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TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Dragonfly's Blessing
Kate Vosti

Rapping on Java
Rotraut Jampa Wurst

Waking Up in *Samsāra*
Vanessa R. Sasson

Women, Compassion, and Social Justice
Karma Lekshe Tsomo

Reflections on Dying
Bhikkhuni Adhimutta

Women, Buddhism, and Philosophy: Where and How Do They Meet?
Jin Y. Park

Life As It Is
Anja Tanhane

Buddhism and Social Enterprise: Creating a More Compassionate Economy
Claralynn R. Nunamaker

A Buddhist Seminar on ASEAN *Bhikkhunis*
Bhikkhuni Dhammananda

A Golden Ship
Thavory Huot

Review of Zenkei Blanche Hartman's *Seeds for a Boundless Life*
Konin Melissa Cardenas

Review of Sarah Jacoby's *Love and Liberation*
Rebecca Paxton

Review of "This Very Life"
Joanne Feinberg

"The Fantastic Stories of Könchok Paldrön and her Enlightened Children
Joel Gruber

Buddha's Sweet Daughters
Dita Sudarmawan

Further Reading

14th Sakyadhita opening ceremony with Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, Bhante Viriyanadi, Bhiksuni Karma Lekshe Tsomo, Bhiksuni Thubten Chodron, and Sumatran dancers.

A Dragonfly's Blessing

By Kate Vosti

What is a blessing? I often remind myself to "count" my blessings. These are the most obvious aspects of my life that I deem "good," "satisfactory," and "me-approved." What are often misunderstood, though, are the blessings in disguise. Something I have learned while studying the Dharma is that true blessings seem to manifest in the biggest obstacles, the most difficult struggles. Of course, these blessings are usually not recognized until the latter half of the struggle. Most unfortunately, sometimes these blessings, these precious teachings, are completely overlooked.

The first morning of the Sakyadhita conference in Indonesia, we gathered together under rows and rows of awnings, anticipating the opening ceremony. This trip was one of many firsts for me: my first trip traveling alone, my first trip to Asia, and my first Sakyadhita conference. I sat among somewhat familiar faces, ones that I had seen around my hotel the night before. A mixture of overwhelming excitement and blistering fear swirled inside me. My senses were heightened and my attention was darting everywhere. I was surrounded by great minds. Who was I to be here? My own mind was adjusting to the sight of hundreds of women with shaved heads. I began touching my long, luscious hair as if feeling it for the very first time. I noticed the feeling of attachment rising within me, for I love my hair very much. It is very much a part of me, part of the way people see me, which in turn affects the way I see myself. All of a sudden, in the middle of my hair reflection, a dragonfly landed on my knee. My breath stopped. I did not move a muscle. The dragonfly gracefully rested there and then took flight again. The woman sitting behind me put her hand on my shoulder, leaned in, and said, "That was a blessing."

Being on the other side of the world made me feel as if I were in an alternate reality. The environment was like nothing I had ever seen before. The Indonesian language has

Kate Vosti enjoys one of 90 workshops at the 14th Sakyadhita conference.

no Latin roots and therefore is not dissectable for the English speaker. I saw fruits and vegetables that I never knew existed and spices I never imagined tasting. In the midst of culture shock, my mind immediately got stuck spiraling in the idea, "I am completely alone." Why is it that sometimes we feel the loneliest when we are surrounded by thousands of people? There is a very primal, very raw fear that comes to the surface when one is not sure how to interpret the environment around one. I had to take each day, hour by hour. I listened to the voices of women pioneering social justice in their communities, then I rested in solitude, listening to my own thoughts. I ate the most delicious vegan food I have ever had, sitting among women who were leaders in their countries, then rested in the shade, digesting food and conversations. I listened a lot during that week. I listened more and spoke less than ever before. There was so much to take in between the wisdom, the exquisite Indonesian culture, the friendships, and, of course, the Dharma – always at work.

I was honored to have had the opportunity to present a workshop at the conference. I had created it myself: Compassion It Leadership. Compassion It is a non-profit organization I work with in San Diego whose mission is to educate people about compassion and how to make compassionate action part of our daily lives. I integrated compassion education with the leadership training I had been receiving in my Master's program at the University of San Diego's School of Leadership and Education Sciences (SOLES). When I woke up on the morning of the workshop presentation, I had completely forgotten it was my birthday and didn't remember until in the midst of facilitating the workshop. I really did feel I was living in an alternate reality!

Working with the women who attended the workshop was such a delightful experience. Nuns from different traditions came, including all the Vietnamese bhiksunis! I was not prepared for that, but fared surprisingly well working with an interpreter. The challenge required me to humble myself, to use language that was less academic than what we use in my graduate program, and to create more tangible leadership tools on the spot. The audience and I settled into a rhythm – a flow that felt quite natural. I noticed that many of the nuns were diligently taking very accurate notes on leadership. It was then that I realized how much these women were craving to learn the skills necessary for practicing leadership. At the end of the workshop, as I thanked them all for their participation, I subtly mentioned that it was my birthday and that I had completely forgotten about it. They all cheered gleefully. Rushing over to me, together they began singing "Happy Birthday" in three languages: English, Bahasa, and Chinese. It was one of the most special moments of my life – truly a birthday I will never forget.

It was only months later that I realized what I want to do with my Leadership Studies degree. At the Sakyadhita conference, I was faced with the reality of social injustice experienced by Buddhist nuns. I was completely unaware that women were not allowed to be ordained in certain countries and that inequalities are apparent in many monasteries. In the United States, many people teach leadership and many people teach the Dharma. In Asia, many people teach Dharma, but leadership is rarely taught, especially for Buddhist nuns. When I graduate from my Master's program this spring, I am inspired to share leadership training with Buddhist nuns in countries like Thailand, Vietnam, and the Himalayas. I could never have imagined my life going in this direction, yet now it seems to be the only direction that makes sense.

My experience at the Sakyadhita conference in Indonesia was an unforgettable one and not for the reason I anticipated. My eyes and my heart were opened, not just to the suffering of others, but also to the suffering within myself. I listened to the ways that many awe-inspiring women talked about their work. Beneath their words was great affectionate and unconditional love, which helped them to accomplish great things.

Kate Vosti leads a workshop on Compassion It Leadership.

I had to check my identity at the door for Sakyadhita. I realized that the moment I noticed my attachment to my hair the very first day. I was able to reclaim this identity again when I left Indonesia and returned to the U.S., but this identity does not fit the same way it used to. My hair represents an identity that I am not willing to give up yet, but I now know that this identity is fluid, always changing. My sense of control was an illusion. Beneath all this, I can see the Dharma at work. I think the dragonfly knew this, too.

Dharma Rap on Java
By Rotraut Jampa Wurst

The first Dharma rap occurred in 2010, at a workshop I initiated at the 10th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. It was there that I performed Dharma rap for the first time and took the stage name DJ Jampa Sausage. When I was asked to present a workshop on Buddhism and pop culture, this is the medium I chose. Dharma rap is a form of active engagement that serves as a medium for expressing Buddhist ideas. People from 13 countries and many different Buddhist traditions, both laywomen and nuns, joined the workshop. Together, we performed rap at the closing ceremony.

We performed Dharma rap again at the 11th Sakyadhita conference in Vietnam. Since then, rap has been an integral part of Sakyadhita gatherings. This contemporary musical form, which features the rhythmic intoning of texts, is a way to impart Dharma in a relevant way that can help link the generations. Those of us who have been members of Sakyadhita International for many years are now getting older. Rap holds the potential to attract young people and make the conferences appealing to the next generation. Most importantly, it is an accessible way to transmit the Dharma to future generations.

Rap is a creative way to motivate people to come together, share ideas about Buddhism, and create original raps to convey these ideas. It is an easy way to put complex Buddhist concepts into short sentences that can be remembered like mantras. The rhythm motivates young people, because it is a musical form that they are familiar with. It is a fun and easy way for older participants to share the experience of learning Dharma with young people.

Our experience of rapping at the 14th Sakyadhita conference in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, was really special. In addition to the scheduled workshop, I demonstrated this unique way of sharing Buddhist ideas by performing a short rap before my panel presentation. My intention was to help people become more engaged, motivated, and mindful. Especially when topics are new or controversial, such as Buddhism and sexual diversity, rap is a good way to ease people´sfears.

The Dharma rap workshop attracted people from different countries and diverse Buddhist traditions, lay and ordained. The energy was so high that people requested another rap workshop. Peg, the workshop coordinator, gave the Dharma rappers a hall big enough for 30 or 40 people. Young people and old developed raps in different styles and presented them to each other. Bhutanese nuns, American laywomen, and Indonesian Muslim women and men all joined in. It was amazing to see women from Lebanon, Brazil, Australia, and many other countries expressing Dharma in their own unique ways.

The workshop was so successful that we spontaneously decided to hold one every day. We found some big markers and accompanied our raps with graffiti. We happily learned break dance moves from one another, dancing until our muscles ached. Luckily, we had the possibility of getting an Indonesian massage at Sambi Resort after the workshops!

Each day, new people joined the workshops, so there was a constant steam of new creative ideas. We also got a chance to perform our raps for larger groups. Some participants were too shy, but others were brave, outgoing, and happy to perform for the conference participants.

More than a thousand people attended this gorgeous conference. The experience was like being in paradise. The week's schedule was very full and richly diverse. Some events were quite formal, such as the opening ceremony at the Sultan's Residence in Yogyakarta, attended by many dignitaries, and the closing ceremony with Ratu Hemas, the queen of Yogyakarta, who gave an impassioned talk about

Rotraut Jampa Wurst and two of her rappers, volunteers Eva Husein and Novi Marceline

women and social justice. With so many wonderful events scheduled, the Dharma rappers realized that there was no chance to perform on stage this time. Instead, they were so motivated to share what they had done that they held spontaneous flash mobs in front of the dining area at lunch time, which was great fun for everyone!

The Dharma rap workshops are always wonderful opportunities for participants from different backgrounds to come together and express their creativity. As a group, they can create international Buddhist raps to be performed and shared. The experience is crosscultural, interreligious, global, and diverse. Many photos record for all time how many laughs we shared!

Waking Up in *Samsāra*
By Vanessa R. Sasson

I remember what it felt like the first time I discovered the vinaya passage in which Mahāpajāpatī asked for ordination. The Buddha refused her three times but he would not say why. I remember my dismay as I continued to read and found her sobbing in the back of the line with nowhere else to go. I remember reading the verse that compared women to mold on a rice field – a metaphor I have never been able to shake.

Gender discrimination in Buddhist literature is something I have forced myself to get used to. It is everywhere in the literature, and I realized early on that if I was going to make a career out of studying these texts, I had better learn how to swallow the difficult parts. I could not afford to stop and feel angry each time. My job – so I thought – was to make the difficult parts intelligible.

One afternoon at the Sakyadhita conference in Indonesia this summer, I found myself sitting with Venerable Jampa Tsedroen over lunch. In between bites, Jampa challenged me.

"Do you realize," she started, "how profound the injustice against women goes?"

I nodded.

"Women are asked to use separate entrances in some places and are entirely forbidden from entering temples in others. Women are denied ordination, despite the fact that all the arguments in favor of ordination have been made many times over. Women lose access to teachings, to retreats, and to monastic visas, just because they are women."

I knew this to be true. It was familiar terrain.

"Think of it this way," she continued, undeterred. "In America, everyone knows what racism looks like. If a rule is made that is based on a racist worldview, we jump at it, write articles about it, protest in the streets. But when a policy is built around the exclusion of women… That is what we call tradition."

And there it was: the view I had never considered before. The view that woke me up to samsāra.

Racism is certainly not over, but whenever we do catch hold of it, the world goes on fire against it. We cannot sit on a racist idea and claim it is tradition. Not anymore. But we are still asking women to stay behind, to give up their dreams of higher education or higher ordination. We are still pointing them – we are pointing ourselves – to a different entrance or no entrance at all, because these are traditions, and traditions have to be respected. Because there is wisdom in tradition. There is wisdom in leaving women behind.

I had never thought of women's issues this way before. The "whites only" signs of the past were signs of hatred and cruelty. If just one of those signs resurfaced today, the headlines would be howling with indignation. But when it comes to excluding women, the signs remain, and the world is – for the most part – quiet with its response. "No women allowed" is a sadly familiar encounter, and most of the time we accept the rejection. Excluding women is just one of those things religions do. We expect it. And sometimes, we even buy into the argument that it is wise.

How can exclusion from the sacred be associated with wisdom? I did not ask myself this question until recently. Even when I was angry, even when I came across discriminatory passages in the vinaya for the first time, I don't think I was shaken enough. Instead, I taught myself how to justify exclusion. I developed the academic tools required to protect the stories told by "tradition" and I mastered the art of making the required academic caveats. I leaned on historical arguments and convinced myself that times were different "back then." I told myself that the texts did not mean what they said.

But when gender discrimination was compared to racial discrimination, in between bites of vegetarian food on a beautiful summer day, the world crashed over my head. All the justifications I had grown used to were kicked out from under me and I found myself staring into the face of injustice as I never had *before. Suddenly, the exclusion of women became unpalatable to me. It became impossible to accept.*

I do not know how Mahāpajāpatī did it. She walked away from her home in the hopes of finding refuge, but the sign "no women allowed" was hanging on the door. The Buddha refused her request three times. He refused the request of the 500 women who stood behind her as well. Eventually, he changed his mind and provided her with an entry ticket. But she was compared to mold on a field of rice.

Perhaps none of this ever happened, but supposing it did: what was the price of that comparison? How much did it cost her to accept the words? Whatever the answer, the texts tell us that she did not flinch. She remained focused on her goal and put the hurt aside.

Women, Compassion, and Social Justice
By Karma Lekshe Tsomo

Compassion is a universal value. Social justice – ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all – is often propelled by rage against systematic injustices. I believe that social justice will be most effective if it is activated by compassion. If our motivation for social activism is genuine compassion, we will be energized to work harder to ensure that all human

beings have a decent quality of life. I believe that women can play a special role in working for social justice by cultivating compassion and wisdom.

For Buddhists, compassion is the wish that all beings be free from suffering. Loving kindness is the wish for all beings to be happy. Together, compassion and loving kindness are the wish that all beings be happy and free from suffering.

To generate compassion, we need to understand the sufferings of living beings. Buddhists include all living beings – the animals, including mosquitoes and cockroaches, all the fish in the ocean, all the animals on the land, as well as all human beings in their beautiful richness. So in the Buddhist tradition, the idea of relieving the sufferings of all sentient beings is a really huge responsibility. How do we do that?

Each being has its own particular sufferings. Sometimes we hear people say "I wish I were a bird. I wish I were a fish, they swim so freely. Ah, but when we think about it, are the birds free? Are the fish free? When we think about it, birds suffer a lot and fish even more so. They are stuck in the cold ocean and they are always worried about being eaten by the bigger fish. When we see birds flying around, when we see fish swimming around, they look very happy. But when we look carefully, we see that their lives are full of suffering and constant fear.

A human rebirth is considered the most special, because as human beings we have the perfect opportunity for achieving spiritual progress on the path to awakening. The potential for awakening unites all sentient beings, but human beings have a special capacity to cultivate enlightened awareness. So we try to generate compassion for all beings, aware that being born in a human body is something unique that comes very rarely. Of course, Buddhists believe we get more than one chance at it – we take birth again and again and again in different forms. So we get another chance, but what form will we take? That depends on our actions. If we get stuck in a rebirth as a bird or a fish, it will be very difficult to make spiritual progress. While we have this special opportunity, we make an effort to be ethical people, to avoid any kind of corruption or dishonesty, and to be very generous to ensure a prosperous human rebirth next time around.

Being reborn as a human being is not enough, however. Many human beings who have been born in this world are suffering enormously. Many do not have sufficient water. Many do not have sufficient food. When we remember that, we can feel really joyful that we have been born as a human being. We can remember how fortunate we are to have the basic requisites of life. We can remember how fortunate we are to have time to tend to our spiritual life, generate compassion, and aspire to free all beings from suffering.

This brings us to the social justice part. In the many different societies around the globe, not all human beings have equal opportunities. Some people are very fortunate. They are born into prosperous families, with enough to eat, enough to drink, a roof over their head, and opportunities for education. But many human beings are not so fortunate. Women, especially, suffer a great deal. The poverty in the world falls heaviest on women and children. So when we talk about social justice, we need to remember the sufferings of others, especially the sufferings of women and children.

How does it happen that women and children suffer more? If, as the U.N. tells us, 60% of the work in the world is done by women, why is only 20% of the wealth of the world and only 1% of the land in the hands of women? Something is terribly wrong. If women are doing the work, but not getting the rewards of their work, the world is obviously full of injustice.

There are many different kinds of justice and injustice. We speak about animal rights, human rights, climate justice, economic justice, and social justice. All of these are interrelated. When we talk about justice for women, we recognize that women do not get an equal wage for equal work. Even in the U.S. women do not have equal rights. This comes as a surprise to many people in other countries. The question of equal rights for women is raised in Congress again and again, but it's always voted down. The corporations do not want equal rights for women, because then they would have to pay women an equal wage. The economic injustice that is rampant in the world falls most heavily on women.

If we set about creating a just society, we need to create just social structures, just governments, just political processes, and just corporations. Often, the voices of women are not equally represented in our systems of government. Women generally work harder than men because, in addition to their jobs, they shoulder greater responsibilities in the family. Politically they don't have the necessary leisure or wealth to run for office, and often don't even have

the time to vote. Also, women are not as wealthy as men, so they generally don't have the resources to win elections. The electoral system is clearly out of balance. This means that women's voices are not equally heard, equally respected, or equally represented.

Many countries have laws to protect women and children. Happily, many dedicated people are working overtime to make sure that these laws are enforced. In many countries, however, the rights of women and children are not adequately protected. We all need to work together, as a human family, to correct this. In many countries, women live under political oppression and other restrictions. For example, sometimes women want to come to our Sakyadhita International Conferences on Buddhist Women, but cannot get passports or cannot get permits to leave their countries. Some governments do not recognize the rights of their citizens to travel freely and in those countries we find many violations of human rights and the rights of women. If we are fortunate enough to live in a country that safeguards political rights and human rights, we need to appreciate that and remain vigilant to protect those rights, not only for our own benefit but for the benefit of others.

When we speak about politics, we are speaking about power and the just distribution of power. When we speak about power, we are speaking about power in the family, the workplace, the courts, the political process, and religion.

Throughout history until today, we see incidents of religious nationalism and the collusion of religion and militarism. In this, we rarely hear the voices of women, or see representations of women. The value of women's contributions as caretakers of children, husbands, friends, and communities are often overlooked. Women have developed in themselves unique qualities to help others, who experience myriad sufferings. As women, we must not undervalue these compassionate qualities. We must not close our eyes to the fact that some people use religion for their own political ends, to gain and maintain power over others, and in their thirst for power justify endless wars and iniquities. The inclusion of compassionate women at all levels of government can help mitigate the excesses of power and greed, and instead use the gains for the good of society.

Buddhism, like most religions, teaches peace and most Buddhists are peace-loving people. Unfortunately, today Buddhist nationalism is on the rise, which is very dangerous for everyone. This becomes a social justice issue, because religious nationalism goes hand in hand with intolerance, which works against the rights of followers of other religions. Questions of religious identity and national identity are very complicated, but using religion and nationalism to justify violence and aggression is quite shocking, bringing humanity to the brink of destruction.

Buddhism, like most religions, has the tools for creating and maintaining peace and justice. Buddhists have a responsibility to use them well. We need to study and live the teachings well, discover the tools for creating peace, and find ways to put them into practice in society for the benefit of all.

We all need to open our eyes and be aware of the problems that afflict humanity. We need to look directly at the injustices in the world and use whatever methods we have within our traditions to cure these inequalities, to cure these injustices. Recognizing injustices can be depressing, but it can also be empowering, inspiring greater efforts to counteract the forces of greed and to find antidotes to the sufferings of the world. Recognizing the depth of human (and animal) sufferings can be a powerful catalyst for developing deep compassion. All of us, from different countries and different religious traditions, have a responsibility to share our knowledge, share our wisdom, and share our compassion.

Together, women are very powerful. Imagine three and a half billion people working together for social justice. We don't know exactly how many Buddhists there are in the world, but it could be one billion and we know that half of them are women. Working together for social justice, we can be a very powerful force. If we work together in harmony with compassion and loving kindness, practicing with mindfulness and awareness, I'm convinced that we can change the world, both for human beings and for all living beings. Working together, we can create more just and humane social structures.

To be effective, Buddhists need to learn the distinction between social welfare and social justice. Buddhists are generally very good at charitable activities. Temples are often distribution centers for food and providers of healthcare for the poor, taking care of needy families, orphans, and the frail and elderly. These activities are a wonderful contribution to the common good. Yet we must do more. We must recognize that there is a clear difference between social welfare and social justice. Social welfare projects help improve conditions for the poor. Social justice projects work to change the structures of injustice that create poverty and insecurity, replacing them with structures that create health and well-being for all beings. It is very meritorious to give food to the poor, but our generosity does not address the causes of poverty and insecurity. With social justice, but we need to delve more deeply. Even if we could feed every hungry person in the world today, it would not solve world hunger or food insecurity. We need to ask: Why are these people hungry? What is the root cause of the problem? How can we solve the problem?

To solve the problems of the world, we need to listen to the voices of the suffering and discover solutions from every direction. If we draw upon the collective wisdom and compassion of all the world's religions and peoples, there is hope. If we draw on the wisdom of women, who are often closest to the sufferings of the world, we can find true strength. I sincerely believe that compassion is the solution to ending war, terrorism, killing, torture, and oppression.

Loving kindness and compassion naturally work together toward that end. If we want living beings to be happy, naturally we want to free them from suffering. If we want living beings to be free from suffering, naturally we want them to be happy. For this, we need to open our eyes to the sufferings of others, not close our eyes – open our hearts to the miseries of others, not close our hearts. Loving kindness and compassion are the strongest antidotes to hatred, injustice, oppression, and all the other ills of the world. If we develop compassion, we will quickly begin to realize the connections between our own happiness and the happiness of others. Our own happiness is inextricably connected to the happiness of others. Only ignorance prevents us from seeing these connections.

As we develop compassion, we automatically want to work for peace and justice, because we can no longer tolerate the sufferings of living beings. At this critical time, when the very survival of life as we know it on Planet Earth is at stake, I believe that human flourishing depends on two assets of extraordinary value: women and compassion. Working together, I am convinced that we can build a more just and compassionate world. Now's the perfect time to get going.

Reflections on Passing
By Bhikkhuni Adhimutta

Death, death, death! Everything so dear, all fortunate circumstances, can all vanish in a moment, like a shimmering bubble in the sun.

Reflecting on death is like a knife that cuts to the heart of things. Reflecting on death brings this moment into sharp focus and connects me everything around me – my little nephew's grand adventures with his train, the tiny ducklings I see while out on a walk (who've already grown in the time since I began writing this!), late winter reflections on a lake – all make me realize the preciousness of this moment, now. Now is the time to be deeply engaged.

Reflecting on death brings a strong feeling of samvega, or spiritual urgency. It connects me with the deeper pulses and aspirations of my life, urging me to stay true to them.

Reflecting on aging, I feel that, like the midday sun, I'm no longer young and not yet old. It feels like looking over the whole landscape, seeing little ones growing up and my parents growing old. Enough years have passed to realize that life does not last long. If there are things to do, it's time to get to it. This takes clarity, commitment, fortune, and support.

Reflecting on the passing of time makes me sober, grounded, clearer, more dedicated.

Upon reflection, life and death and everything seem pretty much out of control. So, I do what I can and try not to waste time. Beyond that, I leave the rest to nature. This tree, those around me, all have a chance to grow to fruition and full maturity – or not.

These last few weeks, especially, I have been reading and contemplating death – reading stories about the deaths of different people and the reflections of those who care for the dying. I certainly have ideas about what makes a good death – what I would like for myself and others – and I'll work toward that, as much as possible. I accept that what will be, will be. Death may not be beautiful or dignified, but we can all feel its intensity. In theory at least, we will feel a sense of confidence and equanimity. Be prepared! Who knows when death will come?

I always assumed I would care for my parents when they got old and were dying. Until now, though, I didn't feel in my heart how rich the experience would be. Even more strongly and clearly, I feel that an awareness of old age, sickness, and death should be brought into our communities, especially our contemplative communities.

Reflecting on readings and my own experiences over time, I see the deep trust and connection that emerges when we embrace these realities. I understand the intimacy that emerges when the vulnerable are deeply cared for. Without deep caring, there will be an underlying unease, shared by ourselves, others, and our communities. With feelings of deep and trustworthy connection, there is a basis for very deep contemplative work.

Without bringing to mind a constant awareness of death, aging, and sickness, it is easy to get lost in a heavenly deva realm of delights and diversions. Living in a dream world, we never get to the heart of things. We get involved in useful projects, learn many interesting things, but we do not get around to the practice. We are not quite committed to it. We do not make it the centerpiece of our lives. And so the years flow by.

My reflections are not so different from what we find in traditional texts. By contemplating the teachings, they become true for me. Reflecting on old age, sickness, and death brings an especially great feeling of urgency. I want to practice now, while there is time, so I'll have no regrets later on. Reflecting on death awakens a much greater sense of the immediacy and vividness of life. Matters of the heart, the moments we enjoy with each other, and the quality of relationships become much more important than projects or skills. If my life and relationships are in order, I'll be fine – even if I die suddenly, any moment. I don't want to die, but things will basically be fine.

Reflecting on aging, sickness, and death gives me a feeling of kinship with others. Reflecting on these realities amplifies what unites us. We're all in this together. We're just here for a short time. We don't know where we came from. We don't know where we're going. We don't know how long we have to live. Even great wealth and great medical advances cannot necessarily allay the sufferings of illness, aging, and death that come to us all. These reflections are simple, yet powerful. When I remember to bring them to mind, their immediacy is striking.

Recently, contemplating death and reading about dying have made me more determined and clear-minded. Engaging actively and consciously with these matters makes me determined to take good care of the dying and arrange everything necessary to make them comfortable. I am determined to allow their death to be as peaceful as possible. We can care for the dying with the same energy that we use to organize weddings and other special events. We need that kind of clarity. We cannot leave things to the winds of fate.

Reading more about death and dying makes my heart clear. It helps me realize how vulnerable human beings are at the time of death and how valuable our relationships are. The compassion we have for each other has profound, far-reaching effects. This makes me determined to have important conversations and to advocate for those who are dying. I feel determined to develop my heart and mind as much as I can, while I have the opportunity, so I can be a refuge for myself and for others at that critical time.

Korean Zen Buddhist nun Kim Iryop

Women, Buddhism, and Philosophy: Where and How Do They Meet?
By Jin Y. Park

Why and how do women engage with Buddhism? This essay aims to answer this question by examining the life and thought of a Korean Zen Buddhist nun, Kim Iryŏp. Gender in world religions emerged as a significant issue among religious scholars around the mid-1980s. The Women and World Religions series in the 1980s discussed the images and treatment of women in the world's major religious traditions, including Buddhism. Gender in Buddhist philosophy, however, has yet to be critically evaluated, and this is a telling omission in our discussion of Buddhist philosophy. Philosophy has been one of the most male-dominated disciplines in humanities. Encounters between women and Buddhist philosophy raise issues that might not be shared with gender issues in Western philosophy. Women, Buddhism, and philosophy – what do they share in common?

In order to accomplish the goal of this paper, I examine the life and philosophy of a 20th-century Korean Zen Master, Kim Iryŏp (1896–1971). To put it briefly, Iryŏp was the daughter of a Christian pastor and his wife. She was raised as a faithful Christian, envisioning her future as a Christian missionary. During her teenage years, questions about Christian doctrines eventually led her to lose faith in Christianity. In the 1920s, she actively engaged with women's movements in Korea, at the forefront of a group known as the New Women. She found the society's attempt to control feminine sexuality in the name of virginity and chastity to be a visible form of gender discrimination in Korean society and demanded sexual freedom, as well as free love and free divorce. During her late twenties, Iryŏp gradually became attracted to Buddhism and began to study Buddhist doctrines, practice meditation, and eventually joined the monastery. She was a leading figure in the Buddhist nuns' community until her death in 1971.

As a woman in a patriarchal society, Iryŏp sought her authentic identity through social movements, challenging the gendered identity imposed by her society. As she turned to Buddhism, Iryŏp felt that there was a deeper source that constrained her freedom and authentic existence. This existential turn in her thought led her to Buddhism and the religious worldview. Reinterpreting the Buddhist notion of the no-self, Iryŏp claimed that the everyday self we consider so precious is a fragmented self, a small "I" (soa). Once we realize the provisional nature of this limited vision of the self, Iryŏp argued, we find boundless capacity as a human being, which Iryŏp defined as a big "I" (tae). The openness of a being, explained through the Buddhist worldview, enabled Iryŏp to find the basis of freedom to liberate her from gendered identity.

Realizing that contradiction is the logic of the universe and that the life force (saengmyŏng) is the shared foundation of all beings, Iryŏp found a deeper meaning to existence. Iryŏp interpreted the Buddha as a being who fully exercised the creativity with which each being is endowed. When a being fully exercises creativity, the concrete form of such an exercise appears as "culture" (munhwa). Iryŏp defined the Buddha as a great "person of culture" (taemunhwain) and Buddhist practice as training to be a person of culture.

Creativity is a mode of engaging life in a free and authentic manner. The exercise of creativity was Iryŏp's vision of Buddhist practice and also her advice to women who were searching for freedom and the authentic self. One of the issues Iryŏp's critics have challenged her on in recent Korean scholarship is Iryŏp's position on women's movements after she became a Buddhist nun. After joining the monastery, she did not explicitly mention or engage with women's movements.

I argue that Iryŏp's Buddhism was her way of dealing with women's issues at multiple levels. The first was to propose that the Buddhist vision of the big-I or the great-self is the primal task women need to accomplish to liberate themselves from gendered identity. The search for the self through inner transformation is the first step to liberation. Iryŏp's life and philosophy offer more than the philosophizing of Buddhism in thinking about women's engagement with Buddhism.

Iryŏp employed an autobiographical style in her books, combining stories of her life with Buddhist teachings. As we follow Iryŏp through her personal life stories and the thoughts that appear in her books, we come to realize that similar events and theories have significantly different nuances and implications depending on how we contextualize them. In examining a life event and the ideas drawn from those events as "lived experience," we challenge the judgmental mode of thinking and instead use a life-based mode of thinking. Life needs to be lived and understood before it is judged according to the existing norms of society.

When we consider context and life events as the basis of our philosophy, a "narrative," instead of an abstract theory, emerges as a significant format for philosophizing. Telling the story of a life is a process of meaning production. Understanding narrative as a mode of philosophizing, we realize that narrative is an individual's way of reconciling with life. By restoring the narrative to the context of a person's life, which even the person herself might not have been able to see clearly at the time the events occurred, autobiographical writings highlight our engagement with life through our philosophizing. The primacy of lived experience also reflects Buddhism's attitude toward "philosophy." Through narrative philosophy based on lived experience, Kim Iryŏp's life shows us a paradigmatic way of how women engage with Buddhism in their life and spiritual cultivation.

Life As It Is
By Anja Tanhane

Caught in the self-centred dream, only suffering.
Holding to self-centred thoughts, exactly the dream.
Each moment, life as it is, the only teacher.
Being just this moment, compassion's way.
~ Joko Beck, practice principles of Ordinary Mind Zen

Being present to the moment.

As a mindfulness teacher in Australia, I am often asked by organisations to come and give a presentation on mindfulness to their staff. Occasionally I can spend a whole day with a small team, and feel that they have gained some understanding of mindfulness by the end of the day. Much of the time, however, I am only allocated one to two hours for my talk, with the expectation that by the end of the


MANDARIN/
CHINESE
KOREAN

session, the staff will be trained in mindfulness and will therefore feel less stressed, be more productive, and the organisation will need to pay less sick-leave. In healthcare settings, they ask how they can start teaching mindfulness to their clients, as if a one-hour talk by me can teach them all the skills necessary to offer mindfulness to patients with complex medical and mental health needs. Of course, this is completely unrealistic – the opposite of the Buddhist idea that it may take many lifetimes of sincere effort to gain significant insight on the spiritual path.

Mindfulness is everywhere now – schools, hospitals, universities, major corporations, even the U.S. army, are all endorsing mindfulness. There are thousands of studies demonstrating that mindfulness can help with stress and anxiety, strengthen the immune system, make us more effective at work, improve our interpersonal relationships, and even slow the ageing of the brain. Yet in my experience, even though I have taught mindfulness to several thousand people now, many of whom have completed the eight-week Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) course, only very few – a handful – have taken up a regular meditation practice. While doing the course, they notice significant improvements in their lives. They feel happier, appreciate life more, are able to deal with challenging emotions more effectively, sleep better, have more energy, find it easier to communicate with difficult family members, and no longer get lost for endless hours in ruminative thinking. After noticing all these benefits, at the end of the course, their intention is usually to keep meditating. And yet when I meet some of the participants a year or two later, hardly anyone is still meditating on a regular basis.

Why is this? Most people are reasonably disciplined around personal hygiene, taking their dog for a walk, mowing the lawn, getting their taxes done, ensuring their car is serviced on a regular basis. It's not as if the people I teach are lazy or undisciplined. They usually work hard, juggle many responsibilities, and are committed to doing their best. They might be in the gym at five in the morning, or spending their weekend looking after their elderly parents, or be up till midnight sewing costumes for their daughter's dance performance. The people I teach manage to fit an awful lot into their lives – but when it comes to twenty or thirty minutes of daily meditation, somehow this tends to slip by the wayside.

No doubt there are a number of reasons why people choose not to make meditation a part of their lives, even when they have experienced the benefits. I wonder if one reason is that secular mindfulness, or the use of mindfulness in clinical settings, does not address the Buddhist concepts of anatta (no self), dukkha (suffering, or the unsatisfactory nature of existence), and śunyata (emptiness). Sooner or later, if we meditate regularly, we are confronted with the question – if I'm not my thoughts, my emotions and my beliefs, then who am I? When we slow down enough and allow ourselves to stay present in the moment even though our mind is tempted by countless distractions, then we are sitting in the great emptiness. And emptiness, in Western thought, carries with it the notion of nihilism – that in the end, nothing actually matters, that life is empty, meaningless, and futile.

We have come out of the wreckage of two world wars in which millions of people were slaughtered, through the threats of nuclear annihilation during the cold war, and now find ourselves looking into a future of terrorism and climate catastrophe. Our human brains look for sanctuary and certainty, but also distraction from what we are bombarded with every day through the 24-hour news cycle. Scratch beneath the surface of the happy-go-lucky Australian image and there are many people with significant trauma in their lives – intergenerational trauma from wars, shocking levels of domestic violence and sexual assault, natural disasters such as bush fires and cyclones, high rates of anxiety disorders and depression. Some are refugees who have experienced torture and war in their former homelands. People usually come to mindfulness because they are struggling in some areas of their lives. Mindfulness can help alleviate some of the distress, but it also brings us face to face with "life as it is."

Life as it is, the only teacher. It is very difficult for us to be with life as it is. We are caught in the "self-centred dream," and without the framework of Buddhism, we are left with a sense that life should be easier, that we should be able to cope better. Once I've ticked the mindfulness box and learned a bit about it, surely life has to improve.

However, my experience with nearly twenty-five years of regular meditation, including twelve years in the Zen tradition, is that meditation doesn't get any easier. I'm less reactive than I used to be, and don't get as stressed, which is helpful. I understand that śunyata means both emptiness and fullness. I have a sense of Bhikkhu Thich Nhat Hanh's "interbeing." Some days, I feel my monkey mind is more settled than it was 20 years ago. Other days, I don't! But easy? Meditation is not easy.

Once we drop our self-centred pre-occupations, what is left of us? In Buddhism, we talk about śunyata, which is often translated as emptiness, but also means fullness, openness. I think of śunyata as interconnected emptiness, which links us to everything else. In the West, however, emptiness is usually seen as nihilism, which is a disconnected form of emptiness. Albert Camus once said, "Should I kill myself? Or have a cup of coffee?" What does emptiness mean, outside a religious context? How can we conceptualise emptiness in a Western secular setting?

Through mindfulness, I have been able to teach meditation to hundreds of people who would never have walked through the doors of a Buddhist centre. They tell me they have benefited, and I feel very fortunate to be able to offer this to people. Yet underlying the improvements, there is still often an attitude that life should be other than it is, that it is somehow fixable. Not only that, but that it should be fixable with little effort and support.

When I teach mindfulness, people just want to feel better. There are so many challenges to living a more mindful life: our busy society; our anxious brain which tries to keep us safe from predators; the lack of a narrative framework around suffering; intergenerational experiences of trauma; a society which rewards busyness and doesn't know what to do with silence and contemplation. There's little, if anything, in a modern Western society which encourages us to move away from the self-centred dream. So where does it leave mindfulness, taken out of the context of Buddhism? The benefits are proven in thousands of scientific studies, but the challenges are also worth talking about.

Buddhism and Social Enterprise: Creating a More Compassionate Economy

By Claralynn R. Nunamaker

In *Facing the Future*, Bhikkhu Bodhi writes:

> The massive transnational corporations that dominate this economic order, driven by the quest for commercial profit, have turned into the institutional embodiments of greed. Despite their impressive public-relations propaganda, their fundamental purpose is not to meet genuine human needs but to generate maximum profit at minimum cost. Profit is the fuel of corporate growth...[1]

In recent years, a new business sector has emerged: social enterprise. Social enterprises focus on a social or environmental mission rather than simply maximizing profits. In the U.K., social enterprise is understood to be unlike a charity in that it has a profit motive. But it is unlike a traditional corporation in that its primary directive is to further its social or environmental mission. The aim of social enterprise is to use "commercial strategies to maximise improvements in human and environmental well-being, rather than maximising profits for external shareholders."[2] Income comes from trading activity, grants, donations, or other sources.

This paper proposes that social enterprise is a business form especially well-suited to Buddhists, given its ethical foundation of commitment to social or environmental missions. It explores what social enterprise is, some of its distinguishing characteristics, and its relevance to Buddhism. The paper further proposes several ways in which the Buddhist community and social enterprises might look to identify and strengthen connections for mutual benefit.

What is Social Enterprise?

There is broad agreement that "social enterprises are businesses set up primarily to benefit people and the planet.[3] They have social or environmental missions, for example protecting an aspect of the environment, addressing social exclusion, improving employment or employability for a certain community, or providing affordable housing.

The term "social enterprise" is used in different ways by various organizations, however, and it can be argued that "the meaning of social enterprise is being eroded by the casual use of the term by a widening range of people."[4] For some, including the Voluntary Code of Practice for Social Enterprise in Scotland, the "asset lock" is key. An "asset lock" means that, on dissolution of the company, all residual assets must be passed on to another organization with the same or similar social mission. In other words, "Assets are legally protected and permanently retained for social or environmental benefit (this means they cannot be bought-out and privatized)."[5]

For others, how a social enterprise is defined is less strict. In its white paper, "What Makes a Social Enterprise a Social Enterprise?" Social Enterprise UK states, "While we believe an asset-lock is a desirable feature for all social enterprises, we recognize that there are some cases where it is not required."[6]

These differences in how social enterprise is defined account in part for discrepancies in the estimates of how many social enterprises are active in the UK. Researcher Simon Teadale writes that "Government publications show the number of social enterprises to have increased from 5300 to 62000 over a five year period.... We find that growth is mainly attributable to political decisions to reinterpret key elements of the social enterprise definition and to include new organizational types in sampling frames."[7] Nonetheless, characteristics are emerging that show important differences between social enterprises (defined relatively broadly, without the requirement of an asset lock) and traditional small and medium enterprises (SMEs). These differences are summarized in the following section.

Key Characteristics of Social Enterprise in the UK

In 2013, Social Enterprise UK conducted a survey of 9,024 social enterprises in the UK. To be categorized as a social enterprise, organizations needed to define themselves as social enterprises and generate at least 26% of their income from trading.[8] The data presented in this section are drawn from that survey, titled The People's Business.

Social enterprises were active in a wide range of business activities. Topping the list were business support, education, and employment and skills, followed by housing, retail, culture and leisure, and social care. Other areas of business engagement included financial support and services, health care, environment (e.g., recycling), childcare, transport, and others.[9]

One very interesting result of the survey was that women were found to be much more likely to hold positions of leadership in social enterprises than in SMEs:

> "… 38% of social enterprises are led by women, compared with just 3% of FTSE 100 companies and 19% of SMEs. What's more, 91% of social enterprises have at least one woman on the leadership team (vs 51% SMEs) and 28% have at least one member of the leadership team from a Black and Minority Ethnic background (vs 12% SMEs). It seems that the sector is not just changing the way we do business but also changing who does business.[10]

The figure for women as leaders of social enterprises was even stronger for start-ups. For enterprises under three years old, 41% were headed by women.[11] Social Enterprise UK has recently created a Woman's Champion Award, specifically in response to the results of its 2013 survey. This new platform for recognizing women leaders is being put in place because female leadership "is an important characteristic of the sector, and one that many people believe is key to its strength, growth and sustainability.[12]

Another interesting characteristic of social enterprises is that they are much more likely than SMEs to be working in areas of deprivation. As such, social enterprises may be seen as a force to strengthen social justice, by reducing poverty and providing more opportunities for employment, learning, social inclusion, and so on, in areas of deprivation. In the UK, the deprivation of geographic areas is assessed by the Index of Multiple Deprivation rankings. These rankings consider a number of factors, including health, employment, crime, education, income levels, barriers to social services or housing, and living environment.[13] The 2013 Social Enterprise UK survey found that the highest number of social enterprises (38%) worked in the areas with the greatest levels of deprivation (lowest quintile). As deprivation lessened, so did the activity of social enterprises. The activity of SMEs showed an opposite trend, with less activity (just 12%) in the most deprived areas, and the most activity in the top two quintiles, or least deprived areas.[14]

Regarding the financial viability of social enterprises, the survey presented various statistics showing that, although social enterprises had been adversely impacted by the recession, they performed on a whole comparable to or better than SMEs. Figures for social enterprises on turnover, growth, profitability, planned hiring of employees, and start-ups all matched or exceeded numbers for SMEs.[15]

Buddhists, Business, and Social Enterprise

What is the connection between social enterprise and Buddhism? It is important to remember that, as Bhikkhu Basnagoda Rahula writes in the book The Buddha's Teachings on Prosperity, "The Buddha never imposed limitations on his lay followers' efforts to be successful; instead, he clearly encouraged them to strive for success."[16] Further, he states, "The Buddha introduced a system of ethics into the process of acquiring wealth… Fairness is so vital to making a profit that…one should first make a resolution not to exploit others."[17]

Social enterprise provides a form of business that is in alignment with the Buddha's teachings insofar as it emphasizes both profit and an ethical foundation. Commitment to a social mission, rather than simply making a profit, can be seen as a resolution not to exploit others. While the ethical foundation of social enterprise is generally understood to be commitment to a specific social or environmental mission, there is nonetheless considerable scope for overlap with Buddhist values such as compassion, mindfulness, and awareness of the impact of one's actions, whether a person or a company. Furthermore, a successful

social enterprise is relevant to Buddhism because of the potential for the enterprise, or the people who run it, to contribute financially to Buddhist institutions. A business person using a portion of earnings to support those in monastic life is seen a skillful use of wealth, along with support for oneself and others, as outlined in the Adiya Sutta (AN 5.41):

> My wealth has been enjoyed,
> my dependents supported,
> protected from calamities by me.
> I have given supreme offerings
> & performed the five oblations.
> I have provided for the virtuous,
> the restrained, followers of the holy life.
> For whatever aim a wise householder
> would desire wealth, that aim I have attained.
> I have done what will not lead to future distress.[18]

Social enterprise might be seen as a kind of natural home for Buddhists engaged in business. The case of Windhorse:evolution, a well-known and longstanding example of a Buddhist social enterprise in the UK, illustrates the potential of weaving together Buddhism and social enterprise. Beginning from a market stall in 1980, Windhorse:evolution a successful Buddhist enterprise of the Triratna Community that now employs 250-300 staff members. Support Manager Dharmasiddhi explains, "Our mission is to raise money to promote the spread of Buddhism, promote Right Livelihood, do business ethically and to support the Buddhists that work for us to grow as individuals, we also practice ethical trade and where possible pass back some of our profits to the communities we buy from in developing countries."[19] Vajraketu , the former managing director of Windhorse:evolution, puts it this way: "If you want to make money for the Triratna Buddhist Community, you become a good businessman."[20]

Windhorse:evolution is owned by The Windhorse Trust, charitable organization. The organization has expanded the notion of Right Livelihood to encompass Team-based Right Livelihood. This vision includes creating supportive conditions both for personal practice and also for collective practice." Some profits are reinvested in Windhorse:evolution, but any additional profit is given to the trust for distribution to Buddhist or social projects. Past recipients of such distributions have included Free Buddhist Audio, Windhorse Publications, Clearvision, maternal healthcare projects in Nepal, and an orphanage in Thailand.

Putting it Together: Further Considerations and Conclusion

In many cases, the social or environmental mission that is the social enterprise's raison d'être overlaps with the aspirations of Buddhist organizations. Consider these social missions, from social enterprises in Moray, Scotland:

- Make a difference to the lives of young people in the local area, and helping them to reach their potential;
- Protect the future sustainability of the local community
- Improve the quality of life for the young people in rural Keith
- Deliver high quality childcare provision for 0 to 5 years, designed to enhance each child's full potential – socially, emotionally, physically and educationally – by innovative practices and procedures
- Develop, practice and teach skills for sustainable living, in harmony with ourselves, each other and the earth
- Support healthy eating

- Improve literacy and learning skills
- Make a difference to the lives of young people in Moray enabling them to become positive contributors to their community
- Preserve and protect the environment for the benefit of the community by re-using and recycling IT materials

In what practical ways might Buddhism and social enterprises with these kinds of missions work together in the everyday world? One angle to explore is bringing social enterprise to Buddhist organisations: monasteries, Buddhist communities, local groups, and social enterprises that specifically present themselves as Buddhist. This might include strategies such as:

- Social enterprises approaching Buddhist organisations to explore areas of shared concern or activity;
- Creating new Buddhist enterprises that aim to make a profit to further a social mission that is specific to Buddhism (akin to the example of Windhorse)
- Creating new ways (virtual or in-person) for Buddhist social enterprises to network, collaborate or otherwise work together

Equally, one might investigate bringing Buddhism to social enterprise. Buddhist organisations, whether monasteries, lay groups, charities, or trusts, might

- Through talks, writings, videos, or other means, encourage Buddhists who are social entrepreneurs to view their business as a form of practice, and bring Buddhist practice into their business
- Investigate ways of identifying and working with social enterprises that share a vision similar to that

of the Buddhist organization. This could range from simply using the services of a local social enterprise to partnering on joint projects
- Provide publications or other resources on mindfulness, meditation, or similar topics to interested social enterprises

These are only a few ideas, and clearly many more strategies are possible. The point is to actively look at the Buddhism-social enterprise link not only for mutual benefit but also for furthering a social mission. These ideas can obviously be extended to business in general, not just social enterprise. There is, admittedly, an assumption made in this paper that social entrepreneurs would have a greater interest in integrating Buddhism and business in these ways, given the ethical foundation of their commitment to social missions.

One Buddhist social entrepreneur in Scotland recently told me, "I walk a Buddhist way but never thought about connections in my social enterprise!"[21] To my mind, Buddhism, social enterprise, our society, and our planet all stand to benefit by thinking about, acting upon, and strengthening those connections.

Notes

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A Buddhist Seminar on ASEAN *Bhikkhunis*

By Bhikkhuni Dhammananda

On October 6, 2015, the Buddhapat Research Unit of the Buddhasavika Foundation and the network of Theravada Asian bhikkhunis organized a seminar on ASEAN bhikkhunis at Rajbhat University in Nakhonpathom Province. In the morning, a panel presented the history and development of bhikkhunis in five countries: Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and India.

The speakers included Bhikkhuni Lieu Phap (Vietnam), Bhikkhuni Dhammananda (Thailand), Bhikkhuni Thitacarini (Indonesia), Bhikkhuni Suniti (India), and Bhikkuni Sumangala (Malaysia).

Attendees at the seminar included 11 bhikkhus, 20 bhikkhunis and samaneris, and 500 students from Rajbhat University in Nakhonpathom. Many professors and lecturers also attended. This was the first time that most of the audience had witnessed a four-fold assembly of bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, laymen, and laywomen.

The afternoon program began with a formal inauguration. After the former rector of the university sounded a gong, the sangha, led by Bhikkhu Pra Khru Sudhammanath, chanted a blessing. After this, the five speakers from the morning program responded to questions from the floor for an hour. After this panel, students gathered around individual speakers to learn more about bhikkhunis from the five countries. The students were assigned to report on the event and therefore participated actively in the program.

In addition to these academic programs, there were also activities to introduce the students to the activities of a bhikkhuni temple. For example, the students participated in making donations for the kathina ceremony that was to be held the following month. A group of students helped prepare for the activities and also with transportation. The bhikkhunis and samaneris actively participated in both the academic seminar and the demonstration of temple activities, along with professors and lecturers – something that is rarely seen in Thailand. A film crew from Channel 11 sent a film crew to record the event for the media. The event coincided with Bhikkhuni Dhammananda's birthday and was a wonderful gift to her.

A Golden Ship

By Thavory Huot

Wat Sampov Meas (Golden Ship Temple) in Phnom Penh is out of the ordinary. Typically, temples in Cambodia provide housing and education for boys and young men, but not for women. Sampov Meas Temple sets a groundbreaking precedent by providing a Buddhist study program for laywomen and nuns. Even more extraordinary, one of the teachers in the study program is a nun. Her name is Heang Kim Yun, but everybody calls her Donchee Kea.

In Khmer language, the term donchee refers to a woman who lives a renunciant life. There are no fully ordained nuns (bhikkhunis) in Cambodia, but several hundred women there have chosen to live as donchee. They shave their heads, wear white robes, observe eight precepts, and devote their lives to practicing the Dhamma (the teachings of the Buddha). It is not the custom for nuns to go for alms like the monks. Instead, the nuns' families or friends usually provide their basic requirements. After the Pol Pot catastrophe in the 1970s, many women chose to leave the household life after losing their entire families and experiencing unimaginable suffering. In truth, most no longer had a home to leave.

Cambodian nuns are devoted to benefiting their communities.

In Cambodia, very few temples provide housing for women. Wat Sampov Meas is unusual both because it provides rooms for a small group of nuns and because it provides classes on Buddhism for both laywomen and nuns. Currently, the temple offers two different classes on Buddhism. One class is for monks, taught by the abbot of Wat Sampov Meas. The other class is for nuns and laywomen, taught by Nun Kea. The laywomen who join the classes are devout practitioners who work during the day as teachers, nurses, and shopkeepers. Many more women would like to join the classes, but are unable to read. Nun Kea teaches these women how to chant, the meaning of the chants, and about the qualities of the Buddha.

The curriculum for the class taught by the monk abbot includes Dhamma and Vinaya (monastic discipline). He focuses on kammathan: how to develop awareness, let go of delusions, and develop wisdom. The curriculum for the

Nuns and laywomen study Dhamma at Wat Sampov Meas.

class taught by Nun Kea is based on the tripitaka (the "three baskets": Vinaya, Suttas, and Abhidhamma). She focuses on apithorm: how to better understand the nature of the mind and its unsystematic way of seeing, listening, tasting, speaking, and thinking. She teaches that, through awareness and understanding, the uncontrolled mind can be trained. She expects that the participants will become educated, train their minds, and develop wisdom.

Along with their scriptural studies, the students train in mindfulness, so they can avoid negative responses and contribute to building peace within themselves, their communities, and society as a whole. Nun Kea teaches that when human beings are mindful, they are able to realize whether their daily activities are wholesome (kusala) or unwholesome (*akusala*), meritorious or demeritorious. With the insights the students gain through their studies, they come to realize that the quality of their actions depends on the quality of their mental states. With practice, they learn to let go of habitual tendencies that create suffering.

Buddhist Artist: Suzanne Rees Glaister

The Buddhist art of Suzanne Rees Glanister reflects her 30 years of Buddhist practice in the Nichiren tradition. Born in Wales, her formative experiences for both Buddhism and art took place in several different countries, as her father's work exposed her to many perspectives on life. In the post-World II ruins of Germany, she encountered the sufferings of children who had little to eat and witnessed the enlightened behavior of her mother, who invited the children as often as she could for meals at their home. In Sri Lanka, she saw children surrounded by poverty and disease and was inspired by the brilliant glittering colors of humming birds, flowers, shimmering saris, and Buddhist paintings. Later, she lived in Nigeria and Ghana.

After boarding school in England, Suzanne became fascinated by theater, design, sets, and costumes. She worked with Sean Kenny and later Jocelyn Herbert, eventually working on her own. After marriage and three children,

she began developing her Buddhist practice, painting, and teaching art. Her paintings range from a series on old people in sheltered housing to those inspired by the 18th-century haiku master Chiyo-ni. Her latest series is based on the *Lotus Sutra*. She finds the act of drawing to be a form of meditation that leads to discovery in new directions. Her paintings convey an understanding of life that includes love and compassion as well as darkness and destruction. Sharing her work with others brings a sense of completion and a feeling that others have enjoyed life a little more because of her work.

Seeds for a Boundless Life: Zen Teachings from the Heart by Zenkei Blanche Hartman
Reviewed by Konin Melissa Cardenas, Guiding Teacher at Empty Hand Zen Center

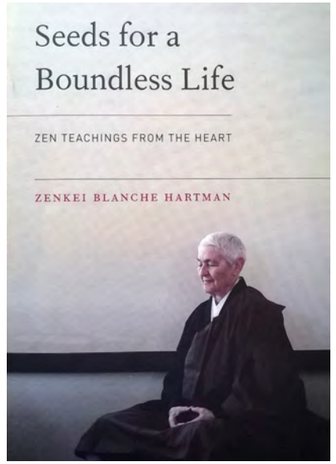
Zenkei Blanche Hartman's first Dharma book has been released in this, her 89th year of life, after more than four decades of practice. It's not that she didn't have anything to say until now. It's just that she was fully engaged in doing it, rather than writing about it.

When I arrived at San Francisco Zen Center in late 2003, Blanche was already the first woman abbot of three of the largest Zen temples in America. She had already been living Zen for 30 years by that time, but I didn't know anything about that, because she did not depend on titles or on power for her authority. At that time, I only knew the old woman whose practice was so "no nonsense," down-to-earth, and determined that I often found myself amazed.

One day, I called to make an appointment for dokusan, the one-on-one practice encounter that is a traditional way of meeting a Zen teacher. The person who answered the phone at the front office said, "Hold on a moment." I thought I was being transferred to her assistant, as most of the senior teachers at SFZC had help with setting their appointments. Instead, I was surprised to hear Blanche's voice on the other end of the phone. I expressed my surprise and told her that I wanted to set up an appointment to meet with her. She replied, "Do you usually come to zazen (seated meditation) at the first period (which starts at 5:25 am) or second period (which starts at 6:05 am)?" I answered that I usually did not come to zazen in the morning, but preferred the evening sits. Blanche did not hesitate for a moment. She replied, "If you begin coming for morning zazen, maybe you can give me a call back then." I sputtered, tried to explain, and said I'd come in early, but Blanche just replied, in her slight Southern accent, "It's okay. Just call me then."

That combination of rigor and kindness shines clearly throughout her book, Seeds for a Boundless Life. In it, we hear the story of how Blanche engaged courageously in the study of the self and how she came to Zen Buddhist practice. One particularly poignant example, which Blanche often recounts in her Dharma talks, is an encounter at a strike at San Francisco State University in the 1960s. Blanche came face to face with a policeman in riot gear and, meeting his eyes, had a sudden realization of shared identity. She calls this "the most transformative moment" of her life, one that made it clear that there was no longer anything to fight over. This knowledge eventually led her to Suzuki Roshi, someone who could help her understand what had happened.

In this short book, we find Blanche's teachings divided into three categories: "Seeds" contains short writings on fundamental aspects of practice, "Dharma Talks" expounds the teachings, and "Seeds of Advice" contains her responses to questions posed in the magazine Buddhadharma. Each of these forms of teaching reveals Blanche's lifetime of practice. They also reveal her deep appreciation for her teacher



Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, the teachings of Zen, and the teachers of many other Buddhist traditions.

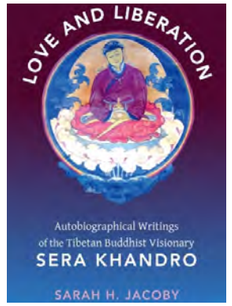
Yet it is her living Zen teaching that can be heard most clearly in the words in this book, as when she defines true renunciation: "just to welcome your life as it arrives moment by moment…being as open to it as you can." She goes on, "this is leaving behind all of your preferences," a reference to the famous Ch'an poem Hsin-Hsin Ming (Faith in Mind." Or her teaching that sitting zazen is "finding your home where you are." These simple yet profound expressions demonstrate Blanche's place among the ancestors of Zen.

Over the years, I found that Blanche's practice was also a very intimate one, fostering a closeness that made authenticity possible. This, too, shines through her writings, as she exhorts us again and again to find our practice in the midst of relationship, as she did, in her relationship to her teacher, her husband of 60 years, and her students. Most prominent in her writings, however, is relationship expressed as compassion, manifest in the Metta Sutta and the practice of the four immeasurables (brahmaviharas). Many years ago, Blanche began leading a small group of practitioners in chanting the invocation of Avalokiteshvara (Enmei Jukku Kannon Gyo) every morning, to benefit those who were suffering from illness and distress. Blanche continues this practice even when traveling. I have been met by Blanche's compassionate heart over and over again, and readers of this book will be met by Blanche this way as well. May we all nourish the seeds of a boundless life as Zenkei Blanche Hartman has.

Love and Liberation: Autobiographical Writings of the Tibetan Buddhist Visionary Sera Khandro by Sarah Jacoby
Reviewed by Rebecca Paxton

This fine analysis of Sera Khandro's (1892-1940) spiritual autobiography is a revelation and delight. Beautifully organized, the book is written in a style that makes the excellent research and translation accessible [because "fine" is used in the first sentence] even to non-scholars.

At the age of seven, a girl named Sera Khandro began having visions and dialogues with dakinis and local guardian spirits in the Lhasa area of Tibet. At the age of 15, she left home with a pilgrimage caravan in order to avoid a marriage arranged by her prosperous family. After she arrived in a remote eastern region of Tibet, penniless and unfamiliar with the local language, she began her spiritual journey. She studied with a number of teachers and became a treasure revealer (terton), a tantric healer, and eventually a tantric consort in a mutually loving, co-creative, and spiritually fruitful relationship with a revered Tibetan lama.



Sera Khandro wrote other biographies and poetry, too. In spite of innumerable misfortunes and social alienation, she deepened her experience through a range of loving relationships with human beings, nature spirits, dakinis, and a pantheon of deities and Buddhist adepts. These relationships not only fostered the fulfillment of her own spiritual goals but also to offer immeasurable service to many practitioners and their communities. With the publication of this clearly written book, Sarah Jacoby has brought us a new Tibetan treasure that is insightful and inspiring on many levels.

Review of "This Very Life"
by Joanne Feinberg

"This Very Life" is a beautifully filmed short-form documentary that presents a compelling portrait of Burmese Buddhism and the lives of Burmese Buddhist nuns in the Sagaing hills of Myanmar. Sagaing is the site of innumerable monasteries in a country that has one of the highest concentrations of monastics in the world. The area is famed for producing highly respected scholars and contemplatives.

"This Very Life" serves as a vehicle to raise awareness of the nuns who lead by example as they walk through their lives with generosity, humility, and kindness. Ranging in age from seven to seventy, the nuns offer new perspectives on living in the moment. Their peaceful lives are signposts for how to find deep and abiding well-being in our modern and troubled world.

An award-winning, all-female crew filmed the documentary in December 2014. Not surprisingly, the team found the pink- and orange-robed nuns to be inspiring in their devotion to following the Buddha's teachings as a way of life. With the filming now complete, the editing phase of production has begun. The production team expects to complete the film in the spring of 2016.

For more information visit: thisverylifethemovie.com. A link to the trailer provides a glimpse of the nunnery and stunning footage from the documentary.

"Fantastic Stories of Könchok Paldrön and her Enlightened Children"

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Further Reading

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