

Sakyadhita

International Association of Buddhist Women

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"Nuns of all traditions practicing together at night under a bright bodhi tree."

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND THE BUDDHIST CONCEPT OF NON-SELF

Eun-su Cho

Although the advancement of women's status is global, in many countries today, women's social participation is still undermined and remains lower than that of men. Korea is among such countries. The phenomenal economic growth of the past two to three decades has enabled Korean women to achieve greater higher education and social status than was previously possible, so that contemporary middle-class women, in particular, enjoy unprecedented freedoms, cultural enrichment, and purchasing power. In addition to these personal and economic victories, many women are also involving themselves in the betterment of society by working in the public sector, for example, in government offices and large companies. When it comes to women in decision-making level leadership positions, however, Korea continues to rank very low among its peer OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries. In the religious arena as well, despite the remarkably conspicuous nature of female participation in the operation of religious orders, the role women play is marginalized as a background supporting force, while men dominate the more visible religious activities in the foreground.

Social prejudices, lack of psychological, educational, and financial support systems, and women's own hesitance to break with inherited concepts of gender roles are counted as the main obstacles to women's advancement in the labor force. While some women have dared to move forward and forge their own paths up mainstream social ladders, overcoming social and cultural obstacles and prejudices, it is still common to hear dispiriting accounts of the tremendous number of social and psychological difficulties that women experience in terms of advancement throughout their careers. The proverbial glass ceiling is still firmly in place in Korea. Addressing this barrier is hindered, however, by the complexity of the factors underlying it. What appears on the surface of the gender disparity belies its scope and depth. For example, more alarming than the external prejudices women experience along the path toward achievement are the profound hidden, inner battles that they must

wage with themselves. The higher a woman climbs up the steepening pyramid of social and professional structures, the more she finds that the female colleagues by whom she was initially surrounded, disappear rapidly and it becomes harder for her to find women mentors and a female support system. Surrounded by competitors, such women must push themselves to be ever more effective and capable. Yet, the more they push themselves, the more they experience loneliness and internalized self-doubt and fear, even while they may not recognize it themselves.

Traditionally in East Asia, women were taught to be obedient and submissive, not only in external manifestations such as gestures and etiquette, but also in their internal lives, so that these ideal “feminine” qualities were molded into their psyche. Today, the system of ethics taught in East Asia for thousands of years has been officially curtailed and replaced by modern Western ethics and concepts of gender equality. This ideological transformation, however, contrasts with the everyday realities of continuing challenges, attempted subversion, and judgmental perceptions directed toward women in leadership positions. The traditional emphasis on serving others rather than oneself that is so ingrained in Korean women creates in high achievers a dynamic of doubt and self-consciousness concerned about whether or not their pursuits are based on pure motivations or by self-serving ambition and a selfish love of success. In a modern society characterized by competition and self-promotion, women continue to feel uncomfortable about being assertive. They are often uncertain about when and how to put their ideas and achievements forward, and worry that taking initiative may be interpreted as being motivated by pride or conceit. While this conflict might simply be the inevitable result of the various pressures of social norms imposed on women in contemporary Korean society, it could very well also originate in a much more fundamental self-doubt that is both profound and deeply rooted.

In particular, those women who are active in the context of Buddhist society tend to eagerly emphasize that the motivation behind their involvement with certain tasks is not conceit, love of fame, or the pursuit of personal gain. While the East Asian Chan Buddhist tradition in general is characterized by its consistent emphasis on the practice of “putting oneself down” and “humble mind,” what is of interest in a discussion about gender is how these moral characteristics are especially expected of female practitioners. Meanwhile, the Confucian tradition, which is also a strong moral force in East Asian societies, holds the principles of love (*ren*) and respect (*li*) as cardinal rules, specifying the execution of these ideals within distinct codes of action – such as the three bonds and five moral rules – set out in particular forms of relationship, such as those between husband and wife and elder and younger. This moral code is designed to prevent conflicts that might arise among people by establishing a hierarchical society that filters

out certain courses of action through specific social and moral stipulations. The culturally conditioned behavior of following these prescribed and accepted social norms offers a comparatively easy guide to actions and behavior for socially involved individual. This frees them of the responsibility of overly reflecting about their autonomy, its potential influence on their actions, and the social ramifications of those actions.

On the other hand, the principles of “putting oneself down” and “humility” place a moral burden on women’s shoulders to weigh the implications of their choices in any given situation. When matters go well, they may ascribe the result to social structures or external conditions, especially when the matter is related to human relations. By the same token, it can be observed that when matters go poorly, many women tend to place the blame on themselves, scrutinizing their own actions and character for the cause of the problem. While such devoted practice of humility might be appreciated in the religious realm, the dilemma is that such religiously framed prescribing of moral responsibility, removed from the secular social context, may spill over and serve as a stumbling block in the way women function in modern society. The fact is that the modern world requires people to let others know about their achievements.

What is the primary mechanism behind women’s disinclination to be more assertive in the pursuit of their own needs and desires? The prevalent assumption is that many women feel that wishing to be recognized for their achievements is a crass reflection of personal pride. In examining why women often tend to be more reserved and less confident of their own motives, I hope to address the following questions: How do women integrate Buddhist teachings with a perspective of non-self? Is there a way of wanting recognition that does not reflect self-interest and pride? I would like to apply the Buddhist doctrine of non-self to situations that revolve around self-doubt.

The non-self doctrine is a central tenet of early Buddhist teachings. It negates the existence of a permanent, independently existing self, arguing that although our sense of self originates from a socially conditioned self-consciousness, in truth, there is no self that is substantial and unchanging. According to the Buddha, adherence to the false notion of an independent and eternal self leads inevitably to disappointment and frustration. We tend to believe that this world and the things in it exist eternally, but Buddhist doctrine holds that in reality no compounded phenomena in the world continues to maintain its self-identity in an unchanging and everlasting way. The non-self doctrine teaches freedom from the attachment to self because the self is, quite simply, empty of abiding existence. Things come into existence as a result of dependent arising. Nothing comes into being by itself, nothing is self-sustained, and nothing is able to maintain its own identity permanently. The Buddhist *sutras* say, “Things arise interdependently; thus, they are empty.”



Jihyong Sunim, one of the guiding lights of Chungamsa, a Buddhist college for nuns in South Korea.

According to the non-self doctrine, we exist in co-arising relationships and cannot continue without connections with others and the world. We grow within these relationships and we gradually come to understand ourselves through our relationships with others. The *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, a Mahayana Buddhist text, defines a *bodhisattva*, a being committed to awakening, as someone who has gained insight into the truth of emptiness, but resolves to embody that insight in the world by performing altruistic acts for the benefit of others. The individual and those who surround her are not considered to be separate, independently functioning beings, but are beings whose individual actions exist within the context of a complex web of relationships. Those who comprehend the truth of emptiness are free from fixed notions of self versus other, subject versus object, absolute good and evil, and beauty and grotesqueness. Such realized individuals can, by overcoming the falsity of reified dualities, progress with the practice of unhindered altruism. This freedom from falsely conceived dualities is illustrated in the text when a goddess admonishes Śāriputra for differentiating men and women in an overly determined way. Only those who are free from clinging to dualities are free from attachment and can truly understand emptiness.

Moreover, the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* teaches that only those who understand emptiness and dependent-arising can fully practice compassion towards others. The *bodhisattva*, for example, is someone who can identify sympathetically with other beings, with the emotional capacity to share the feelings of others, and thus embody and practice the principle of non-discrimination between subject and object and unbiased value judgements. According to Buddhist doctrine, when a practitioner perceives non-duality through a personal practice of the non-self doctrine, s/he will then finally be capable of practicing true compassion – truly sharing the pain of others as his or her own.

On the other hand, the same text also says, surprisingly: “But one who entertains egoistic views as huge as Mount Sumeru can still set his [or her] mind and aspire to the highest attainment. From this you should understand that all the various earthly desires are the seed of the Tathāgata.” Even if we consider that this teaching should be understood in the context of the paradoxical polemics for which it is famous, it still sounds radical. I would like to employ this interesting polemic to the situation we are discussing in this essay – as a “skillful means” (*upāya*). We know that an

egoistic view (*sat-kāya-drsti*) is something that Buddhism usually teaches its adherents to overcome, but this text holds that those who maintain their egoistic outlooks can yet aspire to the highest level of enlightenment. What then did Mañjuśrī mean by “egoistic view” in this text? The renowned Korean Buddhist scholar Wonhyo (617-686) mentions this conundrum in his *Essentials of Observing and Transgressing the Code of Bodhisattva Precepts*: “Although one gives rise to a view of oneself [i.e., egoism] as big as Mt. Sumeru, one should not let oneself give rise to a view of emptiness [i.e., nihilism] even as small as a hair.” Wonhyo compares the view of oneself to egoism and a false view of emptiness to nihilism, arguing that egoism is better than nihilism for the sake of enlightenment. The Śikṣāsamuccaya by Śāntideva contains a similar passage.

Is it not possible to interpret this “egoistic view” as a necessary evil? In order to move on to the project of changing the world and benefiting others, *bodhisattvas* must allow themselves to aspire to act for justice, an aspiration motivated by frustration at the social injustices that exist in this world. The *bodhisattvas* are models of realized beings who retain their emotions and feelings, such as volition, desire, and passion. The *bodhisattvas* are not emotionless persons. Indeed, their “egoism,” such as it is, gives rise in them to such high-minded personal resolutions as: “I should do this work. I am the right one. I am supposed to do it. I cannot expect others to do it, but must take it on myself.” That is, it is their egoism or self-assertiveness that facilitates their efforts on behalf of others. Intense emotion may be accompanied by a sense of “I” and yet this sense of self can be an expression of altruistic motivation. That is, consciousness of self itself might act as a skillful means of achieving noble actions for the good of others. Further, along the path of acting for others in a righteous and dutiful mindset, the devoted practitioner should ideally be able to recognize the fundamental interrelatedness of all things. What one person achieves is made possible only by a teeming ocean of conditions and causes. Inevitably, an awareness of interrelatedness and community leads one to develop greater empathy and compassion. Inevitably, too, for those who act out of empathetic compassion, the sense of a self will disappear. The text’s treatment of both “wisdom” and “skillful means” as the two most important pāramitās seems to support this point.

With such an understanding, one realizes that all achievements are not in fact one’s own, but are the culmination of a network of relationships. Although one’s own actions may be the primary instigating force, the overall results are created by the interrelated operations of various causes. One who sees through attachment to actions and results, informed by wisdom and compassion, is free from attachment to one’s own achievements. By acting in a way that is free from attachment, stumbling blocks such as attachment, desire, and fear can be overcome. Self-less action

is directly enabled by the realization of non-self. The value of the work I perform manifests through relations with those surrounding me and is affirmed by the communal sharing of these values. The ethics of non-self entails concerted practice and the implementation of these core values for the benefit of others.

Social engagement in Buddhism means to discover the meaning of one’s own actions in the context of one’s relationships with others, considering all beings as an interconnected community. This view derives from the practitioner’s awakening to the truths of emptiness and non-self. My own actions in this moment cannot possibly be achieved solely through my own intentions and efforts. The effects of an action will not rebound only on those who performed them, nor will the effects be created independently of a host of other actions and causes. My actions create corresponding effects, not only for me, but also for everything with which I am linked. My decisions, expressed in the form of thoughts, words, and actions, are related to the thoughts and actions of others. My commitment to performing good actions brings good results to others as well, just as my accomplishment affects the eventual accomplishments of others. I comport myself according to certain principles, not out of the conviction that my behavior will benefit myself alone, but because I believe that it will benefit others as well. Realizing the fundamental interconnectedness of beings through actions and practice is the lived experience of the non-self theory. One can only move forward when one has self-confidence and conviction, yet simultaneously actions motivated by compassion express a realization of non-self. The theory of non-self is not merely a negation of the self. One begins with an understanding of the conventionally existent self and gradually moves forward to the realization of non-self, the humble mind. At the beginning of this process, however, being overly self-effacing and timid may impede one’s altruistic intentions.

Here I have presented my candid experiment in applying non-self doctrine to the matter of women’s self-understanding and development of the confidence needed to be successful in the *bodhisattva* pursuit. I believe that it is time for Buddhist ethics be further developed to reflect contemporary social behavior in ways that will assist women’s awakening and enable them to become more daring in their virtuous activities. The theory of non-self need not erode women’s self-confidence. On the contrary, paradoxically, it may enable great achievements. In early Buddhist texts, we find courageous women who find themselves shaken by Mara’s whispers, thus conjuring up their fears and memories of painful pasts, but who nevertheless heroically overcome their self-doubt and assert themselves, confident of the purity of their motivation and practicing valiantly to achieve spiritual freedom. It is time for Buddhist women to take inspiration from such stories and find the courage to overcome their own delusions of inadequacy.



"Nuns make up one-fourth of the fourfold assembly. Their gaze seems to ask us to practice for the sake of future generations."



ON SEEING EVERYONE AS YOUR MOTHER

Palmo Rybicki

In Buddhism it is taught that one should see all beings as one's own mother. When I first heard this teaching in Nepal, I thought it was such a load of nonsense that I left the teaching. The idea is that, because we have been wandering in cyclic existence since beginningless time, and have in that time taken every conceivable form, everyone in the universe has been our kind and loving mother at least once. As such, it is our obligation to repay their kindness by freeing them from this round of birth and death.

I didn't believe in rebirth and anyway, even if I did, it's really quite a stretch to think that at some point every single living being had been my mother. In any case, by the same logic everyone had also been my hated enemy, so what was the point? But, on the way back to the guesthouse I thought, "Why not try it? I wonder what it feels like to see everyone as my mother?" So, I started the practice.

I saw a tiny, old woman in a green sari carrying an eight-foot tall pile of branches on her frail back. She became my mother. Suddenly, rather than the vague sense of pity I might have otherwise felt, I became intensely interested in her. What is she doing? Where is she going? Why is she in this position? But far more importantly, her pain and discomfort became unbearable to me, just as it would have been had my actual mother been made to carry such a load.

That young boy carrying tea in the open-air restaurant was my mother. The mangy dog in the street was my mother. The lovely young woman with a gold ring in her nose was

my mother. I cared about all of them. I wanted all of them to be free from suffering and to be happy.

I realized that this practice had the power to transform my heart and that it didn't matter at all that I didn't accept rebirth. The practice still worked. And yes, by their logic, everyone had also been my worst enemy. But, the focus is on the mother, because the whole point of the practice is to develop compassion. And it works.

If you had a difficult relationship with your mother, then choose the person who has been the most kind to you. Your grandfather? Then see everyone as your grandfather, or your sister, your aunt, your kind older brother who watched out for you.

These days I do this practice on the road when other drivers are getting on my nerves. I do it when someone has hurt me, or when I feel intense dislike for someone. I do it when I should help someone, but don't want to and I know that if it were my mother asking, I would jump at the chance. I do it when I don't want to meditate and it helps me get to the cushion, because ultimately the entire *raison d'être* of this path is to benefit others.

I invite you to do this practice. Just imagine that everyone you see has been your kind mother or someone else who loved you very much. Just try it and watch your heart transform.



MĀRA, SAMSĀRA, AND IDENTITY

Hsiao-Lan Hu, Ph.D.

Everyone who is familiar with the story of the enlightenment of the historical Buddha knows a mythical figure named Māra. He sent his three daughters to tempt the Buddha after he himself had failed in terrifying and tempting the Buddha on many occasions, even after the Buddha had already attained enlightenment (SN I.103-127, V.260; MN i.326-27, i.330-331; DN ii.104-106). As a matter of fact, at one point in the *Mārasaṃyutta* it was stated that Māra had been following the Buddha for seven years (SN I.122). Māra also appeared to *bhikkhunis* when they were deep in concentration, wishing to arouse fear with various tactics. Each time, the *bhikkhunis* practice was deep enough to see through Māra's tricks and defeat him (SN I.128-135).

Who is this Māra? Some American textbook writers refer to him as "the Buddhist devil" or "the god of evil,"¹ clearly thinking of Māra as the Buddhist equivalent of Satan. Some Buddhist scholars also suggest that Māra must be a real evil deity, rather than just a personification of humankind's moral frailty, because in the Nikāyas he appears to the Buddha and the *arahants* (Skt. *arhats*) after their enlightenment,² and enlightened beings would have already overcome moral frailty. It is undeniable that, in Buddhist literature, Māra is often referred to as the "King of *Saṃsāra*," "Lord of Sensuality," or just "the Evil One." However, the notion of Devil, or God of Evil, as an independently existing king completely in charge of the world, and yet above the influence of the world, does not tally well with the early Buddhist worldview. Early Buddhism does not presuppose independent, unchanging essences of any kind, whether eternally good or eternally bad. Furthermore, not presupposing an all-knowing, almighty, and thoroughly benevolent Creator God, Buddhism has no need for theodicy through dualism. That is to say, without projecting all positivities to a singular being and calling it God, Buddhism does not need to project all negativities to another singular being and call it Devil in order to maintain God's omniscience, omnipotence, and goodness. A devil that has always been evil and will always be evil has no place in a non-theistic framework. No independent, unchanging being has a place in Buddhist non-theism.³

It is true that, if Māra can appear to the Buddha and to *arahants* after their enlightenment, Māra cannot be just a personification of human moral frailty. On the other hand, as argued above, it is even less tenable to consider Māra an independent entity that is inherently evil. What, then, is this Māra that enlightened beings can still encounter during their meditation? We can get some clue from the literal meaning of his name and his daughters' names. Māra literally means "death,"⁴ and his daughters' names – Taṇhā (Skt. *Tṛṣṇā*), Aratī, and Rāga (Skt. *Rati*) – literally mean "craving," "discontent," and "lust," respectively.⁵ Māra is the "king of *saṃsāra*" because "death" characterizes the *saṃsāric* cycle of birth, death, rebirth,

and re-death, so much so that *saṃsāra* is sometimes referred to as "the realm of death" (Pāli: *maccudheyya*; SN I.35, I.123; MN i.225-227). Due to the inevitability of death that all beings have to encounter, they lust after certain things in life, are discontented with other things, and crave a particular kind of permanent existence – filled with things after which to lust, and void of things with which to be discontented. That is to say, the definitive characteristic of *saṃsāra* is that it is full of craving, discontent, and lust. Thus considered, Māra is the personification of the defining characteristics of the *saṃsāric* world. As long as one still has life and can die in this *saṃsāric* world, one can still encounter Māra, even after one has completely overcome human moral frailty.

Still, what exactly does it mean for Māra to appear to the Buddha and his disciples? It is interesting to note that, with the exception of the Buddha himself, to whom Māra would appear during any daily activities, all the others encountered Māra face-to-face when they were deep in meditation. According to the Nikāyas, Māra appeared during their meditation "wishing to arouse fear, trepidation, and terror." (SN I.104, I.106-107, I.109, I.128-131, I.134-135). I maintain that the appearance of Māra is a literary device indicating that people in advanced meditative states may experience the defining characteristics of the *saṃsāric* world, which can lead to fear. In the Nikāyas, though, each time Māra appeared during meditation, the meditator would be well grounded in the Buddhadharmā enough to not be influenced by Māra's tactics of terror. Then Māra would be "sad and disappointed" and "disappear right there." (*ibid.*)

At a glance, my assertion of advanced meditators encountering fear during meditation may seem to be contradictory to findings in the field of cognitive-behavioral psychology. Ever since Jon Kabat-Zinn and psychologists developed the therapeutic method based on Buddhist-style meditation called Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, researchers have repeatedly found that basic mindfulness training is effective in reducing severe fear.⁶ However, the subjects discussed in these psychological studies, whose fears are reduced, have only gone through a very basic level of mindfulness training. Their fear and anxiety are caused by excessive ruminations concerning how others may perceive or react to them, or, in some cases, they fear their own emotions.⁷ Basic mindfulness training proves to be helpful because, on the one hand, mindfulness prevents perceptions "from going astray to conceptual proliferation (*papañca*)," and, on the other hand, it "prevents feelings from developing into emotional disturbances."⁸ By contrast, the people who encounter Māra face-to-face in the Nikāyas are all evidently at highly advanced levels. Aside from the Buddha himself, the others' achievements were remarkable enough to be recorded not just in the Nikāyas, but also in the *Therīgāthā*. And, as noted above, each of them was sufficiently grounded in the Buddhadharmā to be able to repudiate and eventually defeat Māra.

Given their high levels of spiritual achievement, there is reason to suspect that the kind of fear they would potentially experience during meditation is different from the kind of fear that can be reduced by basic mindfulness training. To unravel the nature of this fear that may occur during advanced meditative states, it may be useful to examine the tactics Māra used. In the Nikāyas, Māra attempts to arouse fear in the Buddha (SN I.104, I.106-107, I.109), Bhikkhunī Ālavikā (SN I.128), Bhikkhunī Somā (SN I.129), Bhikkhunī Kisāgotamī (SN I.130), Bhikkhunī Vijayā (ibid.), Bhikkhunī Uppalavaṇṇā (SN I.131), Bhikkhunī Selā (SN I.134), and Bhikkhunī Vajirā (SN I.135). Māra also appeared to three other *bhikkhunis* during their meditation but did not intend to arouse fear (SN I.132-34): Bhikkhunī Cālā, Bhikkhunī Upacālā, and Bhikkhunī Sīsupacālā. Besides the Buddha himself, the only other male who directly encounters Māra during meditation and has a conversation with him is Bhikkhu Mahā Moggallāna (Skt. Mahā Maudgalyāyana), but the text does not say that Māra intended to arouse fear in him (MN i.332-338).⁹ Māra also approaches a couple of other *bhikkhus*, but they do not know that it is Māra until the Buddha tells them so (SN I.117-120). None of these *bhikkhus* is named, except Samiddhi. Therefore, in the whole collection of Nikāyas, Māra only tries to arouse fear in eight people during their meditation and seven of them were women. Does that mean that women are more fearful or that they are easy targets for Māra? I hardly think we can draw either conclusion, because the only man in whom Māra wishes to arouse fear is the Buddha himself, and he does so even after the Buddha has already attained enlightenment. The compilers of the Nikāyas certainly would not portray the Buddha as fearful, especially not after enlightenment. Besides, given that those compilers were mostly men in a highly sexist society who did not think much of women at all, they definitely would not portray the Buddha to be as fearful as women.

Moreover, the majority of the tactics that Māra uses to arouse fear have very little to do with what we would normally associate with fear. In all of the accounts of Māra seeking to arouse fear in advanced meditators, only three actually involve what we would associate with fear, one of which is when he threatens the Buddha's sense of safety by shattering huge boulders near him (SN I.104). Another is when he approaches the Buddha in the form of a giant serpent (SN I.106-107). The other is when he threatens Bhikkhunī Uppalavaṇṇā's sense of safety by saying there might be bad guys around who would be tempted by her extraordinary beauty, suggesting the possibility of rape (SN I.131). The time when he tries to arouse fear in the Buddha by manifesting himself "in the form of a giant king elephant" (SN I.104) can be interpreted either as trying to intimidate the Buddha with something physically big, or as trying to arouse desire in the Buddha with a symbol of high social status, the king elephant. The rest of the accounts describe Māra as seeking to arouse fear, either with sensual desire (as

when he "displayed diverse lustrous shapes" to the Buddha [SN I.104], when he suggested that Bhikkhunī Ālavikā should enjoy sensual pleasures [SN I.128], when he suggested that Bhikkhunī Kisāgotamī should overcome her sorrow by seeking the company of a man [SN I.130], and when he manifested himself as a young man to seduce Bhikkhunī Vijayā [ibid.]), or with a sense of limited individual identity (as when he told Bhikkhunī Somā that women did not have enough wisdom to have spiritual attainments [SN I.129]¹⁰ and when he suggested to Bhikkhunī Selā and Bhikkhunī Vajirā that individuals were made and completely controlled by a superior being [SN I.134-135]). Viewing all these accounts together, it is clear that Māra sought to arouse fear by instigating or fortifying certain aspects of the individual's sense of fixed, conventional self-identity, either by directly referring to it, or by indirectly arousing desires and worries associated with the particular self-identity.

If Māra's ways of arousing fear in advanced meditators involved instigating or fortifying the meditators' sense of fixed self-identity, what these accounts of Māra's appearances indicate is that practitioners at an advanced meditative state might come face-to-face with their own sense of individual identity. It is worth reiterating that the meditators to whom Māra manifested were all at advanced levels. In the Nikāyas, there are eight advanced meditative states altogether, each with deeper concentration and less self-attachment than the last (SN II.210-212, IV.225-228; MN i.40-41, i.174-175; AN IV.422-426). In the first advanced level, the meditator experiences rapture and happiness with thoughts and examination. In the second level, thoughts and examination subside, and the meditator experiences internal confidence and unification of mind, marked by rapture and happiness without thoughts and examination. In the third level, rapture subsides and the meditator is equanimous, mindful, clearly comprehending, and happy. In the fourth level, happiness subsides and the meditator experiences neither pleasure nor pain, neither joy nor displeasure, and only the purification of mindfulness by equanimity.¹¹ Many *suttas* stop at the fourth level and go on to describe how the meditator applies the mindfulness and equanimity obtained at the fourth level to the direct knowing of reality, indicating that the Buddha, or the compilers of the Pāli canon, did not encourage meditative states beyond the fourth level, which may indicate that the fifth through eighth levels are not conducive or relevant to attaining *nibbāna* (Skt. *nirvāṇa*) (SN IV.236-237, V.213-215, V.307-308; MN, i.21-22, i.89-90, i.117, i.246-247, i.441, iii.4; DN iii.131-132). In the fifth through to the eighth levels, the meditator transcends the perception of sensory data and experiences the infinity of space, the infinity of consciousness, nothingness, and neither perception nor non perception.

Even though the texts do not say at what point the Buddha and the *bhikkhunis* faced Māra – or, rather, faced their own sense of fixed self-identity – it is likely that it happened when they were in the fifth or sixth level, that is, after they



Chungamsa, a Buddhist college for nuns in South Korea.

transcended the perception of sensory data and were about to experience nothingness. Psychiatrist Ricky Emanuel, in line with the psychoanalytic works of Melanie Klein, Donald Meltzer, and John Steiner, points out that it can be terrifying to realize that reality is nothing like what one has projected based on one's own sensory data and one's sense of individual identity. So, at this point, one may resort to grasping onto an aspect of self-identity in order to convince oneself that one's projections are still real.¹² The accounts of Māra say that he wished to arouse fear in the advanced meditators (by instigating their sense of self-identity), but all of them saw through his tricks and defeated him, and so none of them experienced fear. That is to say, paradoxically, if one tries to avoid the looming fear of facing nothingness by clinging to one's identity and projections, one ends up creating real fear for oneself, because, by clinging to self-identity, one binds oneself to *saṃsāra* and subjects oneself to the control of Māra. Bearing in mind that Māra literally means death, we can state the above paradox in another way and say that, if one holds onto a certain aspect of one's self-identity, and all the desires and worries that come with that identity, when facing the "death" of one's self-projections, one ends up facing death itself, because any self-identity is impermanent and will naturally die.

The defining character of *saṃsāra* is death, and beings experience the bondage of *saṃsāra* by clinging to their sense of fixed self-identity. In the *Salāyatanaśāmyutta* and *Dhātuvibhaṅga Sutta*, this rather important passage indicates the causal connections from self-conception to bondage:

In conceiving, one is bound by Māra...
 "I am" is a conceiving; "I am this" is a conceiving;
 "I shall be" is a conceiving; "I shall not be" is a conceiving; "I shall consist of form" is a conceiving; "I shall be formless" is a conceiving; "I shall be

percipient" is a conceiving; "I shall be nonpercipient" is a conceiving; "I shall be neither percipient nor nonpercipient" is a conceiving. (SN IV.202; MN iii.246)

In other words, in whatever way one clings to one's own way of seeing oneself, one binds oneself to the endless cycle of birth, death, rebirth, and re-death, and never leaves the realm of existence controlled by Māra. Enlightened beings such as the Buddha and *arahants*, as long as they still have a life in this world that can die, still have something very concrete on which they can lodge their sense of self-identity and, as such, Māra can still appear to them.

According to the *Mārasaṃyutta*, however, Māra never succeeds in alluring those advanced meditators by appealing to their sense of fixed self-identity. That they encounter Māra face-to-face indicates that they are aware when their sense of self-identity resurfaces (as opposed to some of the *bhikkhus* who encounter Māra's manifestation but do not know it is he). Being aware of the tricks of one's self-identity, it seems, is enough to defeat Māra and achieve liberation, for Māra's words of admitting defeat are always "The Blessed One knows me" or "Bhikkhunī so-and-so knows me." Then Māra would be "sad and disappointed" and "disappear right there." Being aware of the illusive nature of one's self-identity, one does not cling; facing the flux of reality and fluidity of identity directly, without projections from a fixed identity-view, one defeats Māra and transcends death and fear.

Hsiao-Lan Hu, Ph.D., is an associate professor of Religious Studies and Women's and Gender Studies at University of Detroit Mercy. She is a long-standing member of Sakyadhita International and Sakyadhita USA. Currently, she serves on the International Conference Planning Committee.

ENDNOTES

1. For examples, see Gary E. Kessler, *Studying Religion: An Introduction Through Cases*, 3rd Ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 135 and 139; Willard G. Oxtoby, *World Religions: Eastern Traditions*, 2nd Ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), 208-209.
2. Bhikkhu Bodhi, "Introduction" to the *Sagāthāvagga*, in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya* (Boston, MA: Wisdom, 2000), 79.
3. For more on the difference between Satan and Māra, see Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*, 2nd Ed. (Boston, MA: Wisdom, 2001), 1246-47 n. 499, and 1250 n. 517; Maurice Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (Boston, MA: Wisdom, 1995), 545 n. 117.
4. Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Donald S. Lopez Jr., "Māra," *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2013), 530-31; Damien Keown, "Māra," in *Dictionary of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), 173.
5. Keown, "Māra's Daughters," in *Dictionary of Buddhism*, 174; Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya* (Boston, MA: Wisdom, 2000), 422 n. 322.

6. One of the seminal studies is Jon Kabat-Zinn, et al., "Effectiveness of a Meditation-Based Stress Reduction Program in the Treatment of Anxiety Disorders," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 149(1992): 936-43. Numerous studies in the past 20 years have reached the same conclusion.
7. Ibid.
8. Tse-fu Kuan, *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism: New Approaches Through Psychology and Textual Analysis of Pali, Chinese, and Sanskrit Sources* (London: Routledge, 2008), 10, and also 17-33 and chapter 3.
9. Curiously, the text states that Bhikkhu Mahā Moggallāna was once "a Māra named Dūsī" who had hurt the disciple of a previous Buddha and consequently roasted in the Great Hell for ten millennia.
10. Māra said that enlightenment cannot be attained by "a woman with her two-fingered wisdom (dvaṅgulapaññāya). The term "two-fingered" either refers to women "holding the cotton ball between two fingers," or women "testing whether the rice is cooked by taking grains out from the pot and pressing them between two fingers." See Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 425 n. 336.
11. Kuan, *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism*, 33-40.
12. See, for example, Ricky Emanuel, "A-Void: An Exploration of Defences Against Sensing Nothingness," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 82(2001): 1069-1084. See also John Steiner, *Psychic Retreats* (London: Routledge, 1993); Donald Meltzer, "The Conceptual Distinction Between Projective Identification (Klein) and Container-Contained (Bion)," in *Studies in Extended Metapsychology: Clinical Applications of Bion's Ideas* (Perthshire: Clunie Press, 1986), 50-69.

THE HEALING POWER OF BEAUTY IN A CUP OF TEA

Paula Arai

*The places the eyes of the flesh see have a limit.
The places the eyes of the heart see have no limit.
— Gyokko Sensei, "Received from the Buddha"*

The pithy yet profound words of an elderly Japanese Buddhist woman suggests the wisdom of viewing the world through one's heart. When the heart looks out, it can see the boundless connections that weave everything together in a beautiful and vast web of compassion. Beauty is the fullest manifestation of the present moment and it has the power to focus one's being on the wisdom in the present.

The key to the healing power of beauty is to experience interrelatedness—not just have an intellectual understanding of it. Such is possible through complete body-mind engagement with a meaningful activity in the present moment. Beauty heals because it is an immersion in immediate and positive sensorial, somatic experience of the present moment. One of the dimensions of the practice of beauty as healing that is especially amenable to daily activities is the beauty of physical movements. Beauty in motion occurs when one acts with full mindfulness in the present moment, embodied awareness of the meaning of each movement, and treats everything with respect. Therefore, when doing basic tasks as beauty-making activities—including cooking, cleaning, and doing laundry—they become healing activities. Being in this mode is healing, because beauty-making is a positive choice to engage one's entire being in a seamless experience of the present moment. It is a choice to perceive and approach

something in its wholeness, where its deepest beauty is illuminated.

Beauty also sustains through its capacity to soften the rough spots in our heart, enabling one to be more flexible in living with present circumstances. Once we are aware of beauty in our midst, it works as an antidote to bitterness and it stops calcification in the heart. It acts as a solvent that loosens debris in the heart. Our heart (would) closes up (as) when we seek protection from harm. A closed heart gets stuck in a time or situation, because by nature, to the extent that it is closed, it is shut off from what is going on currently. Since an open heart is required to be present, beauty helps us heal by encouraging us to recognize that it is safe to open up. Beauty can then engage one further in the fullness of the present moment in which one can recognize oneself as an integral part, a participant. Perceiving beauty is an act of recognizing the value of something. In so doing, it awakens the beauty in oneself, to one's bigger nature. In these ways, beauty helps one feel deeply connected and whole.

Whether engaged in a formal tea ceremony or enjoying a cup at home, tea is an aesthetic mode of ritualized motion. Tea embodies tranquil beauty and participants enter a refined world that creates a space, literally and figuratively, where healing can take place. One woman, Yamamoto-san, explained to me what she finds healing about tea. "Silence is treasured, because it embraces you and supports you in the deepest and weakest places. It is safe to be just as you are. You are accepted as you are. You are protected and cared for. Your deepest needs are understood and met." Another woman, Ogawa-san, elaborates on her experience with healing through tea. "Tea focuses me on the present moment, to be in a deliberate awareness of being. You enter the world of tea where beauty is of central importance, which is a world where the heart and spirit are principal. It is also a world where all things are treated with vital significance, because everything is interrelated. The distinction between animate and inanimate is not made." Even when one knows the potential for tea to heal, the depth of one's experiences is remarkable. Sharing a cup of tea—when done with purity, harmony, respect, and tranquility—reveals the potential for all daily actions to be opportunities for healing.

Let's take a glimpse of this refined and subtle world of healing beauty through tea. It begins with the first step into the garden. Join me in visualizing the recently moistened rock path meandering through the garden, generating an inviting sense of fresh life, as we walk towards the tea hut. Watering the rocks is a subtle gesture the host makes to show guests respect. With each step, the strains and weariness of stressful demands are left behind, as each stone leads us deeper into the tranquility of the garden. On arriving at the well, we pause to reflect on the carving in the stone basin: "I only know satisfaction."

Reaching our right hand out to lift the long, thin-handled bamboo dipper is an occasion for reflecting on how it would feel if we all knew contentment. No desires pulling or aversions pushing, no complaints or disappointments. Pause to imagine this. We gingerly scoop water into the dipper and slowly pour it over our left hand. Switching hands, trickle water over our right hand. Then with both hands on the handle held just so, we allow the remaining water in the dipper to run down the handle to rinse it as a courtesy to the next person. Then we set it back down on the well, dipper down, handle at a slight angle, just being in the present moment, content. We feel purified, inside and out. Breathing in slowly to enjoy the verdant garden, we dry our hands on our handkerchief.

After removing our shoes and placing them neatly out of the way, we kneel at the tea room door and slide it open with both hands, showing respect. When we enter, slide the door shut, again with both hands, being careful to make little sound. Although you are alone in the small room, we bow low in the direction of the painting and flowers chosen for the occasion. While sitting in silence, we drink in the carefully and thoughtfully arranged items, feeling respected. Someone cared enough to tend to each detail, creating a soothing harmony of elements that draw out the tranquil beauty of the season, time of day, and qualities of the relationships of those to be gathered.

As other guests arrive, we bow in greeting to each other. Conversation is limited and hushed, for each wants to maintain the purity and tranquility of the moment. The host enters and all bow out of respect for each other. This establishes an harmonious group. We will help each other heal as a natural by-product of engaging fully in the aesthetic enjoyment of tea together—nothing gratuitous, nothing lacking. First, to balance the bitterness of the *matcha* green tea that will come later, the host offers elegantly arranged confections that anticipate the spring season. It looks as if soft pink cherry blossoms have just gently fallen on the celadon ceramic plate. Our hearts are captivated by the refinement and delicacy of the sweets, their beauty amplified by the silence. The host then makes the tea with exquisitely flowing gestures. Each intricate detail is executed with an ease that only comes from a relaxed comfort in being fully embodied and devoted to the present moment, respecting each utensil and each meticulous movement for its precise part in preparing tea for a friend. A bow of gratitude and respect accompanies each item served, passed, or returned. A heightened awareness through all the senses permeates our heart, beauty nourishing our body-mind. We experience a finely tuned joy in just being, heart expanding its capacity to accept and be compassionate. Tea has once again helped us inhabit our integrated place in the universe. That place is one where there is only space for satisfaction.

Harmonizing diverse elements into an integrated whole is beauty-making activity in its highest and strongest mode.

Expansive beauty provides a safe space for healing to occur. The larger the context in which we perceive ourselves to be, the stronger the support we feel. When we feel alone and perceive things narrowly, it is easy to experience suffering. Beauty draws our attention beyond this illusion and directs it to the proverbial Jewel Net of interrelationality. Beauty entices us to engage in an act with our full being, whereby the distance between things dissolves. Beauty is empowering when we experience it with all six senses, including our mind/consciousness. It is not dependent on whether we are the creator of the beauty or the appreciator, for such distinctions are ultimately empty. Experiencing something as beautiful is a profoundly refined mode of acceptance. Perceiving beauty occurs when we appreciate the strengths and contributions of something, especially in the context of its larger whole. Such beauty is perceived through the heart. In other words, beauty is a lens for seeing deep interrelatedness. Healing occurs in the awareness that we, too, are an integral part of something vast and beautiful. Indeed, beauty and healing go hand in hand: the more beauty, the more healing; the more healing, the more beauty.

Healing through beauty helps us see everything interrelated in a perpetual dance of change. I encourage all of us to engage in aesthetic practices, for the art of healing is a creative activity. These practices facilitate a direct experience of interrelatedness which gives rise to gratitude—a place where we can feel at peace and intimately connected: connected to family and friends, living and dead; connected to nature and the cosmos. The wisdom that emerges out of this awareness of our interrelated wholeness engenders ethical action, helping us respond to the needs of the present moment with compassion. Nothing is more healing or beautiful than that.

TAKEKO KUJO: A BUDDHIST ROLE MODEL

John Iwohara

The image created by popular media of the Japanese woman is that of a subservient, docile, and passive person. When the discussion turns to Buddhist Japanese women, the image is exacerbated to the point where the conversation may even come to an end. Unfortunately, there has been very little effort to offset this image, despite the robust and important contributions that Japanese Buddhist women have made to Japanese culture and society. Takeko Kujo (1887–1928) is an example of someone who not only epitomized the potential of womanhood, but also that of humanity itself.

Although she was known as one of the three great beauties of Japanese history, during a period of great gender discrimination she was able to overcome the limitations of her era. In her short lifetime (she was 41 years old at the time of her death), she became a renowned poetess and social activist.

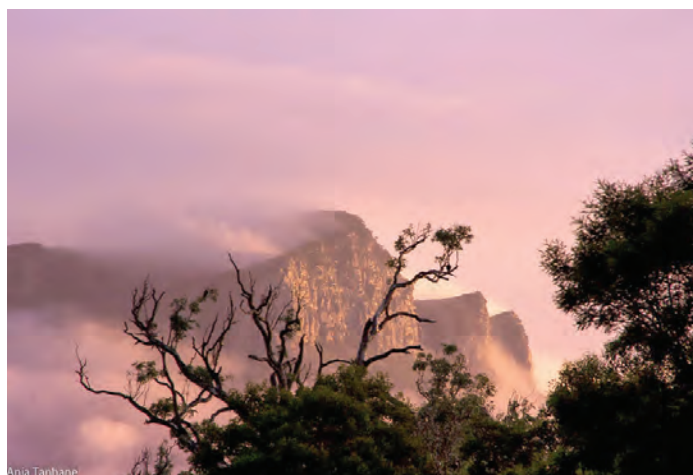
Throughout Japanese history, women have helped to shape the aesthetic sense of Japanese culture. Although names such as Lady Murasaki are more popularly known, modern examples of Japanese women have tended to remain in the shadows. Takeko Kujo, a Jodo Shinshu Buddhist, is a notable exception. Her words, even as an early 20th-century poet, continue to provide both inspiration and hope. In a collection known as the *Muyū-ge* ("Flowers without Misery"), one of her more popular poems is titled, "Sacred Night."

The beauty of the starry night,
Who can know the riddle of the heavens?
When these countless eyes twinkle,
My heart, is calmed with joy.

More than the sands of the Gange,
The many accordant Buddhas,
By day or by night, constantly protecting
My heart, that which hears and is calmed.

This collection of poems is one example of how art can be transformed into lasting social action. Written in 1927, it was composed after the Great Kanto earthquake of 1923, when an estimated 106,000 people were killed. In response to this disaster, Takeko Kujo began her relief work and through the Hongwanji ("Temple of the Primal Vow") established a series of temporary treatment centers for disaster victims. Later, in 1925, with the idea of establishing a more permanent center, a facility was established in the Fukugawa area of Tokyo that later became the Asoka Hospital. In order to help finance the establishment of the hospital, a fund was created with the royalties earned from the publication of *Muyūge*. In expressing her hopes for establishing the hospital, Takeko Kujo writes: "Becoming the mother and the friend of the injured, we will give free medical treatment together with emotional assurance." She also established a home for battered women in the Ogikubo area of Tokyo called Heiwa Mura ("Peace Village").

Another accomplishment of hers was the establishment of Kyoto Women's University. In 1904, together with Kazuko Ohtani, her sister-in-law, she helped to found the Bukkyō Fujinkai ("Buddhist Women's Association"). In 1910, with financial assistance from the Bukkyō Fujinkai, the groundwork for establishing a women's college began. After the unfortunate passing of her sister-in-law in 1911, Takeko Kujo assumed leadership of the Bukkyō Fujinkai. By 1912, Takeko Kujo was able to pronounce her intent to establish a women's college with the support of the Hongwanji and financial backing by the Bukkyō Fujinkai. Because of public backlash, however, the college could not be established that year. However, by 1920 the Kyoto Women's Vocational High School, which became Kyoto Women's College in 1949, was established. In 1920, the same year, the 19th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution was also ratified, giving women the right to vote. In contrast, Japanese men were not allowed to



vote until 1925 and Japanese women did not gain that right until 1946, (in part due to the post-war occupation of Japan).

Although the activities of Takeko Kujo occurred in the past, her work continues to influence and inspire people in the present. Her work is also a constant reminder not to disqualify anyone simply on the basis of gender or other discriminatory factors. Because this work is not just from the past, the Bukkyō Fujinkai and Hongwanji continue to remember Takeko Kujo annually in a memorial service called the Kisaragi-ki ("February Memorial"), which is held on or near the date of her passing. Since the establishment of the Bukkyō Fujinkai in Japan, sister organizations were established in Hawai'i, the United States, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Peru, and Paraguay. Since their establishment, a world conference has been held roughly every four years. The 15th World Buddhist Women's Association Conference will be held in Calgary, Canada, in 2015. All of this work continues because one person had the strength and courage to start.

NUNS PRACTISING KUNG FU

Dominique Butet

The sun has hardly touched the green hill of Druk Amitabha, west of Kathmandu, but the paths of the convent already resound with the deep sounds of a drum filling all the space leading to Naro Hall. In this huge gymnasium overlooking the nunnery, it is exactly 6 a.m. and the training has already begun. Some 30 nuns standing in straight lines are diligently practicing kung fu postures to the beat of the drum. Little cries of energy release punctuate their movements.

In the *ding dan* position – one leg folded forward and the other one stretched out backward – they kick the air again and again, executing several series of impeccable kicks. They are wearing a tight dark red outfit suited for this practice. Now, leaning on both legs bent outward to the utmost – *chumi dan* position – they are diligently performing a series of very tonic hand movements called "punch," which produces a jerky but skilfully steered ballet: stretched out hands with

extended palms which seem to push away the air, then clawed fingers closing on the chest, fists punching the front or pressing the sides, fingers tucking up the space to point at the sky. An incredible energy can be felt from the subtle balance of these postures.

Every day, these nuns of the Drukpa lineage practice like this for two hours, tirelessly repeating the various movements taught by their teacher Jigme¹ Rigzang who lives in Vietnam and only comes twice a year to Nepal to give teachings. During his visits, the nuns have three daily trainings, which means six hours of intensive practice.

Out of the 350 who live at Druk Amitabha, 108 are devoted to this martial art coming from China. Please note that the term “kung fu” ordinarily given to martial arts in the West has quite a different meaning when translated literally. Indeed, “kung” or “gong” indicates mastery of a discipline and “fu” means “the accomplished man”. The association of these two words would then mean “the time it takes to master an art or a craft.” The Chinese term *wushu* seems much more adapted to the notion of martial art since *wu*

includes everything connected with war and *shu* means “the art.” Together, *kung fu wushu* means “mastery of the martial art.”

Besides learning the postures involving the body, when their teacher considers them capable of it, the nuns also learn how to handle the traditional kung fu weapons: the sword (*ki am*), the sabre (small *dao*), the halberd (big *dao*), the lance (*tong*), the stick, the chain attached to two metallic bars (*nhi khuc* or *nunchaku*) as well as the “fan” which is a much more aesthetic, danced practice. It is Jigme Rigzang who decides who can practice with whatever instrument.

A small group of eight nuns is warming up, stretching, making their legs and arms more supple. These young women have also just been running around a *kora*² – they are ready. They catch a long, thin wooden stick and start the demonstration. Legs in Chumi Dan position, their sticks spin in front of them fast, precise, whistling in the air. Then, they hold the sticks up towards the sky, their bodies poised and balanced. Their fulcrum changes and the sticks come down touching the ground and stopping there, as if to indicate the earth. They do a cartwheel on one hand, weapons in tow, stable and firm. Nothing trembles. The movements are fast, in order to protect the vital parts as much as possible: splits with sticks standing straight up, u-turn with *chao*, right fist pressed against the other vertical palm. This salute, like a signature, is a mark of respect to the teacher, the public, and possibly to the opponent, too.

The association of such sweet-looking nuns with this martial art is really quite a surprise. Who originated such a training? It was His Holiness Gyalwang Drukpa, the twelfth incarnation of the founder of the Dragon lineage (Drukpa means dragon) who wished that the nuns of his lineage – who live in two convents, one in Ladakh and the other one in Nepal – could practice kung fu. “My karma is to take care of women and of nuns,” declared His Holiness, “In our culture, no matter what they do, they are always second to men. I am fighting this attitude.... What incited me to introduce the nuns to kung fu was that they must be able to protect themselves from the attacks of the world.”

That was in 2009 and the nuns who were present at the time admit that they were very surprised. At the same time, they were absolutely excited at the thought of having to practice this very special discipline so unexpectedly. “You should know,” explains Jigme Mingyur – aged 22 and an expert swordsman – “that long ago the Shaolin monks, after being repeatedly harassed by thieves during their retreats, learned kung fu to protect themselves and save their lives.”³

“The teacher presents it as self-defense,” Jigme Kunchok explains, “but we are nuns and as such we cannot speak about attack or defense.”



Nuns from Druk Amitabha, west of Kathmandu, Nepal demonstrating their kung fu skills.



Nuns from Druk Amitabha Monastery, west of Kathmandu, Nepal demonstrating their kung fu skills.

"Still, it is useful to us as women," Jigme Wangchuk dares say. She is hardly 16, but has already been practicing for three years and is fully trained in eight different types of kung fu. "We feel safer when we have to go downtown or shopping on our own."

Beyond the self-defense aspect, kung fu helps develop self-confidence, subduing the shyness that affects so many young nuns. They now dare to speak up fearlessly. What is also at stake is the ability to take responsibilities within the community as well as outside, in a society where it is still considered more auspicious to have been born a boy than a girl. "This is why we are proud to practice kung fu," Jigme Wangchuk whispers with a smile. "Many people believe that women can achieve nothing, but His Holiness thinks that they can be as successful as men. If we do our utmost, everything is possible."

All the nuns agree that, above all, this martial art is good for their health. It helps them to strengthen their muscles, bones, and joints, and to remain fit. "As a consequence, we can sit meditation or do our practices for longer periods of time," Jigme Wangchuk declares. Jigme Samten Palmo, a

teacher of Tibetan for four years and a kung fu follower, goes even further: "Kung fu is good for our health, it helps us live longer. Therefore it is useful for the practice of Dharma and beneficial to all human beings, because we can pray for them much longer."

These young women also mention the benefits obtained in terms of concentration, which then helps them in meditation. Jigme Kunchok, who is hardly 20 and has already practiced kung fu for five years, explains the process: "My eye, my mind follows the movements of my body. I need to be constantly aware of my movements, know whether they are right or not, and correct them immediately, if necessary. Then I have to think of the following step right away and so on.... I must focus my attention on the sequence of movements that I have memorized and on each movement at once. If the mind wanders, then the movement is not right or the stick falls..."

"It is the same in meditation," Jigme Wangchuk adds. "First, I think of my root guru, I concentrate on visualizing him, and ask for his blessing. Then I visualize something else, like Vajrasattva or Vajrayogini, and I move on in this way, step by step, always fully focused on what I am visualizing."



Santacari, an arahant bhikkhuni.

Focusing attention. This is synonymous with full present-moment awareness, full self-awareness, or contemplation – all steps to enlightenment. “The only difference,” Jigme adds with a smile, “is that in kung fu we are aware while moving whereas in meditation we are aware while sitting. Still, after two hours of kung fu practice, I don’t feel tired any more, I feel fresher and my concentration is much better to meditate.” We can conclude that practicing a sport allows the body to release accumulated tensions and that, as a consequence, focused attention is more readily available when practicing meditation. “Kung fu helps me keep my mind turned inward, and it is easier for me to meditate afterwards,” Jigme Wangchuk confirms. “And if I practice meditation first and kung fu next, it is the same: my kung fu is much better. For example, I stretch my legs more easily and I don’t let my stick fall.”

In the same way as they use Lungro Len Sum before meditating – a purifying breathing technique in which one inhales white light and exhales darkness three times through one nostril or the other alternately – they also need to clarify their minds before starting kung fu. For example, if fear or doubt invades their thoughts, the nuns have to start by making a clean sweep of these negative feelings. Only then can the mind concentrate on the practice.

There is a much more unusual discipline for nuns and an even more selective one: the breaking of bricks by means

of a mass. This is performed on special occasions, such as the birthday of His Holiness. After the teacher has checked the emotional state of the performer, bricks are piled up on her arm, leg, or head. “We inhale deeply several times and then we block the air while the mass rises above us,” Jigme Lotus Palmo explains. “We exhale after the bricks are broken.” Of course, this requires specific preparation and exercises intended to strengthen the parts of the body involved in this exercise. “The aim is to become stronger and stronger,” Jigme Kunchok explains when she notices our skeptical looks. “If we practice every day for two or three months, we can be ready for this particular discipline and it does not hurt us.” To strengthen the top of her head, Jigme Lotus Palmo practices standing on her head several times a day, for example. She also learned how to develop her concentration in order to divert the sensation of pain at the moment of impact. One thing is for sure: beyond the performance, these exhibitions contribute to building up the nuns’ confidence, which later stimulates them to participate in the world more easily. Many projects incite them to do so: the ophthalmological private hospital of Kathmandu, the partnership with schools, and the tree planting projects in Ladakh, among others.

“My first priority is to help others,” Gyalwang Drukpa declared. The nuns practicing kung fu fully participate in this dynamic. They say that they are happy to have the possibility to practice such an art and keep thanking H. H. Gyalwang Drukpa, who gave them this chance. More than anything, they wish to continue the practice and keep learning more and more. Their humility, coupled with absolute enthusiasm, is obvious. Three years ago, the nuns performed the Dragon Dance – traditionally reserved for monks – in homage to their lineage. In this dance, ten nuns hold a stick and their sticks are linked to a dragon made of shining fabric. The movements flow beautifully. As with kung fu, concentration and physical effort are exercised to their utmost. In the fulfilling lives of these Buddhist nuns, inner strength and dedication to all sentient beings converge in an attention to every moment.

ENDNOTES

1. In the Drukpa lineage, the name given at the time of taking Refuge is always preceded by “Jigme,” which means “fearless.”
2. *Kora* means walking around a Buddha statue, a stupa, or a holy place.
3. According to legend, Bodhidharma, a Buddhist monk, taught this martial art to the monks at Shaolin temple to help them fight off thieves and wild animals. Many believe that he founded the Chan school in China that became the Zen school in Japan.



BEING A GOOD GIRL VERSUS BEING AN AUTHENTIC PRACTITIONER

Adrienne Cochran

According to the Buddha's teaching on the Four Noble Truths, suffering exists. The Buddha stated that the origin of suffering is ego-clinging, or desire. Desire, trying to hold on, and aversion, trying to push away, generate the emotions of greed, anger, pride, and jealousy. When our ego clings, we block being fully present to a situation. But what constitutes the ego construct that is the site of ego-clinging? From a Buddhist standpoint, we come into this life with karmic inclinations based on our past lives that stimulate our present ego-clinging. Until we reverse the twelve links of dependent arising, we will be stuck in the cycle of existence (*samsara*). In a *Tricycle* article, "Dependent Origination," Joseph Goldstein gives a lucid explanation of the twelve links.¹ He discusses the process that leads to mental formations, then to ego clinging, and to continued existence. What role does the social sphere play in developing our ego construct in this life? This paper is a reflection on some issues that Western Buddhist women may encounter based, in part, on the impact of the social training that gets integrated into their ego construct. Much of what is discussed in this paper may be applicable to other societies, but here the focus is on a Western experience of socialization and the impact this training has on Buddhist communities.

THE GOOD GIRL SYNDROME

In human societies around the world, women and men are trained from birth in different social roles and in the different cultural contexts in which these roles are to be enacted. From a young age, women and men internalize these social messages, which become part of their ego identity. In her article, "The Social Construction of Gender,"² Judith Lorber argues that gender is a social process that leads to social stratification. Being "gendered" since birth, women and men are trained for different social roles and given different messages regarding correct gender behavior. According to Lorber, authority figures and peers help enforce these different behaviors and conducts. In order to be accepted and receive praise, children learn gendered codes of behavior. As a process, these codes of behavior define their social status and clarify the rights and responsibilities related to that gender. In terms of stratification, gender still tends to privilege the work of men over women, and determines spheres of authority and emotion. In the West, society tends to assign men the former sphere and women the latter.

Many positive changes have occurred over the past 100 years, but Western women continue to receive gender-based social conditioning in their families and in the wider society to behave like "good girls," that is, to not make waves in the

community. In the same vein, Western women are trained to view their primary social role to be taking care of the social and emotional needs of others, especially family members. The behavior related to this social conditioning may become even more exaggerated by Western women in their adopted Buddhist centers. In their efforts to be "good girls" in their Buddhist communities, female practitioners clean their temples, tend to the needs of the teachers, cook community meals, and soothe relational sore spots. Thriving Buddhist communities need people to take on these roles, and so these activities fulfill a useful function. Indeed, not only are these tasks useful; they are invaluable to the community's well-being. What might be problematic about this admirable behavior is determined by the motivation of the practitioner and the expectations of the community. If the practitioner performs these activities from an ego-centered place of seeking praise and approval, instead a heart space of openness, then her motivation perpetuates ego-clinging. On the other hand, she may be pressured by her Buddhist group into this "good girl" behavior in order to gain community acceptance.

Due to gender stratification, the services performed by women are often not as appreciated as the tasks routinely undertaken by men in the community. In addition, not all women feel comfortable with the roles they are asked to assume. Even if the activities of men and women are valued equally by their Buddhist community, women practitioners are often "locked into" tasks that are perceived to be gendered, even if their most useful contributions are in other areas. Thus, continuing to follow culturally ordained practices learned from the wider society may reinforce gendered cultural constructs within the Buddhist community.

Certainly there is something to be said for requiring a member to undertake work that she or he is not inclined to do. This can be a skillful method of breaking down fixations related to a member's sense of self-importance. If a person has excellent skills as an accountant, cleaning bathrooms in a community center might be purifying on several levels. Furthermore, most Buddhist communities are necessarily hierarchical; less experienced students rely on the guidance of more realized teachers. Having some hierarchy and having assigned tasks in the community are not necessarily problematic, unless they are based on fixed social constructs and are instituted due to conceptual rigidity.

BEING AN AUTHENTIC PRACTITIONER

If nothing is independent, solid, or permanent, then group dynamics and individuals in Buddhist communities are empty of these characteristics, too. While certain activities may be condoned and particular emotions may be habitual in a particular Buddhist community, from a Mahayana perspective, these actions and emotions are also empty of any permanent identity.

The Buddha pointed out that, as long as a practitioner is stuck in a dualistic “self” and “other” mode of thinking, this will lead to suffering. In his book *Open Heart, Open Mind: Awakening the Power of Essence Love*,³ Tsoknyi Rinpoche notes that we develop different types of “I.” The “mere I” (Tibetan: *dak tsam*) relates to a fluid state of experience in which a person is open and aware without making value judgments or grasping at things.⁴ The “mere I” is the state in which children begin their journey in this life. In this spacious mode of experience, a child is relaxed and can open his or her heart to unconditional love, or essence love. Over time, as a part of the learning process, society encourages the child to make differentiations between things. This leads to the child’s development of a “solid I” (Tibetan: *dak tenpar dzin*).⁵ In time, this reified state hardens into the “precious I” (*dak ché dzin*). In this state, fixations and aversions start to become habitual, blocking the natural essence love that is expressed in the “mere I.”⁶ As long as a woman practitioner is trying to work with gender-related issues from a “precious I” standpoint, she will not relinquish the habituated internal patterns that are preventing clarity about the situation.

Tsoknyi Rinpoche also notes the development of a “social I.” He describes this as “that aspect or layer of self we develop when dealing with other people.”⁷ According to him, the “social I” is not a part of the traditional Buddhist teachings on ego. The special catch of the “social I” is that we want to please and get praised by others, so we act in ways that we know will garner this praise. However, these actions might not reflect what we are actually feeling inside, which might lead to resentment and internal conflict.⁸ In a sense, women who are trying to exhibit “good girl” behavior in their Buddhist communities are basing their actions on internalized practices and conduct to garner the praise their ego seeks. However, if these women are also disturbed by certain gender practices in their communities, they may also be generating internal resentment. Both seeking praise and engendering resentment block the open, loving qualities of the heart.

CONCLUSION

Practicing loving kindness in Buddhist community centers is essential, but the goal is not be “good” or “nice” in a culturally perceived manner. By practicing patience and joyful diligence, a member may release the ego fixations of the “precious I.” By examining and then freeing emotional tensions arising from the “social I,” a practitioner may also rediscover the unconditioned love that arises in the “mere I” state. An experienced, mindful practitioner focuses on her own reactions and brings a spacious and relaxed approach to fraught situations. In this state, genuine openness to all sentient beings is possible and a practitioner may fully benefit sentient beings.

ENDNOTES

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5. *Ibid*, p. 97.
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8. *Ibid*, p. 106.

FURTHER READING

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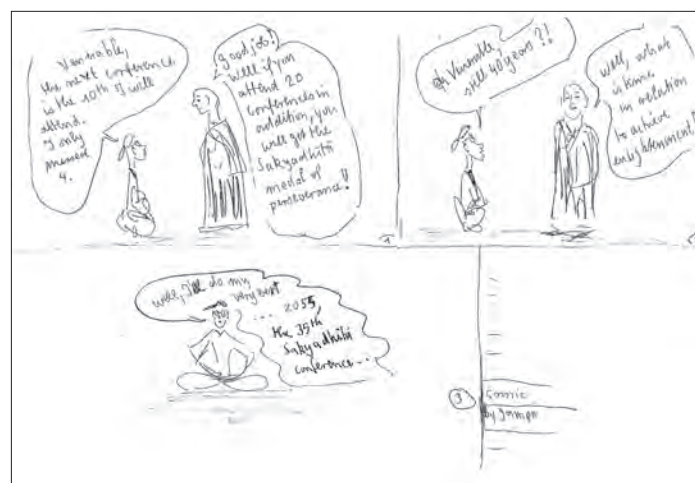
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GENDER ISSUES IN TRANSLATION AND TRANSMISSION

Donna Lynn Brown

The Tsadra Translation & Transmission Conference, focused primarily on Tibetan translation, was held October 2-5, 2014, in Keystone, Colorado (USA). Practitioners, academics, translators, students and publishers from around the globe and from all Tibetan Buddhist schools attended the conference, including 250 participants from 37 different Buddhist groups and 33 universities. The conference, with its large number of participants, breadth of topics, and clockwork organization, mirrored the increasing depth and professionalism of the field. Now, Tibetan translation has come of age.

Gender issues came up when a participant asked Dr. David Bellos what he would do with writings that demean women. While there is an old style of translation – “les belles infidèles” (beautiful unfaithful ones) – which alters offensive passages, Dr. Bellos noted that “misrepresentation with a purpose” is no longer well-seen, and we would be wise to hesitate before deleting passages. There was debate about gender at other sessions as well. It was widely agreed that translators should make language inclusive and gender-neutral, especially in practice texts. More challenging is demeaning material. For example, Dr. Karma Lekshe Tsomo showed a number of verses from the Tengyur that discomfited the audience, such as the following, attributed to Nagarjuna and translated in 1919 by William Campbell:

An evil man, gold, a drum
A wild horse, women and cloth
Are controlled by beating
These are not vessels for elegant doings.

A woman's appetite is twice (that of a man)
Her deceitfulness four times (as much),
Her shame six times
And her passions eight times – so it is said.

She noted that such material is found throughout sutras and commentaries, and impacts the reputation and dissemination of Buddhism. Some participants suggested leaving it untranslated, softening the wording or adding explanations. Others felt texts had to be translated as written. Kagyu Lama Ringu Tulku noted that His Holiness the Karmapa had changed some texts from praying for women to become men to praying for women to become powerful, in order to express the deeper meaning. Ringu Tulku termed this correcting the text by looking at its real intention. Dr. Janet Gyatso summed up the discussion by noting that we should not deny Buddhism's history, but should still use our critical abilities. Buddhism has evolved over time, and innovating to solve problems is allowed. The majority view was that material that demeans women or other groups, such as disabled or so-called low-caste people, requires either alteration or explanation when it is translated.

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Bhikkhunis newly ordained at Songkhla, with their preceptors.

HISTORIC BHIKKHUNI ORDINATION IN THAILAND

Karma Lekshe Tsomo

On November 29, 2014, eight Thai nuns received the upasampada, full ordination as bhikkhunis, in Songkhla, Thailand. The preceptor was Mahindavamsa Mahathero, the Mahanayaka of Amarapura in Sri Lanka. The senior bhikkhuni preceptor (pavattini) was Bhikkhuni Dhammananda of Wat Songdhamma Kalayani, outside of Bangkok, who first received ordination as a novice (samaneri), then as a probationary nun (sikkamani), and then ordination as a fully ordained nun (bhikkhuni). Her ordinations were all conducted according to the Theravada tradition in Sri Lanka.

The newly ordained bhikkhunis are from Thippayasathandhamma Bhikkhuni Arama on Koh Yoh Island in southern Thailand. Bhikkhuni Dhammadipa, who heads the community, began monastic life as an eight-precept nun (maechee) wearing white robes. A teacher, she and members of her community received the “going forth” as novices with Bhikkhuni Dhammananda and trained in the precepts for two years before seeking the higher ordination.

The ordination was a cause for great joy for supporters of Buddhist women in Thailand and throughout the world, but has come under criticism from the Supreme Sangha Council (SSC) of Thailand. Phra Prommethi, spokesperson for the Council of the Elders, stated that any foreign monk who wishes to give ordination in Thailand must receive permission from the SSC, in accordance with an order promulgated in 1928. He further stated that the Council rejects the Songkhla ordination because it “compromises the security of Thailand's Theravada Buddhism.”



Sakyadhita

14th International Conference
on Buddhist Women

“Compassion and Social Justice”

Yogyakarta, Indonesia
June 23 to 30, 2015



Program at a Glance

- | | |
|------------------------|------------|
| • Arrive in Yogyakarta | June 21–22 |
| • Conference dates | June 23–30 |
| • Cultural tour | July 1–2 |
| • Depart Yogyakarta | July 3 |



Conference Highlights

Panel topics include:

- Diversity & Multiculturalism
- Trans-Buddhist Dialogue
- Pioneering Indonesian Buddhist Women
- In the Spirit of Compassion
- Bhikkhuni Ordination: Benefits & Barriers
- Equality, Respect & Lay/Monastic Relations
- The Buddhism of Borobudur
- Feminism as Compassionate Activism

Workshop topics include:

- Zen Practice at Perfect Illumination Monastery
- Building a Smart-Living Community
- Honoring the Body in Buddhist Traditions
- Everyday Dharma for Future Mothers
- Rapping for Generations
- Buddhist Women's Leadership & the Environmental Crisis
- Gender and Sexual Diversity
- ... and many others!

Travel Tips

Book your flight to arrive at Yogyakarta International Airport (Adi Sucipto) on June 21 or 22. Transportation from the airport to the conference site will be arranged. Visas for 30 days are issued at the airport for \$25 (USD), with ongoing or return flight tickets.

Indonesia's climate is tropical, with daily rain showers. Temperatures in Yogyakarta in June range from 73–91 F (23–33 C). Light cotton clothing, an umbrella, and sandals or comfortable walking shoes are recommended. Out of respect for Indonesian culture, be sure to dress modestly (please do not dress in shorts, tank tops, or revealing clothing)



Tours to Indonesian Cultural Heritage Sites

A two-day tour to sacred sites in the vicinity of Yogyakarta will follow the conference. A peak experience will be early morning meditation at Borobudur, one of the wonders of the world. These cultural tours will include visits to Pawon, Mendut, Ratu Boko, Kalasan, Sari, Sewu, Plaosan, and other historical Buddhist and Hindu monuments. Additional independent tours to Bali, Sumatra, and other islands can be easily arranged.



Registration

Online registration is available at www.sakyadhita.org.

All costs in USD.

- Early bird registration by March 1: \$60
- Regular registration by April 15: \$80
- Late registration by May 15: \$100
- Two-day temple tour: \$30
- Meals (traditional Indonesian vegetarian, June 23-30): \$80
- Airport transportation provided on June 21 and 22, and July 1 and 3.

A range of accommodations is available at Sambi Resort, the conference venue, in the range of \$20 per day. Budget accommodations are available in nearby local villages for \$10 per day. Register early to ensure your choice of accommodations.

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These statements have set off a wave of protest across Thailand against the SSC. Representatives from the Networks of Women for Reforms (NWR) presented a petition to the National Reform Council (NRC) charging that the SSC's stance on female ordination violates the rights of women. After accepting their petition, Paiboon Nititawan, a member of the NRC and the Constitution Drafting Committee, said that the SSC announcement contradicts both the constitution and the rules of the SSC, which only apply to Thai monks. The NRC position is that Thai women should not be restricted in pursuing their religious beliefs.

This report is based on the article "SSC Faces Fire for Female Monk Ban: Reform Trio Back Female Ordination," published December 16, 2014: <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/general/450083/ssc-faces-fire-for-female-monk-ban>.

Acknowledgments

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Frieze of Mahamaya, the Buddha's mother, and her attendants, from Borobudur, Indonesia.

Your Sakyadhita membership is very greatly appreciated! Send your newsletter ideas and submissions by email to newsletter@sakyadhita.org. Website: www.sakyadhita.org.

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