferences, where we find many papers that deal with gender analysis or feminism and some papers that deal with environmental issues, none have undertaken a serious engagement with ecofeminism from a Buddhist perspective, specifically drawing links between the oppression of women and the destruction of the natural environment.[7]

My aim in this article is to address three questions: First, to what extent has "green Buddhism" been gendered? Second, why has there been virtually no attempt to bring together feminist analysis with responses to Buddhism and environmentalism, and instead they have been approached separately? Third, in what ways do Buddhist women combine gender analysis and environmentalism in practice, either in reference to or outside the framework of ecofeminism?

Is "Green Buddhism" Gendered?

"Green Buddhism" is a response to concerns about environmental destruction and climate change, drawing upon Buddhist resources as well as different environmentalist philosophies and activisms. This response emphasizes the interdependence of all beings, compassion, and non-dualism. Dualistic thinking is typically blamed for the environmental crisis, because it results in an anthropocentric shaping of human-nature relations. In this model, humanity is seen as superior to and separate from the natural world, which only exists to meet human needs, resulting in the dangerous exploitation of natural resources. By contrast, non-dualistic thinking views all human and non-human entities as interconnected and mutually dependent, resulting in an ecological ethic that puts limits on human interaction with the natural world. Also, at the core of Buddhist teachings is the idea of accepting change and impermanence. This has lead some commentators to doubt whether Buddhism can support an ecological ethic, since teachings about impermanence may suggest that there is nothing we can do about environmental change and that the best route is to focus on personal spiritual development and enlightenment.

When we ask to what extent green Buddhism has been gendered, my survey of the literature reveals "not very." One example is the edited volume, A Buddhist Response to the Climate Emergency.[8] The book has six parts, including one presenting "Asian Buddhist Perspectives," but all twelve chapters are written by Tibetan male teachers, which hardly represents Asian Buddhist perspectives. Throughout the rest of the book, there are only three contributions by women, all of whom are situated in the Global North.

It is also striking that even within feminist responses to Buddhism, an ecofeminist-like argument that links ecological and gender concerns has not really been developed. Why has there has been virtually no attempt to bring together feminist analysis with responses to Buddhism and environmentalism, and instead they have been approached separately?

Buddhism and Ecofeminism

Not only have women been marginalised in "green Buddhism," but Buddhism has been more or less left out of ecofeminism. While ecofeminism is not a unified system of thought and is very diverse in its expressions, there seem to be three shared characteristics. First, is the idea that "there are important connections between the domination of women (and other human subordinates) and the domination of nature, and that a failure to recognize these connections results in an inadequate feminism, environmentalism, and environmental philosophy."[9] Second, taking this idea of the connection between the domination of women and the domination of nature further, ecofeminism draws attention to the intersectionality of all forms of domination and marginalization, for instance, as related to class, race, ethnicity, and gender. Third, ecofeminism attributes domination and marginalization to tendencies to think dualistically and to assign uneven value to different items, including, for instance, assumed binaries such as the spiritual and material, male and female, or the rational and intuitive. Hence, many ecofeminists are attracted towards philosophical and spiritual traditions that aim to dispel dualistic thinking, including Buddhism and other Asian philosophies, even though many followers of these traditions have neither heard of nor choose to identify with ecofeminism.

I have only found a few mentions in the Buddhist literature

of something that looks like ecofeminism. In an article written in 1993 for an edited volume about ecofeminism, Stephanie Kaza writes that:

> The environmental crisis is driven by the complexities of power distribution, giving preference and status to some governments, some corporate ventures, some ecosystems, some species, some cultures over others. An effective Buddhist environmental ethic is strengthened by the dimension of power analysis presented by feminist theorists…Without this awareness, the critical role of power can be overlooked by the Buddhist practitioner focusing on the beauty and miracle of interdependence.[10]

The second example is a more recent text by a Western female Theravāda practitioner, Thanissara, who writes:

> The dominance of patriarchy and its entitlements, and the denied feminine, is not only an unhealthy paradigm within Buddhism, but it permeates our global society at a deeply systemic level and contributes to the causes of catastrophic climate.[11]

Like ecofeminists, both Kaza and Thanissara analyze the roots of women's oppression and environmental destruction as having links in dualistic thinking that give rise to unequal power relationships, although in neither case do the authors refer to themselves as ecofeminists. What reasons can we give for this absence of a distinct Buddhist ecofeminism among Buddhist practitioners?

Why is There No Buddhist Ecofeminism?

In 2011, the Buddhist feminist scholar Rita Gross declared an interest in examining the ways in which "a fresh analysis of the ecofeminist conversation could be relevant to Buddhists"[12] and asked:

> Why is there nothing on Buddhism and ecofeminism, given the large body of literature on Buddhism and ecology, the influence of feminist analyses of Buddhism, and the prevalence of ecofeminism in contemporary Western discourse?[13]

Gross argues that the idea of a "special relationship" between women and nature that underpins much ecofeminism is problematic for Buddhists, because it entails an essentialist view of women. Although most ecofeminists today rigorously defend themselves against charges of essentialism, this is nonetheless a tendency toward essentialism that, for Gross, makes it difficult for Buddhists to identify with ecofeminism.[14] She also suggests that "Buddhists generally do not react well to topics with the word 'feminism' in them":

Western Buddhists tend to believe that Buddhism does not need gender analysis because Buddhism does teach that enlightenment is beyond gender. Asian Buddhists sometimes claim that because feminism is a Western system, it should be avoided altogether. Feminism is too confrontational and ideological, it is often claimed.[15]

On the other hand, Gross embraces the way in which ecofeminism offers "an integrated analysis of oppression and social injustice in which issues of gender, race, class, ethnicity, environmental degradation, etc., are linked as parts of a larger system of domination instead of being analyzed separately,"[16] for making a more promising contribution to Buddhist engagement with social problems. This, she argues, serves to counterbalance the focus in much Buddhist analysis on "individual karma and on the individual's ignorance as the cause of an individual's suffering," rather than the way in which "humanly constructed institutions cause suffering," and ways to change those institutions.[17]

Gross is herself an example of someone who has written about green Buddhism and Buddhist feminism, but without linking the two analyses together. Nonetheless, some view Gross as an ecofeminist, and also the Buddhist author Joanna Macy, even though we do not find the basic ecofeminist elements in her work and she neither identifies with ecofeminism nor discusses it. Thus, some commentators blur the boundaries between ecofeminism and other environmental philosophies, particularly when they are held by women and even more so when they are held by women who also engage in gender analysis elsewhere in their writing or social action. Tovis Page is critical that ecofeminism has "cornered the market" and that "instead of appearing as one of various approaches to the study of gender, religion, and ecology, ecofeminism is presented as the only approach – indeed, as essentially synonymous with the analytical category of gender."[18]

The discussion so far has demonstrated that there is a literature on Buddhism and ecology but, on the whole, it has not adopted a gender lens. We also know far less about the environmentalist activities of Buddhist laywomen and nuns that we do about those of men. Women activists who write about the environment, such as Kaza and Thanissara, do not tend to describe their work as ecofeminism, even if they link feminism with ecological analysis in their work. Most others, such as Gross and Macy, neither specifically combine the two nor see them as linked, even if they undertake some feminist analysis in other places. In addition, despite the fact that we can identify a series of shared characteristics across a "standard ecofeminism," many tend to use the term rather loosely, in an all-embracing fashion.

Buddhism, Gender and Nature: Looking Forward

Finally, I would like to explore the question: In what ways are Buddhist women (and men) combining gender analysis and environmentalism in practice, either in reference to or outside the framework of ecofeminism? The lack of ethnographic research about the diversity of subjective ways that women globally relate to the intersections between Buddhism, gender, and nature means that, in the absence of alternative frameworks, this set of relationships is subsumed under the banner of ecofeminism. This obscures the ways that the intersections between Buddhism, gender, and nature might be experienced outside of "standard ecofeminist" discourse. Buddhist women in both Asia and the West need to more strongly articulate the ways that they experience the intersections between gender and nature, whether or not their views resemble the standard version of ecofeminism or not.

Furthermore, all available language resources need to be taken into account. My analysis has been based upon publications available in English, which is not a good indication of what has been written globally on the topic. There is evidence that South Korean women are engaging with the term ecofeminism in ways that reflect their location. For instance, Hyun-Shik Jun constructs "an indigenous Buddhist ecofeminism from a culturally-situated perspective…to custom-fit the [Christian] ecofeminism articulated by theologian Rosemary Radford Reuther.[19] And Jeong-Hee Kim mentions ecofeminism, renaming it "biofeminism."[20]

Examples of Buddhist nuns in Asia engaging in environmental activism are not difficult to find, although we know little about how they link their activism with their status as nuns or whether they link the oppression of nature with the widespread oppression of women across the globe. For instance, in 2005 a Buddhist nun named Jiyul Sunim went on a hunger strike to protest the construction of a tunnel for high-speed trains through Mount Cheonseong in South Korea. This tunnel was "home to about 30 endangered species and marshlands that are thousands of years old. For example, the mountain is a rare habitat for the salamander, which used to be a common in Korean mountain valleys but gradually disappeared after new roads and travel attractions were built nearby."[21] An article by Eun-Su Cho discusses Jiyul Sunim's activism, describing her as having developed a Korean Buddhist "ecofeminism."[22]

Another example of Buddhist women's environmentalist activity concerns the so-called "Kung Fu" nuns living at Druk Amitabha Mountain Nunnery in Kathmandu, set up in the 1990s by the spiritual head of the Drukpa lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, Gyalwang Drukpa. An award winning film titled "Pad Yatra" focuses on the yearly pilgrimages the nuns make to different parts of South Asia to share information about environmentalism and other social issues.[23] Their portrayal as combining gender empowerment with environmental activism makes the Drukpa nuns a good case study for exploring ecofeminism. However, most of what we know about these nuns is filtered through the words of their teacher. Their own voices are unheard, so we do not know how they think about their status as nuns and their environmental philosophy. The article by Bhikshuni Lozang Trinlae, an American scholar who ordained as a Buddhist nun in India in 1998, analyzes Gyalwang Drukpa's writings and finds that, although he does not use key terms found in ecofeminist writings, such as patriarchy and feminism, he invests "much personal time and energy in promoting the causes of women and the environment."[24] Still, the "ecofeminist insight that the subordination of women and nature are intertwined,"[25] is not evident in the thinking of the Gyalwang Drukpa. She concludes that, although his work does not share every feature with ecofeminists from the West, he "by way of his words and deeds, has in fact succeeded in characterizing a Drukpa Vajrayāna Buddhist genus of ecofeminism."[26]

Conclusion

As Gross stated, it is important to examine the ways in which"A fresh analysis of the ecofeminist conversation could be relevant to Buddhists."[27] The aim of this article has been to examine why a Buddhist ecofeminism is not particularly apparent and whether there is evidence of other ways of combining gender analysis and environmentalism within Buddhism outside the framework of a standard Western ecofeminism. However, there has been a lack of attention in the relationship of green Buddhism with gender analysis, women's voices, and women's environmental activism. This is a shortcoming that needs to be addressed, as it gives a rather one-sided and narrow view of relationships between Buddhism and ecology.

NOTES

[1] Rosemary Radford Ruether, Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 91.

[2] Elizabeth Carlassare, "Essentialism in Ecofeminist Discourse," Ecology: Key Concepts in Critical Theory, ed. Carolyn Merchant (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1994), 220.

[3] Mary Phillips and Nick Rumens 2016. Contemporary Perspectives on Ecofeminism (Londonand New York: Routledge, 2016), 5.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] See, for instance, Susan M. Darlington, The Ordination of a Tree: The Thai Buddhist Environmental Movement (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2012).

[7] The only discussion I have found in the Sakyadhita literature about

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BUDDHIST REPENTANCE ON THE PATH TO ENLIGHTENMENT

by Nour Suleiman

Typically, when we consider repentance through the lens of Western religions, we assume the presence of God and sin. The Buddhist traditions, however, approach repentance with a different set of assumptions. Rather than referencing laws set forth by a God, Buddhists use the teachings of the Buddha as a moral framework. These teachings explain a concept of repentance that sets Buddhism apart from Islam, Christianity, or Judaism. A proponent of one of these Abrahamic faiths may argue that, without God, one need not feel remorse or regret for one's actions. On the contrary, the Buddhist concern for "self-examination, feelings of remorse, the renunciation of unwholesome patterns of life, and the possibility of radical moral change"[1] allows for an extensive contemplation of skillful and skillful actions. In fact, Buddhist principles encourage the practitioner to acknowledge a wrongdoing, generate regret, and correct it.

The Buddhist traditions allow for constructive moral growth through repentance by understanding the impermanent, selfless nature of phenomena. Rather than confessing to a priest, Buddhists make virtuous changes in an effort toward personal forgiveness and restitution. This practice is not only an individual concern; it also benefits other living beings. Based on the principle of altruism, repentance allows for the reconsideration of a moral attitude and allows for reflection on how one's behavior affects others. Buddhists thus reshape their path toward personal enlightenment as well as the enlightenment of others.

For a person to feel a need to repent for a given action, the person must first experience remorse or regret for the action. Here, an important distinction must be made between remorse or regret and feelings of guilt. To make sense of Buddhist repentance, it is paramount to first develop an understanding for what necessitates it. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has explicitly said, "There is no guilt in Buddhism."[2] Due to a human propensity to direct negative feelings inward, guilt can also be a kind of aversion.[3] From a Buddhist perspective, remorse and repentance are wholesome, whereas quilt feelings can be unhealthy.

When considering Buddhist ideals, a sense of responsibility for one's actions is what generates a need for repentance. In Buddhism, repentance presupposes responsibility; the need for penance stems

from the acknowledgment of a moral wrongdoing. Traditionally, Buddhists consider it useful to acknowledge and act promptly upon those feelings. Once a wrongdoing is recognized, the individual should internally reflect upon it and make a commitment to prevent its recurrence.[4] This type of internal repentance lives at the core of the Buddhist traditions. The Buddhist pragmatic sentiment to benefit the world dovetails with an emphasis on selfless repentance. This sentiment helps create an altruistic Buddhist society that works to reduce suffering for all sentient beings.

To practice repentance effectively, a person must first overcome feelings of guilt. Guilt keeps drawing us back to the past, instead of being attentive in the present. A person who is anchored in empathy, morality, and justice cannot help but feel pangs of conscience or regret for wrongdoings. Feelings of regret or remorse can help us evaluate, understand, and atone for our misdeeds, so that we avoid doing the same thing again and again. Since the past cannot be changed and the future cannot be predicted, energy spent distracted by thoughts of the past and future is futile. Instead, we should direct our time and energy to determining the source of the guilt, making restitution, and resolving not to repeat the action again.

The key to eradicating feelings of guilt is to reflect upon one's wrongdoings and to revise one's thinking and actions accordingly. The process of reflection entails first a determination of who is responsible for the incident. If the person feeling guilty is at fault, he or she must evaluate what motivated the transgression. What was the intention behind the action? If the intention was entirely to benefit, there is no need to feel guilty. Depending on the circumstances, Buddhists would try to remedy the problem or, if that is not possible, accept the situation without beating oneself up and try to be more mindful in the future. Mindfulness of intentions, causes, and conditions is a beneficial form of moral repentance.

If we examine the question further, it could be argued that how we feel about a wrongdoing can play either a positive or negative role in our moral growth. Feelings of remorse can be constructive if they draw attention to changes that need to be made in order to prevent future transgressions.[5] Through the constructive practice of repentance, we can experience the advantages of mental cultivation and purification and let go of the burden of guilt. A person who practices repentance in this way grows in virtue and becomes better suited to help relieve the sufferings of sentient beings. Thus, healthy repentance can help improve the quality of life for both ourself and others.

"The Great Compassion Repentance," a widely implemented recitation of repentance from the Chinese tradition, demonstrates the moral effectiveness of repentance on society. It reads:

> I feel shame, great fear, and remorse. I confess my faults, and I repent and reform. I put an end to my incessant thoughts and resolve upon Awakening. I will no longer do harmful things, and with body, speech, and mind, I will be diligent in doing only good. I will correct my mistakes and will always rejoice in the good works, whether great or small, of sages and ordinary people…Since time without beginning, I have committed many harmful acts, without realizing that all things are fundamentally empty and still. But now I know that all things are empty and still, and for the sake of awakening and for the sake of living beings, I will no longer do anything harmful. But instead, I will do every possible good deed.[6]

This form of repentance clearly emphasizes the Buddhist ideal of moral, virtuous actions .

Throughout Buddhist history, instances of repentance have been recognized as significant. In fact, Buddhist accounts of repentance and its repercussions are among the most noteworthy of Buddhist tales. During the third century BCE in India, for example, repentance had a significant impact on Buddhist history when Emperor Asoka of India generated remorse for his cruel conquests.[7] As a particularly brutal conqueror, Asoka was responsible for the extensive destruction of human life. One day, after seeing the tragic results of his brutal conquests, he transformed his attitude and suddenly felt regret for his actions.[8] He decided to renounce militarism and instead live a blameless life in accordance with Buddhist principles. After reflecting on his wrongdoings, Asoka expressed his deep remorse and contrition through a public confession and a commitment to social welfare projects for the benefit of the populace. The Edicts of Asoka document his resolve to rule with compassion, justice, and integrity. Asoka's works for the public welfare are held up as a model of the beneficial effects Buddhist repentance can have.

Angulimāla is another renowned example of Buddhist repentance.[9] As the account goes, a precocious boy was born into a priest's family in Kosala. When he grew up, his classmates became jealous and convinced his teacher that the young man was plotting against him. To retaliate, the teacher instructed the young man to kill one thousand people and bring him a finger from each as a gift. The diligent student did as he was told and, stringing the fingers around his neck in a garland, became known as Angulimāla (Garland of Fingers). Everyone in the vicinity became terrified of the murderous villain. While searching for his final victim, he spotted the Buddha walking in the forest and chased after him saying, "Stop, monk!" The Buddha replied that he has already stopped, meaning that he had renounced violence.

When Angulimāla heard this, he repented of his heinous crimes, threw away his weapons, and made obeisance to the Buddha. He renounced the household life and became a monk under the Buddha. The story is often recounted to illustrate that, through the power of repentance, even a hardened criminal or serial killer can change course and become a liberated being (*arhat*).

In the Tibetan tradition, teachers explain the Four Opponent Powers that are used as antidotes to unwholesome actions.[10] Visualizing countless enlightened beings in the space in front of oneself, the first step is to admit having committed the unwholesome action. The second step is to generate regret or remorse from the very core of one's heart. The third step is to make a determination to not commit the action again. The fourth step is to engage in some virtuous activity, such as

generosity or meditation, to offset the unpleasant consequences of the action. Practicing these Four Opponent Powers helps purify the effects of our misdeeds on our stream of consciousness.

One of the most fundamental Buddhist principles is to relieve the sufferings of sentient beings. Buddhist practices aim not only for personal liberation, but liberation for all. In order to achieve enlightenment, one must first gain an understanding of life, including the value of a wholesome lifestyle. By repenting for actions that are unwholesome and determining not to do them again, one can avoid the unpleasant consequences of ethical lapses and live a happier life. In doing so, one moves closer to liberation and is better able to help others do the same.

NOTES

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[4] Ibid.

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BUDDHISM, JUSTICE, FREEDOM, AND ACTIVISM
by Undarya Tumursukh

I am a political scientist by training and a pro-democracy, human rights, and women's rights activist by calling. I began studying Buddhist philosophy, ethics, and psychology when I was still enrolled in a doctoral program in Political Science at Rutgers University in New Jersey. By that time, I had accumulated more than ten years of experience with Mongolia's democratization and much theoretical knowledge on democracy, equality, and human rights, as well as the best potential avenues for political activism. My Buddhist self-study, incomplete as it was, led me to redefine all this theoretical knowledge and my practical understanding of activism.

Freedom and Democracy

First, let me share a few thoughts on freedom and democracy as a political system that seeks to enable people to live in freedom. The democratic systems that we know today are liberal bourgeois democracies. This is the model that was proposed to Mongolia by foreign (Western) experts in the 1990s, and it is the model that we Mongolian democracy advocates have actively sought to emulate since then. While the social challenges we face today stem from a variety of tough problems, I believe one of them has to do with the fundamental assumptions of a liberal democratic model.

One of the critical assumptions in this model is that every person is bounded in time and bounded in space. Each person is distinct from the other as a discrete individual. Let's call this a "limited" person – limited precisely because that person is capable of clearly defining his or her self-interest. Moreover, such a person is capable of putting self-interest above the interests of others. Through elections, all these discrete individuals' interests are combined and the majority wins. To be sure, individuals may all vote for the so-called "common good," but it is also possible that they do so based on their own self-interest, rather than for the benefit of everyone. To make the system more humane, minorities may be guaranteed special protection and rights, so they will not be entirely crushed by the majority, but that is not guaranteed.

The liberal democratic model fundamentally depends on this supposed clarity and stability of boundaries between persons and the ability of these persons to clearly define their boundaries, hence their own self-interest. The problems begin to arise when some persons, for a variety of reasons, may not keep others' interests dear to their heart. Valuing someone else's interests above one's own is a dangerous delusion for liberal democrats. They fear that if personal boundaries are not clearly drawn, the self-interest of the individual may not be clearly and specifically defined. The educational systems, both inside and outside of schools in countries like the United States are thus dedicated to raising self-interested individuals – individuals who are afraid of becoming permeable and diluted, afraid to to open themselves to the world and to other human beings.

People in liberal democracies must clearly define themselves and most of the time they do so by defining themselves against something else. I like spinach soup, I do not like carrot soup. Or I am a democrat, I am not an authoritarian. I am a feminist, I oppose patriarchy. I am a woman, not a man. Or vice-versa, I am a man, not a woman. These definitions are not just thoughts. Often they are demonstrably enacted, often visibly and loudly. These identities can be marked materially as in words and actions, or silently as in thoughts, ideas, ideologies, and the like.

These markers are then taken as signs of freedom. A person who is able to define his or her boundaries against supposed external forces is deemed to be free. This is what we may call a negative definition of freedom. It is defined in relation to external objects and in negative terms, such that it becomes a force of destruction, isolation, and separation. Inside the high walls of individuality, citizens become filled with fears and desires. The stronger the desire, the greater the fear. Individual integrity becomes compromised by the inner conflict. Since the conflict is painful, most people shove it into the realm of the unconscious. Individuals in modern civilizations have

huge deposits of unconscious, unexamined, and, therefore, potentially explosive impulses. We are sitting on a time bomb.

In order to deal with fear and achieve some degree of so-called security, human beings seek to increase their material power in order to control other human beings and situations. Money serves as the proxy for this material power. Hence, the race is on for more and more wealth at both the individual and the collective levels. What lies underneath is the desire to achieve a state of fearlessness or security. But under these terms, the goal can never be achieved.

Buddhism offers a different perspective, wherein a person is not conceived as an utterly discrete individual, separate from other beings in the universe. To think of ourselves as discrete and separate is a delusion. Fundamentally, we all share the same qualities. Even humanity is not a discrete, stable category, but a temporary manifestation. I am the cloud, the earth, the stone, the flower, my neighbor, that child far away in the Andes, or the herder in New Zealand. I am all of that, as well as myself, understood in conventional terms.

With a compassionate heart, we do not simply observe the suffering of others, we feel it as our own. There is no "other" in the Buddhist paradigm; we are interrelated – different and the same, diverse and united. These are not contradictory categories in the Buddhist world. Freedom means entirely letting go of the markers, shedding all the labels, and being free to create, roam, and feel, from deep inside. Freedom here means naiveté, freshness, spontaneity, creativity, permeability, transparency, absence of fear, and boundless energy. What's more, this freedom is largely conceived as being independent of external conditions, including, in principle, political systems.

But I am not ready to let go of democratic political institutions. I believe that they are extremely important for improving people's lives. How do we reconcile these contradictions? If we pursue a path of spiritual development, we should seek to expand our understanding of ourselves as ultimately non-selves. Yet the way liberal democracy is currently conceived and structured, the notion of non-self would be its demise. Is it possible to reconceptualize humane and democratic systems so as to not preclude, suppress, or ignore spiritual aspirations and, I would say, truths? Right now, I don't have an answer to this question. But one thing I believe strongly is that we should not foreclose our quest by rejecting such a possibility. We need to leave room for imagining a different system, one that is more harmonious with reality.

Justice

To begin, let us consider one aspect of a democratic system – the justice system – and try to imagine how Buddhism might inform efforts to reform this system. Modern ideas of justice are also based on the notion of bounded, limited individuals. When a person commits a so-called crime, it follows that the penalty should fall on him or her only, unless of course there were accomplices. Then with the exception of just a few countries, justice is understood as retribution, revenge, or punishment. Looking at a criminal and thinking he or she deserves jail or even the death penalty, is possible only if one maintains clear boundaries between oneself as a non-criminal and the other as the criminal. It is believed that the criminal impulse came from that discreet individual and such criminal or violent impulses have nothing to do with me. Usually, compassion is suspended through the ultimate othering of the "criminal," who is thought to have compromised his or her humanity by committing a hideous crime.

Buddhism and other similar spiritual traditions encourage us to look deep within and realize that we all share these dark impulses. We have all partaken in the maintenance, promotion, and escalation of violence. Thich Nhat Hanh once wrote, "When a soldier rapes a girl, I am that soldier, I am that girl." By these words, he helps us understand that we are one in our humanity. Violence that exists in the world is our collective product – we share in it, we have participated in it. There is no easy way to externalize the responsibility for violence in society onto specific individuals.

Even if we assume a more narrow view, there are still many, many people who participate in the making of a criminal: makers of poor policy decisions that allow for the perpetuation of poverty and degrading conditions; those who fail to support family development or provide jobs and education; parents who do not properly love, protect, and guide their children; teachers, friends, neighbors, the media, and justice institutions who fail to nurture them; and the list goes on and on. But when one act of violence does take place and visible damage is inflicted on a specific person or group, the society quickly isolates, prosecutes, and imprisons that individual, and thinks that justice has been served.

If we expand our understanding of the social world and our collective participation in social violence, how would we

redefine our laws and restructure our courts? Perhaps we would start by examining more closely the circumstances of people's lives, the failures of the system, and the responsibility of individuals and institutions such as schools and government agencies. Perhaps we would use each case as an opportunity to shed light on the responsibility of each of us in this single act, invest in education, support programs for the disadvantaged, and issue stronger reminders to media and policy-makers. We would take responsibility for each case and regard violence as our collective failure. In this way, I believe, we would certainly invest more in prevention rather than punishment; teach non-violence and compassion in schools, families, and the media; and put more demands on our policy-makers to improve the humane and equitable quality of society, not just its material prosperity.

Activism

Buddhism puts a different twist on activism as well. In fact, it fundamentally alters one's ideas of what activism should

be. I realized that the activism I had so proudly engaged in since 1992 was in fact a mock war. I ran on high adrenaline and felt so noble and righteous fighting against the "enemies" of democracy. I used words as weapons and thought of myself and my group as the good guys and "them" as the bad guys. Humility and compassion – these had no room in this struggle.

We activists felt so few in number and so lacking in resources compared to those who opposed or were indifferent to democracy, human rights, and gender equality, that our aggression increased – we felt insecure. Sometimes we felt cornered and overpowered, and we lashed out in anger and we thought that was our right. We thought the outbursts of our concentrated anger and aggression were in fact heroic expressions of our noble desires, that they were a natural result of our passion.

Our pain at the sight of human suffering added urgency to our struggle. We felt rushed and were driven, sometimes to the point of becoming zealots. There were times when we felt overwhelmed by the magnitude and fortitude of the unjust and oppressive economic, political, social, cultural and mental structures, systems, institutions, and traditions. We felt weak and powerless, depleted of our vital energy, and at a loss as to what to believe in. In the process, some of us got burned out as our anger and frustration accumulated.

There are at least three important lessons I learned from Buddhism that I seek to apply to my activist life. First is humility and patience. Second is compassion and non-violence. Third is in creativity based on self-assessment.

My former advisor Leela Fernandes once wrote, "In the face of such massive structures of oppression and domination, why did we ever think that transforming them would be an easy task?" This question is a wake up call for many activists who are understandably in a rush to change the world but naively forget the nature of the problems we are dealing with. While we cannot afford to wait and must act, we must also remember that our struggle is a very, very long process. We must keep our struggle in perspective and not justify our shortcomings. With humility, we must understand our possibilities and limitations.

This means assuming a long-term vision and checking each step in relation to that vision, taking careful steps. In our haste, we must not replicate the same kinds of violence, aggression, and myopia that we seek to transform. A first step for activists is to undergo deep self-examination and recognize the ways in which we are complicit in injustice. In other words, we must deeply understand the enemies inside ourselves and free ourselves from destructive impulses while seeking to combat them in the outside world.

If we hope to truly transform society and make it more humane and free for all, we must engage in a radical struggle "for complete social, economic, and political justice and a profound spiritual journey."[1] This dual process requires patience, diligence, utmost honesty, and humility.

Once we assume a Buddhist view, there are no external enemies. The usual flat representations of "bad guys" assumes more shape, color, and complexity. These beings are human, just like us. We must always remember our common humanity and diligently resist the urge to reduce the other to an enemy.

This approach opens up the possibility of non-violent politics, dialogue, and peaceful conflict transformation. It allows us to build a culture of non-violence, peace, and compassion. By refusing to add more anger and aggression to the mix, we gradually grow in our capacity to transform violence, both within and outside.

The Buddhist philosophy on teaching has a direct bearing on activism. First, we need not force ideas on those who are not yet ready to learn. Second, we should teach in ways that the listener can understand. Teaching must be done gently and skillfully, so that the student's mind is free to develop its own capacity. It is unethical for teachers to forcefully fill the students' minds with their own thoughts. Instead, they should encourage independent thinking. In this sense, Buddhism is a radically democratic tradition that goes far deeper in understanding freedom and responsibility than any liberal democratic theory. It seeks to radically liberate the mind, not just replace one ideology with another.

Understanding the subtle workings of the mind and educating students in ways that liberate the mind will have very important implications for pro-democracy, human rights, and gender equality activism. This calls for a more creative, self-critical approach to training, advocacy, public education, and awareness-raising programs – an approach that is more demanding but also more fun. It calls for an open-minded, fresh attitude towards our lives and our work to consciously avoid falling into old patterns and instead try new ways of doing things.

The last thing, easy to remember, hard to do, is to be happy and have fun even when engaged in difficult struggles. This is the best way to prevent violence and aggression and achieve effective outcomes.

NOTE

[1] Leela Fernandes, Transforming Feminist Practice: Non-Violence, Social Justice, and the Possibilities of a Spiritualized Feminism (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Press, 2003), 38.

SHOP 'TIL YOU DROP?
by Tom Marx

In a Time Magazine article from 2009, Justin Fox writes that after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York, "President Bush didn't call for sacrifice. He called for shopping. 'Get down to Disney World in Florida,' he said. 'Take your families and enjoy life, the way we want it to be enjoyed.' "

What he suggested was not to count our blessings, or realize life's impermanence and fragility, or be kinder and friendlier to one another, or diminish our dependence on foreign resources. No, according to Mr. Bush, the most important and patriotic act for us in the face of that national tragedy was to purchase more products. Spend money. Get back to consuming. Have fun again.

One assumption, I think, is that wanting more and always being hungry for the next thing is good and makes us all happy. So Bush saw a shocked public and, maybe a little out of genuine concern, encouraged them to do what makes a lot of people happy – go shopping – to get their minds off the tragedy and revive the economy at the same time.

Unfortunately, the runaway train of consumption is killing much of life on the earth. If we were all more content, we would consume less and the planet would stand half a chance of surviving the next few generations. Genuine contentment, as distinct from consumerism, is one of the most revolutionary acts a person in the 21st century can experience, because it goes against all contemporary cultural norms and conditioning.

This raises the question: What is contentment? For me, it is about being happy with who I am right now: overweight, under-exercised (but trying to do something about this), struggling to pay off large credit-card debts, and right now not particularly looking forward to the hour-long drive home in heavy morning traffic from my night-shift job. But I feel really, really happy.

I remember when I used to be unhappy. It sucked. In retrospect, I now see that I was unhappy largely because my life was consumed with a series of fantasies, ideas, and expectations: about my kids, my marriage, my meditation practice, my night-shift job – my, My, My .... Somehow, "I" always fell short of these fantasies and expectations.

What happened to change that? Nothing terribly dramatic – no huge epiphany, no burning bushes, no lights, sparks,or kundalini rush. Ever so slowly, it simply dawned on me: Reality is amazing. Never mind that it falls short of all the fantasies. Reality is way more amazing than any fantasy.

Emily Dickinson put it perfectly: "Life is so astonishing; it leaves very little time for anything else." For me, contentment is about letting go of my fantasies and realizing that life is truly amazing as it is – especially without the fantasies.

Mindfulness practice allows us to shine the light of awareness on our fantasies, ideas, and expectations. As we silently, mindfully watch them, we see how they filter our perceptions, distorting our view of things just as they are. Gently, we let them pass by us, and begin to see how incredibly awesome this precious life really is – just as it is, right now.

Let's let dear Ryōkan have the last word:

> My hut lies in the middle of a dense forest;
> Every year the green ivy grows longer.
> No news of the affairs of men,
> Only the occasional song of a woodcutter.
> The sun shines and I mend my robe;
> When the moon comes out I read Buddhist poems.
> I have nothing to report my friends.
> If you want to find the meaning,
> stop chasing after so many things.
>
> ~ Zen monk Ryōkan Taigu (1758–1831)

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BUDDHIST WOMEN IN THE NEWS

Celebrating Buddhist Women Scholars

On December 22, 2016, for the first time in Tibetan history, a group of 20 nuns will be awarded the highest degree in Buddhist philosophy. The Geshe Lharampa degree, the highest scholarly achievement in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, was previously available only to male scholars who studied at the large monastic universities of Tibet. The equivalent Geshema degree is now available to women, who are currently able to pursue the requisite course of study in their own monasteries in India and Nepal. Successful candidates must pass rigorous exams that test their comprehension of Indian and Tibetan Buddhist texts and commentaries. This year, H.H. Dalai Lama will confer the Geshema degree for the first time at a special cere mony to be held at Drepung Monastery in Mundgod, a Tibetan settlement in South India. The monastery will be celebrating the 600th anniversary of its founding in Tibet.

The awarding of this degree is a major landmark in both Buddhist history and women's history. It establishes equal opportunities for women in the Tibetan tradition for the systematic study of Buddhist logic, psychology, and philosophy. A unique and extremely effective method of philosophical debate has been preserved for centuries in the Tibetan tradition. The course of study and the examination process for the Geshema degree are overseen by the Department of Religion and Culture of the Tibetan administration in exile.

Until the 1980s, women practitioners in the Tibetan tradition tended to focus on chanting, rituals, and contemplation. In the last few decades, however, increasing numbers of nuns have expressed a keen interest in advanced philosophical studies and a number of monk scholars agreed to teach them. Their dedicated efforts to Buddhist studies have removed outmoded preconceptions about women's capacity for philosophical reasoning. The doors to official recognition opened in 2011 when, after studying at the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics in Dharmasala for more than 20 years, a German nun named Kelsang Wangmo was awarded the Geshema degree. Now that the glass door is unsealed, hundreds of younger nuns are encouraged to open them wide. The Buddhist world can anticipate upcoming generations of enthusiastic, highly qualified women teachers.

In Praise of Bhiksunis: A Ritual for the Flourishing of Women Practitioners

In February 2016, over 400 nuns of the Karma Kagyu School of Tibetan Buddhism attended the 3rd Arya Kshema Winter Dharma Gathering for Nuns in Bodhgaya, India. At the gathering, the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa mentioned his hope that, as the Dharma spreads, more respected and learned women will look after the Buddha's teachings. This sentiment accords with the declaration of the Buddha himself in the Pāli Mahāparinibbāna Sutta: "I will not pass away until I have nun disciples who are wise, well-trained, self-confident, and learned." At the conclusion of the gathering, a Ritual for the Nuns' Dharma to Flourish and a śrāmanerika (novice) ordination for nuns were held.

This is not the first time Gyalwang Karmapa has expressed support for nuns. At the 1st Arya Kshema Winter Dharma Gathering in 2014, he led a ritual that he personally composed to supplicate Avalokiteśvara and the Buddha's attendant Ānanda for the flourishing of the nuns' Dharma. In 2015, he led a three-hour ritual that he specially composed in support of women practitioners. Led by a female chanting master, the Karmapa and the assembled nuns praised the qualities of nine outstanding bhiksuni disciples of the Buddha who became arhats:

May we be supreme among all with wisdom and confidence like Bhiksuni Kshema,
May we be supreme among all with supernormal powers like Bhiksuni Utpalavarna,
May we be supreme among teachers like Bhiksuni Dharmadatta,
May we be supreme among those who uphold the vinaya like Bhiksuni Gautami,
May we be supreme among those who discern the sutras like Bhiksuni Kachangala,
May we be supreme among those who have memorized what they heard like Bhiksuni Soma,
May we be supreme among those who generate merit like Bhiksuni Supriya,
May we be supreme among those with restraint like Bhiksuni Yasodhara.

Rituals such as these have become a strong sources of inspiration for women practitioners.

In January 2015, Gyalwang Karmapa made the surprise announcement that he would take concrete steps to to establish full ordination for women in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Beginning with the *śrāmanerika* (novice) and the *śiksamānā* (probationary) ordinations, he will lay the foundation for conducting the *bhiksuni* (full) ordination. In a statement on his official website, he stated his intention to collaborate with *bhiksunis* of the Dharmagupta *vinaya* (monastic discipline) to accomplish this. To achieve gender equity in the Tibetan tradition will indeed be an historic breakthrough for women.

sakyadhita

15th international conference on buddhist women
hong kong | june 22 to 28, 2017

Conference Theme
"Contemporary Buddhist Women:
Contemplation, Cultural Exchange & Social Action"

Buddhism is a significant cultural force in the world today, influencing virtually every sphere of human activity from business to popular music. This global spread of Buddhist ethics, iconography, meditation, and philosophy is having an impact on science, psychology, politics, and the arts. Today, women have more paths to self-enrichment than ever before. Whether the choice is career, family, or monastery, women are expanding beyond traditional roles in creative and beneficial ways. Women also take different paths and approaches to spirituality, depending on their cultural backgrounds and personal interests: meditation, scholarship, social activism, and the arts.

The 2017 conference theme encompass many aspects of what Buddhism means to women and embraces a range of Buddhist women's experiences. "Contemplation" includes personal introspection, mindfulness practice, meditation, and reflection on contemporary life issues. "Cultural exchange" incorporates interreligious dialogue, indigenous Buddhist experiences, inter-generational dialogue, and Buddhist transcultural exchange, expressed through the arts. "Social action" includes multiple ways to transform society. The 17th Sakyadhita Conference will be a forum for making connections across cultures and traditions. Explore a wide range of Buddhist teachings for living a meaningful life!

Join us for this special gathering! Registration opens on January 1. Be sure to register at the earliest to get choice accommodations.

The conference is a special opportunity for learning from some of the world's best known teachers. It is also an opportunity to share your own experience. Workshops on mindful movement (stretching, qigong, yoga, tai chi, and so on) are especially welcome.

Express your compassion! Many women would love to attend the Sakyadhita Conference in Hong Kong, but need financial support. Your generosity can help a Buddhist laywoman or nun realize her dreams: as a scholar, contemplative, activist, or artist. Donations are tax-deductible in the U.S.

For registration and further information, see www.sakyadhita.org.

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Sakyadhita

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Thank you for your kind support!

Acknowledgments

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