SAKYADHITA NEWSLETTER

Vol.4, No.1 (Summer 1993)

Contents

Spiritual Development of the Child

Or, "What did they do with the Dalai Lama?"

by Alanda Wraye

We have a modern cultural fantasy that children are by nature pure. Parents tend to scrutinize a new baby's personality for special characteristics and imagine a highly successful future for their child. Some of us look for indications that our child is highly evolved spiritually.

The mind of a child, however, is not ordinarily a limpid pool of wisdom. Like all of us, children are driven by desire, greed, dissatisfaction, and anger. As children grow and the brain develops neurologically, these themes arise repeatly. In each phase of development, we find that children's actions are compelled by impulse, namely, how to get what "I" want. As the child's "I" differentiates itself from the "I" of others at about the age of three, desires become more personalized. A personality gradually manifests its own definite style, whether passionate, aggressive, cautious, or otherwise, according to the child's karmic affinities. Socially, we talk about the "terrible two's." After that, we are so dismayed we don't say anything!

Parents are normally interested in doing what they can to protect and nurture their children. We recognize that the best way to care for a child is to be deeply attentive to her needs. In addition, Buddhist practitioners realize that, as with other phenomena, there are obstacles to seeing a child as he is. Eventually, we hope to become clearly aware of all aspects, including the nature of being wholly responsive to love and the deluded mind of relative reality.

Living with a child gives us an opportunity to observe universal human nature, especially to observe how the mind responds to conditions. Still, young children are different from adults, because of their immaturity. It is the relative lack of conditioning that gives children their appealing innocence. Babies look around, smiling and laughing at what pleases them, crying and seeking our protective arms when they are not pleased. For awhile, we do not hold babies accountable for their feelings. At this early stage, they have not yet learned to mask and deny their feelings. They cry, scream, and reach out, acting on their desires. It is obvious that they are not naturally happy. As time goes on, distress steadily increases in both mind and body, and various cultural

strategies are learned for dealing with this distress. Underlying these behaviors, the child is experiencing the first noble truth: life is suffering.

Many therapies exist to help adults and children overcome their conditioning, developed from honest attempts to look at pain. They offer us positive thinking, an optimistic personality, a healthy personality. They tell us we can choose to be happy. Although these methods are wonderful and instructive, they only approach the truth. Underlying these therapies is a belief that we are born in a primal state of wisdom, free of suffering, and can get back to it once and for all. They do not help us realize the nature of the mind. They do not teach us that desires lead to suffering. They do not teach us impermanence. They do not teach us selflessness.

We all have some memory of the celebrated "wonder" of childhood. Children do have a capacity for immediate encounter with experience - for "unadulterated confrontation," as Ven. Ayya Khema so clearly puts it. Our childhood memories are often graphic images of places or people or things. The great physical detail we remember shows that we were present with all our senses. Still, this is not the wisdom of knowing absolute reality. As adults we may experience it again, as if for the first time, like children. But now, as adults, there is the possibility of getting a totally new understanding of these sense contacts. As Ven. Ayya Khema says, "One can then - for a moment - actually see reality as it is."

Children often ask fundamental questions of philosophy, such as "Who am I?" Since kindergarten and even before, my daughter has told me about her sense of self in the world and in relationship to other people. Her words are amazingly profound. I have learned, however, that the feelings of the child, the feelings behind the words, are quite different from how we adults interpret the words. Children are primarily concerned with security and this concern is very concretely in their minds. The child's concern for security is natural, but also reflects a deluded state of mind.

When accepting the Noble Peace Prize, the Dalai Lama observed: "Since every human being wants happiness and does not want suffering, it is clear that this desire does not come from training, or from some ideology. It is something natural. Therefore, I consider that the attainment of happiness, peace, and joy is the purpose of life." Recognizing that the attainment of happiness is the purpose of life can greatly alter a parent's

perspective. Our goals and attachments can be seen from a new point of view. If the important lesson is to avoid clinging and fear, what else do we hope to achieve? Because babies are helpless and dependent upon us for maintaining their lives, we move a little bit away from self-centeredness and toward giving without expectations of receiving something in return. Gradually we can extend this accepting attitude to others in our lives as well. Parents' commitment to their children helps them discover what leads to the experience of happiness and also what stands in the way.

To the extent that we are aware of our own feelings, we can observe the feelings of our children. We can see the fragility of the human experience, and also its predictability - totally at the mercy of feeling good or not feeling good. What if we were able to understand feelings (of liking and disliking, wanting and not wanting) as something to be accepted, but not necessarily to be acted upon? What if we were able to respond to our children without attachment to results? What if we could interact with them without wanting something in return, such as controlled behavior, love, obedience, or solitude? The pain of parenting lies in this descrepancy between our love for our children and our personal stress in responding to their needs. While parents want only their children's welfare, we often find ourselves hurting them.

I once heard an interview with a man who said that his mother was happy. At that moment I felt, 'What a great gift she gave him!' As a parent, my desire to be a happy person for the benefit of my children has been a strong motivation for spiritual practice. I think that all parents must feel a wish to be happy when faced with a smiling child. As the Dalai Lama points out: "If unpleasant things happen in our daily life, we immediately pay attention to them, but do not notice other pleasant things. We experience these as normal or usual. This shows that compassion and affection are part of human nature."

The qualities of compassion and affection are beautifully evident in children. The minds of children have an easy capacity for generosity and love. When young, they do not yet have strong negative habit patterns. Three-year-olds often say "I love you" and declare how much they like everyone they know. Most of all, children are very responsive to kindness and compassion. Since loving is security for them, they can easily give up their anger and hatred in a greater desire to feel loved. These qualities of kindness and compassion can be nurtured and strengthened. If we give them a good model, children will learn from their experience of our peacefulness. The sooner we can abandon agitation, the sooner they can experience the benefits of a quiet mind. An ability to

recognize irritation before acting upon it and to respond to anger with compassion will be their greatest teacher.

My second child is deeply reflective and is also dominated by emotion. When he was three, his anger and desire for revenge were constant factors in his relationships, particularly with his older sister. Anything that spoiled his sense of harmony, especially, hurt him and made him mad! One day, shortly after I began to study the Dharma, I changed my response to his anger from asking him to relax to recognizing that he was in pain and hugging him. Although lost in passionate anger, he would say "I need a hug," and I would say "Hug! Hug! You need a hug." Even at that age, he learned to surrender his anger and melt in affection.

Just as the Dalai Lama says, the purpose of life is to be happy, and it certainly is a pleasure to see our children happy. Unfortunately, our culture is rife with adversarial relationships with children. I suspect that this is one of the most significant differences between our children's lives and the Dalai Lama's life as a child. The adversarial point of view - that a child is trying to take advantage of an adult - presents a model of fear and attachment. Communicating distrust and disapproval, it destroys happiness.

The distinction between pleasure and happiness is important for parents. Pleasure is a fleeting experience derived from sense contact, mental or physical. Happiness is an abiding contentment. Parents often want to give their children pleasure and use pleasure to divert a child's attention. If only it were possible to give someone a state of mind!

True happiness lies in spiritual development. At the same time, Ven. Ayya Khema says that a person must understand happiness before she can meditate. A mind in distress cannot meditate, but will only experience distress. Experiencing kindness and compassion makes one happy, so as parents, we facilitate our children's spiritual development by being kind and compassionate, which also gives them a sense of confidence. Children are very trusting. Out of love for us, they will accept what we say and try to do as we do.

One of the most important expressions of kindness and compassion is being encouraging, not critical. But Western philosophy and psychology, aimed at building solid and secure egos, rely on methods of criticism and correction. We are uncomfortable with anxiety, uncertainty, ineptness, and mistakes. Some fathers and mothers are so ambitious and critical that their children are reduced to helplessness, fulfilling the parents' fears.

I once observed a remarkable swimming instructor. She encouraged every effort, saying "Good job!" She never said "That's better," suggesting a need for improvement. Her attention was totally with her students and her concern was equal for each. Naturally, all the students increased their skills in such an environment.

The desire to protect children by controlling the circumstances of their lives is something we must examine. Like Milarepa, the great Tibetan saint, we must invite the ogres of our minds to come in for tea. In my own life, I was able to befriend a seven-year-old neighborhood bully and watch the changes in him. At first, we thought this kid would require too much of attention, but our son, eager for a friend, liked his high energy and rough-housing! Not wanting to say, "This boy is bad. You can't play with him," I took it as my practice. In the beginning, his behavior was mean and provocative. He would spit in a display of self-loathing, anticipating the rejection he was accustomed to. Soon, however, we saw his smiling, eager face at our door wanting to play (everyday). This dramatic change to a playful and cooperative child, first with us and then with other neighborhood children, occurred in just a few months and was not particularly taxing. All we did was focus on what we liked about him. We told him we liked him and told him he had good ideas. Letting go of fear and attachment, we concentrated on giving simple responses with mental clarity, which required little effort. Moreover, our children were not provoked to fight with him. Our son had never encountered a bully before and was only intent on being friends.

In another instance, a child yelled and criticized, displaying verbally and emotionally abusive behavior. I had more difficulty accepting this child with kindness and compassion. I watched to see how my son responded to such unkind treatment. At first his face looked hurt, and he drifted away from the game, but later accepted it with a wholesome attitude and joined in again.

"One cannot see in others what isn't happening in oneself." All spiritual teachings tell us this and we know it from experience. Parents, challenged by their child's recalcitrance or volatility, find themselves on the defensive here. They cannot see how they themselves have created this behavior. Yet, although each child comes into the world with its own karmic propensities, the same child will have a different relationships with different people. My husband's story of life with our children is not the same as mine. At the same time, our children's spiritual development is our own spiritual development. Ultimately, one's response to the dynamic of the present moment is the crucial issue.

Our minds develop and function by actions of identification. People with children know this. They've seen their children raise their legs over bushes in imitation of dogs. The children are not simply pretending to be dogs - they are being dogs. In the same way, our children will develop to be like us. They will do and say the same things that we do and say. They identify with us, and will try out for themselves the actions they see us do. In the same way, the untrained mind of an adult unconsciously identifies with its perceptions, believing and impulsively acting upon them. For this reason, the spiritual practice of parenting is a matter of clearing away obstacles to seeing the child as she is. At present our ability to experience life directly is limited by our perceptions and our automatic reactions to them, but through meditation practice we learn to recognize this process. We realize that mental formations are highly personal and derive from past experiences. In parenting, we begin to see behavior patterns formed in our childhood compulsively being acted out with our children.

An infant is utterly dependent on others for survival and vulnerable to the quality of care received. Recognizing this, the Dalai Lama says "a child is dependent upon the kindness and compassion of others." Thus, a child's spiritual development begins with experiencing kindness and compassion. As with all of us, a child's spiritual development is related to other aspects of physical and mental development. Growth naturally expresses itself in curiosity, exploration, and investigation, the final question always being, "Am I happy?"

Contentment is the basis of kindness and is a factor of non-attachment. Non-attachment to results enables us to be contently and whole-heartedly with our children. By being contented ourselves, we give children a model to emulate. Children learn more from what we do than from the lectures we give. This is a fundamental principle in every stage of their neurological development.

The door is never locked when I am meditating. At first my children came and sat on my lap. Now it is just "Mom's meditating." It is no mystery, just meditation. We can share our practice with our children by being a model of contentment, loving kindness, and compassion, and by using reason, which helps prepare the mind for alternative responses. As in our own practice, we can gently call attention to what is happening in the mind. In cases of conflict, rather assigning blame, we can draw attention to the inner causes of conflict: desire, response to hurt, or the desire to hurt. We can ask what anger feels like and how it arises. We can help them see that it always brings unhappiness and never helps.

My son, almost six now, cannot always surrender his anger with a hug. He often becomes attached to it. I have begun asking him to observe his breath when irritated or angry, just as I try to do myself. Once, when I had to remove him from a room and hold him to calm him down, I breathed deeply myself first, then he joined me and we both relaxed. A week or so later he asked me, "Why is my breath always warm coming out of me?" I answered automatically, "Your body warms it up." Later I realized that he was watching his breath - not only noticing that it is warm, but that it is constantly warm!

We can help direct children's attention to their immediate experience. We can teach them learn to observe both body and mind. When a child hits something or knocks something over, it is helpful to briefly review what happened. Ask if her mind was occupied with something else. Explain the wisdom of doing just one thing at a time. When a child is fixated on wanting something, tell her to think about something else for awhile. Ask, "Where are your feet?" When a child is fixated on anger ask, "Where in the body is the anger tube? Where does the anger come out?"

Our cultural solutions regarding self-esteem, "Be yourself" and "Above all, to thine own self be true...," are often quite different from Buddhist solutions. Buddhist psychology is profoundly introspective. We are taught to "look at what you are holding on to" and to question "what is it you are wanting?" These methods work well with children. One morning, after a day filled with disputes, my son looked up from play with a bright toothless smile and matter-of-factly said, "Mom, do you know what? I forgot all my madness against Alan and now I like him."

Teaching from an open heart and teaching from reason are interrelated. Kindness and compassion are also naturally related to ethics and responsiblity. The moral precept to "harm no living thing" checks the impulse to smash a snail. The advice on loving kindness teaches us to carry spiders gently from the bathtub to the yard. The advice to "take nothing that is not given" shows us what to do when a toy is found at the playground. From her work with children, Maria Montessori concluded that they are naturally cooperative. Children, like all human beings, respond naturally to kindness and compassion. They learn that kindness and compassion bring happiness - a natural process of spiritual development.

In the time it has taken to write this article, my practice has deepened. The anxiety in response to my son's anger has abated. I feel more accepting of him - angry little future buddha - and this seems to reflect a greater acceptance of myself. Sometimes I still have to intervene, separating him from a conflict or holding him, but I no longer try to instruct him. I simply focus on making my own body and mind as peaceful as possible. This is an example from my own life of the relationship between Dharma practice and parenting.

My role as a parent is to cultivate a positive mind. By cultivating positive mind states, I can nurture the wholesome nature within my children. Beyond this, I have no program for the spiritual development of children. The program is simply sharing our lives with them: as we meet teachers, study Dharma, meditate, chant sutras, sing kirtan, dance Sufi dances, light incense, bow, offer thanks for our food, and look at mandalas and images of bodhisattvas. Children seem to yearn for spiritual truth. I watch my children's keen interest in God and the Dharma. They love ritual and devotion, and they want guidelines that show them how to live. Remembering our own experiences as a child, we can be present as they ask their questions, even if we have no answers.

I am not sure how they handled the Dalai Lama as a child, but I know that Tibetans are very practical people. Perhaps he was allowed to be both a child and an incarnation of the 13th Dalai Lama. He has said that he did not take an interest in spiritual studies until he was fifteen, an age when there is a biological push toward the use of higher mental functions. Perhaps his teachers, those highly realized masters, were role models who simply waited patiently until the time was right.

May all parents be happy.

Reflection on gender bias in popular Buddhism:

Women and Buddhism in Vietnam

by Dr. Norma Fain Pratt

Last summer in July, I visited Vietnam on a special Women-To-Women tour sponsored by the Vietnamese Women's Union, the official women's organization of Vietnam with a membership of about 11,000,000. I travelled with a ten-woman delegation made up of teachers, graduate students, community health workers, scientists, photographers, and actors. We all had feminist backgrounds, with experiences in the U.S. woman's movement. And we were interested in seeing first-hand the quality of life for women in Vietnam, where an important transition from socialism to a mixed economy has been underway for several years.

I was particularly curious about what had happened to the practice of Buddhism among women in a country where I had heard that Buddhism was, at best, "officially controlled" and, at worst, suppressed. In recent years not much information about the state of Buddhism in Vietnam, especially for women, had filtered into the media.

Initially my inquiries into the state of women and Buddhism were met with little interest by our hosts from the Vietnamese Women's Union. However, when I learned that a Buddhist nun was an active, respected member of the Women's Union itself and that she headed a temple ("pagoda") in Ho Chi Minh City, the Women's Union arranged for me to visit. The journal notes I kept on my visit to Chua Pho Da Pagoda are dated July 28, 1992. Perhaps my very personal experiences will open one small window for others into the world of women and Buddhism in contemporary Vietnam.

I had just about given up on finding Buddhist nuns in Vietnam when the President of the Women's Union in Ho Chi Minh City said at a meeting, "A Buddhist nun is on the Executive Committee of the local Women's Union." When I asked if I could meet her, Ms. Nguyen Thi Ngoc Tam, in charge of International Relations, smiled and agreed. A time was set for Wednesday morning.

When the time arrived, we drove through the energetic, bustling streets of Ho Chi Minh City. All the streets, wide and narrow, were filled with motorcyclists, pedicabs, and bicycles. My eyes swam across the sea of shops - food stands, fruit markets, and small stores packed with an enormous array of small industrial objects, watches, and rubber tires. The conical hats of people on bicycles bobbed by. Girls wearing smart iridescent black hats with lavender ribbons flew by our cab, some driving their own mopeds and some on the backs of big Honda bikes.

Ms. Tam and I talked about what I might ask the nun: How many nuns are there in Vietnam? Why do girls or women become nuns? What role do nuns play in Vietnamese society? Historically, how were they involved in the resistance to the South Vietnamese regime in the 1960's? What kind of education do they receive? Were they self-ordained or part of an official Bhiksuni Sangha? To my surprise, Ms. Tam told me that she is a Buddhist. "Nothing special," she said.

"Do you know any nuns?" I asked.

"Well, yes. A distant relative in a far province," she replied.

"Why do women become nuns?" I asked.

"Something inside," she said. "Many women are also devoted at home. They have altars at home and they also go to the pagodas. Lay women, those who stay at home, often take care of the pagodas, feed the monks and attend to the candles, incense, flowers, and all that."

After travelling through some winding, narrow streets in a residential neighborhood, the cab pulled into the driveway of a simple pagoda set back from the street. I could see a tiny, elderly, hunchbacked woman in a grey robe waiting at the door. Other nuns were visible inside, moving back and forth with a great flurry of busy excitement. Dressed in grey and yellow, they were of all ages, but mostly young.

Introductions started almost as soon as Ms. Tam and I walked through the door. We entered an antechamber, but out of the corner of my eye, I saw perhaps 50 women nuns sitting in meditation positions in a large adjacent room. They were chanting and ringing bells.

I was introduced to the head nun, whose given name is Nguyen Thi Nghia. From Ms. Tam, I learned she was born in 1940 of Vietnamese parents living in Cambodia. She started to study in a Buddhist school at the age of 12. In 1958, she returned to Vietnam from Cambodia. She spent the next ten years in Saigon, now Ho Chi Minh City, where she received a Buddhist education. In 1968, she went to study Zen Buddhism at Vung Tan and returned to Saigon in 1978. She has been at the pagoda for several years now.

I took out my tape recorder to make sure to record Ms. Tam's translation as she spoke into the little area labelled "MIC." I thought I pressed the red circle button labelled "REC," but later when I returned to my hotel room, alas! I discovered I hadn't recorded anything. There was only a long silence on the tape. Was this a Zen joke?

What I remember from this interview with Nguyen Thi Nghia is that the pagoda regularly houses about 30 nuns and it is a school. Every July, there is a special educational session and nuns from all over the district - about 130 in number - convene in the pagoda for several days. There are about 500 nuns in this particular district of Ho Chi Minh City. She didn't know how many nuns there were in all of Vietnam. There is a central pagoda which houses this kind of statistics.

The education of nuns takes about 12 years. Still, she thought there is really too little education for women. Girls are not as educated as well as boys. There are many women in pagodas in Vietnam, she continued, but there is no pagoda exclusively for women. She would like to create one - an Institute for Higher Education for Women.

After the interview, I was graciously treated to lunch with the head nun and a group of other women nuns in their dining room. Many people passed by our table, including a boy about ten years old who came to the table especially to talk to Nguyen Thi Nghia. His head was shaved, but he had a tiny, long pigtail cascading from the top of his head to below his shoulders.

"He's an orphan. We take care of orphans. We've taken in two disabled children and raised them. We distribute rice to the neighborhood poor," my host tells me.

Sometime during lunch there was talk of a visa to France. Someone brought my host's passport to show me. It was new and unused. She has an exit visa from Vietnam, but she has been refused a visa by the French government. They showed me the letter of refusal, which did not state any reason.

"We need help," Nguyen Thi Nghia tells to me. "International connections."

I asked her if she knew about Sakyadhita. "No," she replied. Just then, Ms. Tan came into the room with her arm around a thin nun in a grey robe. "My old friend from high school years," she smiles. "We just met after many, many years. I didn't know she had become a nun."

The case of Buddhist nuns in Thailand

by Narumon (Pook) Hinshiranan

Most scholars of gender and religion in Thailand assert that according to Buddhist thinking, men and women have different potential to attain nirvana. Thai women are often seen as religiously subordinate because they represent worldly attachment. For

example, Jane Bunnag, a British anthropologist, writes, "In Thailand, as in other Theravada Buddhist countries, women are believed to be the inferior sex, because they epitomize those sensual pleasures which form the chief obstacle to any man's spiritual advancement." A Burmese scholar, Khin Thitsa, suggests "With the low value attached to the female body and the female spirit by Buddhism, she has been sufficiently degraded...." Thomas Kirsch, an American anthropologist, asserts that "Women's Buddhist religious roles are poorly developed and not highly regarded, for women are 'incapable' of tearing themselves away from their worldly attachments."

Charles Keyes, another American anthropologist, agrees that the image of women in Buddhism is that of earthly attachment. He argues that both men and women are equally able to realize nirvana, but their paths to nirvana are different: "...in popular Buddhist culture the dominant image of woman is one that has a strongly religious cast and carries a positive value. This image is of the mother who nurtures the religion by bearing sons who will one day enter the Sangha and by providing sustenance on a regular basis to those whose membership in the Buddhist order makes them a 'field of merit.'"

If women are a representation of "worldliness," does this imply that the religious or spiritual place of women is inferior to that of men? I will try to answer this question by investigating the images of Thai nuns through comparison with their male and female counterparts, namely monks and laywomen.

In doctrinal Buddhism, a woman can attain enlightenment by herself through meditation and moral discipline. Hence, she is religiously self-sufficient. Since the female image in doctrinal Buddhism is equal to the male, gender oppression is not an issue. However, in popular Buddhism, it is believed that women can attain ultimate merit by supporting her male kin, especially her son, to become ordained in a Buddhist monastery. Consequently, women are seen as dependent on men for making merit and thus not religiously self-sufficient.

Hence, popular Buddhism manifests gender bias. In Thai society, Buddhist nuns can be categorized as a marginal group that occupies an ambiguous niche in the secular world as well as the religious realm.

Who Are the Thai Buddhist Nuns?

Thai Theravada Buddhist nuns are women who live an ascetic lifestyle by shaving their heads, wearing white robes, and following certain precepts. Most of the nuns have taken eight precepts, but some have taken ten. Thai nuns are generally known as "mae chi." The ritual ordination of mae chi requires a woman to receive the precepts from a monk or a senior mae chi. This is usually done after they have shaved their head and donned a white robe. Mae chi may stay at home, in a temple, or a nunnery. When a mae chi wants to leave the religious life, she may do so by returning to the preceptor and again wearing lay clothes.

The first reference to mae chi appears in a letter written by a foreigner who came to Thailand in 1639. The letter recounts that the mae chi order was established some three hundred years earlier. Therefore, we can assume that the order of Buddhist nuns has existed in Thailand since the fourteenth century.

At present there is an organization for Thai nuns called the Institute for Thai Mae Chi under the royal patronage of the Queen of Thailand. It consists of 518 nunneries in 47 provinces. According to the secretary of the Institute, there are 4,158 registered mae chi. Nevertheless, the Department of Religious Affairs reports that there are altogether 20,000 mae chi in Thailand. Thus, it is quite obvious that many mae chi are not registered with the Institute and remain independent or "illegitimate."

The Religious Status of Thai Nuns in Comparison to Monks

Mae chi are not actually the counterparts of Thai monks. They do not belong to either of the four groups in the Buddhist community which consists of ordained males (bhikkhu), ordained females (bhikkhuni), laymen (upasaka) and laywomen (upasika). The former two groups are those who lead a life in full pursuit of nirvana; the latter two practice religious discipline yet at the same time maintain worldly occupations.

Mae chi are not accepted as part of the Sangha (the ordained Buddhist assembly) because they are not deemed to be propagators of the Dhamma. They are not allowed to interpret the Dhamma, do not officially teach Buddhism or hold religious rituals.

The equal counterpart of the bhikkhu is the bhikkhuni. The order of bhikkhuni was established since Lord Buddha's time in the sixth century B.C. Then it was introduced to Sri Lanka by Sanghamitta Theri in third century B.C. During the tenth century A.D., the order disappeared due to foreign invasions and war. Since the Theravada bhikkhuni order is extinct, there has been no continuous bhikkhuni lineage in that tradition. According to the Vinaya (the Buddhist religious rules), full bhikkhuni ordination requires the presence bhikkhus and a minimum of five elder bhikkhuni. If there are no bhikkhuni to officiate, the ordination of new bhikkhuni cannot be done. Hence, the lineage of bhikkhuni has never existed in Thai society.

The living conditions of mae chi are relatively poor. If they live in a temple, they are often automatically subordinate to monks. Most mae chi live in the poorer quarters of the temple. Their daily activities include cooking, cleaning, washing, and maintaining the temple grounds. James Hughes observes that: "In Thailand nuns cook for themselves and for the monks, as well as performing other labour which would be forbidden if they were fully ordained. They frequently have merely replaced motherly responsibilities with those of celibate housewives, though with even more exaggerated subservience than laywomen."

The accounts of monks confirms this subservient status. One monk wrote that when he visited a very ill nun at a nunnery, she came out to welcome him with water to cleanse his feet, laid out a mat for him, brought drinking water, and paid respect to him. Even though the nun was physically unfit, she felt a responsibility to submissively perform services for the monk.

Thai language also indicates the inferior status of mae chi in relations to monks. The Thai numerical classifier for monks is "ong," which expresses holiness, sacredness, or high status. It is also used for Lord Buddha, Buddha images, angels, deities, saints, and members of the royalty. The classifier for mae chi, on the other hand, is "khon," the same word used for ordinary people.

Many groups of mae chi have made mild attempts to improve their status. For example, in 1957 some women of the Santi Asoke movement in Bangkok ordained with ten precepts and took to wearing dark brown robes instead of white. Santi Asoke is

renowned for its ideology of "spiritual attainment without the attachment to form." Trained and ordained under the guidance of Bhodiraksa, a reform-minded self-ordained monk, the nuns at Santi Asoke called themselves "silacarini," instead of mae chi. Several were arrested and forced to give up wearing brown robes. These nuns are now called "sikamata" and wear gray robes with a brown shawl. Another Thai nun, Ven. Voramai Kabilsingh, received bhikkhuni ordination in Taiwan where Mahayana Buddhism is prevalent. She wears light yellow robe and resides at Wat Songdharmakalyani in Nakhonpathom.

These reform movements indicate that some mae chi are anxious to improve their status. Still, although they attempt to distinguish themselves from ordinary mae chi in both form (by donning colored robes instead of white) and practice (by observing more precepts than ordinary mae chi), their significant status and roles are not widely recognized. This is apparently the result of the strong influence of the bhikkhu Sangha which dominates and controls the mae chi individually and collectively.

Institutionalized Sangha as the Dominating Force behind Buddhist Spirituality

Women are seen as a muted group in society since they are often dominated by men. Furthermore, dominant groups in society often control the modes of expression of subordinate groups. These notions seem to be applicable to the Sangha and the mae chi groups.

Sangha literally means a crowd or a gathering; in particular, it refers to the monastic community of ordained Buddhists - bhikkhu and bhikkhuni. The Thai Buddhist Sangha as exists today can be considered male-dominant religious institution. Diana Paul writes that the Sangha is "an overwhelming male-created institution dominated by a patriarchal power structure. As a consequence of this male dominance, the feminine is frequently associated with the secular, powerless, profane, and imperfect."

Thus, we must understand the institutional factors which affect the status of women in Southeast Asia. In this case, the Sangha is considered the institutional factor whereas popular Buddhism is seen as the ideological one. The Sangha and its members hold power, prestige, and privilege in many religious and worldly affairs. The fact that the

Sangha and its members are exclusively male exerts a powerful influence on the condition of women in these countries.

The status of women in Thai society is relatively lower than that of men. Even within the institutional religious structure, women's place is significantly subordinate. A clear example is Ven. Voramai Kabilsingh, ordained as a bhikkhuni in Taiwan in 1980. Her daughter records that on one occasion when Ven. Voramai traveled to a rural area and was introduced to monks as a bhikkhuni, the first thing the monks asked was why she did not bow to them! This reflects the fact that even bhikkhuni are seen as having a subordinate status relative to monks. In Thailand, the full ordination of women is still an alien concept. This is in contrast to full ordination for men which has become a Thai tradition in popular Buddhist beliefs, sanctioned and legitimated by centuries of Buddhist history.

The Ordination of Monks During the Rains Retreat

The ideal religious role for a Buddhist is the renunciation of the secular world and the rejection of all worldly limitations to reach ultimate salvation, or nirvana. However, this ideal contradicts the worldly nature of human beings. Therefore, a tradition developed in Thailand wherein men entered the Sangha on a temporary basis, usually at least for the three-month period of the rains retreat.

This tradition allowed that men, when they reach twenty years of age, renounce worldly affairs by ordaining as monks to practice monastic discipline and study Buddhist texts. Men do not have to commit themselves to remain in the monastery for life. Keyes mentions that "...a temporary period within the monkhood was viewed as instilling in a man a moral sense that would remain with him even after he returned to lay life. Such moral tempering was highly valued...." Returning to lay life was not viewed as failure. After spending a period of time in the monkhood, men resume worldly occupations as mature "ripe" adults as opposed to their previous "raw" state. They are now ready to accept the role and responsibility of husband or father.

A strong belief attached to this practice is that a son is an agent through which the parents, especially the mother, can do great merit. Because women are not allowed to

ordain as bhikkhuni, the ultimate merit that they can gain is from allowing their sons to enter the monkhood, in other words, to "give" their sons to the Sangha. It is believed that accumulating merit in this way will allow a woman to be reborn as a man and gain a better chance of salvation through monkhood in the next life. It is on this point that many anthropologists propose that men's and the women's relations to Buddhism are defined differently. Kirsch asserts that: "This is the most strikingly manifested in denying women access to the highest Buddhist defined status possible to achieve in this world - monkhood. Any women who aspires to achieve this exalted status must be reborn as a man in some future life."

It has been suggested that entering the monkhood for a short period of time represents a male initiation rite in Thai society, a rite of passage in which a person matures sexually. Most men who ordain are young adults with reproductive ability. After remaining in the monkhood for a time, the men usually step out of monastic life, resume their lay roles, and become "mature sexual beings" who are eligible for marriage. This is in contrast to the case of the mae chi, most of whom have already fulfilled their worldly roles and no longer have family responsibilities when they ordain.

In Thailand, this ideal of becoming a monk for a period still persists. The Thai government allows male civil servants to take leave for three months with full pay when they ordain. This leave of absence is notably longer than female civil servants' maternity leave, which is only one month. Thus, there is social and bureaucratic approval for men seeking spiritual attainment through ordination, whereas such opportunities are not sanctioned for women.

Nuns in Mahayana Buddhism

Mahayana and Theravada are the two main traditions of Buddhism that can be distinguished in their philosophical interpretation of the Dhamma. The Theravada tradition is prevalent in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos and Cambodia, whereas the Mahayana is found in China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Tibet. Most Thai mae chi belong to the Theravada tradition. Nevertheless, I would like to discuss the situation of Mahayana nuns to demonstrate the recognition and high status they enjoy in their societies in contrast to the Thai mae chi.

Mahayana Buddhism reflects a more liberal and more positive view of women. While Theravada stresses monastic life and celibacy, Mahayana fully values the laity and sanctions the possibility of enlightenment within marriage. It asserts that worldly existence should be faced and understood, not denounced. Women, therefore, are respected and revered as partners of men. Some beliefs and practices in Mahayana Buddhism also express gender equality.

For example, there are several bodhisattvas (selfless saints) in Mahayana Buddhism who appear in female form, such as the widely-respected Kuan Yin. Again, we see that in ancient China emperors and empresses established nunneries which attracted talented women of high status who practiced under royal patronage and were highly regarded.

In the Tibetan Vajrayana school of Buddhism, women can become teachers and realized beings. There are numerous nunneries in Tibet and women are equated with wisdom and spiritual realization. The Dalai Lama himself and other bhikkhus give support to nuns to develop their spiritual propensities.

Zen Buddhism also encourages women to seek a religious path because Zen affirms that male and female possess the same human essence. Not only does Zen affirm the equality of men and women, it also encourages women's full participation in the religious realm.

In brief, Mahayana Buddhism is relatively egalitarian in that it allows for the ordination of women as bhikkhuni. The religious status of Mahayana bhikkhunis is eminent and the general images of women are positive.

Social Status of mae chi

One of the factors contributing to the inferior status of Thai mae chi is that many of them have low social status before ordaining as nuns. Kabilsingh reports that about eighty percent of the mae chi are from poor families and have only four years of compulsory

education. She states that, "Lacking economic means and educational background, they have low social status."

While ordination for men is seen as positive and meritorious, it is often seen as unusual for women to be ordained. Nunhood is seen by some people as the last resort of those who fail in lay life. Kabilsingh states that many women do become mae chi to escape worldly problems. Thus, there is a slight social stigma attached to the status of mae chi.

Mae chi in Thailand receive very little public support compared to monks. Most of them rely on their private savings or depend on relatives. According to Karma Lekshe Tsomo, some mae chi "stay in a temple until their private savings are exhausted, then disrobe, get a job, and work to save up until they have enough money to get ordained and stay for another length of time in a temple. Thai custom permits them to disrobe and re-ordain like this, but having to repeatedly disrobe and go to work is decidedly disruptive to their spiritual life."

Making merit by giving food or money to mae chi is not a popular practice in Thailand. People believe they gain less merit by providing for mae chi than providing for monks. Some mae chi have to beg in order to sustain their life; this further degrades the status of mae chi in general. Penny Van Esterik says that, "While individual mae chi may be admired for their good acts or meditation skills, as a category they are not particularly admired or respected. Indeed, they are often the subject of jokes, and may be feared or despised."

Mae chi in Comparison with Laywomen

In order to further understand the social images of the mae chi in Thai society, it is necessary to compare their role with that of laywomen. Ideally, mae chi represent independent women who separate themselves from worldly involvements and dismiss their sexual potentiality. However, despite their efforts in following the Buddha's path, mae chi are not considered a model for ideal behavior. In fact, as Van Esterik notes, they are sometimes viewed as "failures, outcasts, or eccentrics."

Laywomen who constantly render support for Buddhism and the Sangha, by contrast, are deemed the ideal female image because they contribute greatly to the religious community. As a result, laywomen often enjoy greater acceptance and respect from monks than do nuns. Barnes points out that laywomen "may have been more respected and better accepted by the monks than the nuns were."

On the other hand, in addition to the image of laywomen as nurturers of family, society, and religion, there is also an image of women as seducers and temptresses. The classic example from the Buddhist texts is the incident when the three daughters of Mara (representing lust, aversion, and craving) try to allure the Lord Buddha during his meditative endeavor toward enlightenment.

The Mother Image

Generally, women are recognized for their reproductive capability. They are often praised for their fertility, nurturance, and commitment to familial obligations. In Thailand, laywomen are also appreciated for their devotion to the Dhamma, and for their financial support and service to the Sangha. A typical Thai morning scene is monks visiting the neighborhood lay community to receive food and alms from women of the households there.

Hence, we see that the major support of the Sangha and the Buddhist religion comes from women. Keyes argues that while men realize their religious potential by being ordained into the Buddhist order, women realize theirs by providing food, alms, and service to the Sangha. In fact, women are considered more diligent than men in their support of the Sangha. Hence, the ideal female image in Buddhism is one who retains her worldly occupation, providing sons and contributing to the support for the male monastic community.

There is a saying in Thai, "ko chai pa luang kuen sawan," which literally means "to hold onto the rim of the yellow robe and ascend to heaven." The yellow robe is that of the monk. The significance is that for a mother to gain great merit, she must give her son to the Sangha. In the act of granting her son to the religion, she commits an act of ultimate merit and achieves a rebirth in heaven. In fact, a mother is not allowed to physically hold

onto her monk-son's robe, because of the taboo against physical contact between monks and women. Nevertheless, this saying expresses a woman's dependence on her son to obtain ultimate merit by arranging for him to be ordained, since she cannot be ordained herself.

Compared to the role implications of an ideal mother, the mae chi's role is totally opposite. First, unlike mothers, mae chi denounce worldly involvements and do not assume any worldly roles. Second, by denouncing sexuality and becoming sexually neutral beings, they no longer have the potential for becoming life-givers like mothers. Third, mae chi are not seen as life-nurturers, because they belong to the world of the ascetic and do not occupy any professional roles. Theoretically, they do not even support themselves, but are dependent on the community for support. Standing, as she does, in contrast to the ideal image of woman, the mae chi finds herself in an ambiguous position.

The Seducer Image

Women are often referred to as a representation of worldly attachment. Closely linked with this is the prevalent image of women as seducers. In Thailand, women's sexuality is feared and frowned upon. In the context of woman as seducer, it is valuable to examine the roles of prostitutes in Thailand.

Views of prostitutes, especially their sexuality, are usually ambiguous. In actuality, a prostitute arouses many conflicting emotions. As Paul notes, "A prostitute's sexuality, although feared, is also desired. She is powerful because she is not subjugated by any single male authority figure. She is appreciated because she gives of herself indiscriminately."

In general, prostitution, although not condoned in Thai society, has not been strongly condemned. This partly results from the popular Buddhist belief that, although there is always a chance to make good karma in this life, a person's present life condition is affected by karma from the previous existence. Although prostitutes are not seen as the ideal female image, they are not seen as total sinners either. Since it is believed that one can gain much merit by providing support to the Sangha, many prostitutes donate

part of their earnings to the monasteries and thus assume the virtuous role of religious nurturers. For example, during the era of King Rama V, there was a brothel owner named Mae Fang who earned much money from her prostitution business and generously donated the money to renovate Wat Kok temple. The name of the temple was later changed to "Wat Kanikapon," which literally means "the labor of the prostitutes." After Yai Fang passed away, her daughter took over the business and built another temple named "Wat Kanmatuyaram."

Not only are they nurturers of the religion, but most prostitutes also assume the role of familial nurturer and provider. These women usually come from rural poor families and enter the profession to earn income to support their parents. Keyes states that: "Many rural women are drawn into prostitution because of the poverty of their families and because they have few qualifications for equivalently paid jobs in the urban sector of the economy."

The sexuality of women is viewed in two very different ways. The seducer's sexuality is considered mysterious, dangerous, and uncontrolled, whereas the mother's sexuality is seen as controlled or properly channelled toward biological reproduction and not entirely for sensual pleasure. Nonetheless, both seducer and mother share the female normative roles of being familial and religious nurturers.

Mae chi, on the other hand, assume the ambiguous image of being asexual since they renounce sexuality altogether. Unlike a mother or seducer, mae chi do not undertake nurturing roles; consequently, they are often seen as a socially and economically marginal group in society.

Conclusion

The notion of gender in Thai society may be seen as the outcome of popular Buddhist ideology: an interplay between pure Buddhist ideology (Buddhism as taught by Lord Buddha) and local Thai values. The apparent "spiritual inequality" expressed through the absence of bhikkhuni and the relatively inferior status of mae chi in Thai society is the result of this popular Buddhist ideology.

Both the religious as well as the social status of mae chi are ambiguous. In the religious sphere, they are not counted as one of the four Buddhist communities; in the social sphere, they are not recognized as fulfilling the ideal role of "nurturer." In addition, they are not legally accepted by the Thai Government as rightful lay citizens. As Kabilsingh has reported, mae chi are not given the right to vote.

The white robes that mae chi wear also have an ambiguous symbolic implication. The color white is often associated with transition or the liminal. For example, in the ordination rite, the monk candidate puts on white clothes to symbolize his transformation from a worldly being to a sacred being. After the transitional stage, he puts on yellow robes and assumes the full status of a monk. Laypeople usually don white clothes on Buddhist sacred days or when attending Buddhist activities. However, they only wear white temporarily; after the occasion is over, they resume wearing ordinary lay clothes. mae chi, wearing white robes in their everyday life, are therefore neither fully worldly nor fully sacred.

Considering the inferior and liminal status of the Thai mae chi, I conclude that they attest to the general gender oppression in popular Buddhist ideology. I agree with Paul that, "...for women, the only religious path open to them, that of the nun, remains the least desirable one." The ideal roles and status of women are still linked to the image of nurturer. Thai religious ideology does not grant power and prestige to women's spiritual status.

Bibliography

1.Chamlonglak Khongsarai. Cremation Volume for Mae Chi Chamlonglak Khongsarai (In Thai). Krungthep: Phairot Khongsarai, 1985.

2.Barnes, Nancy Schuster. "Buddhism," Women in World Religions. Arvind Sharma, ed. New York: State University of New York Press, 1987, pp. 105-134.

3.Bunnag, Jane. Buddhist Monk, Buddhist Layman: A Study of Urban Monastic Organization in Central Thailand. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973.

4.Hopkinson, Deborah, ed. Not Mixing Up Buddhism. New York: White Pine Press, 1986.

5.Hughes, James. "Buddhist Feminism," Women & Buddhism. Toronto: Spring Wind-Buddhist Cultural Forum, Vol.6, 1986, pp. 58-79.

6.Kabilsingh, Chatsumarn. Women's Manners in Buddhism (In Thai). Bangkok: Samakkee Sarn Co. Ltd., 1985.

7.Keyes, Charles F. "Mother or Mistress, But Never a Monk: Buddhist Notions of Female Gender in Rural Thailand," American Ethnologist, Vol.11, 1984, pp.223-241.

8. - Thailand:Buddhist Kingdom as Modern Nation-State. Boulder: Westview Press, 1987.

9.Khin Thitsa. Providence and Prostitution: Image and Reality for Women in Buddhist Thailand. London: Change International Reports (Women and Society), 1980.

10.Kirsch, Thomas. "Economy, Polity, and Religion in Thailand," Change and Persistence in Thai Society. Thomas Kirsch and William Skinner, eds. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975, pp. 172-196.

11.Paul, Diana. Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in Mahayana Tradition. Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1979.

12.Taptong, Tepchu. Green Lantern Women (In Thai). Bangkok: Chao Phraya Press, 1983.

13.Tsomo, Karma Lekshe, ed. "Introduction," "The Role of Women in Buddhism," Sakyadhita: Daughters of the Buddha. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1989, pp.17-30, 225-235.

14.Van Esterik, Penny, ed. "Laywomen in Theravada Buddhism," Chap. in Women of Southeast Asia. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1982, pp. 55-78.

International News

Sakyadhita Meeting in England

Wendy Barzetovic reports that the annual Sakyadhita meeting was held in November this year. The highlight of the meeting was an excellent talk by dharmacarini Sanghadevi, a Dharma teacher of the Western Buddhist Order. Entitled "The Path and the Goal," her talk focused on the twelve nid nas, or links of causation, from a positive perspective. "The Lion's Roar," a film on the life and passing of The Tibetan master Gyalwa Karmapa was appreciated by all. Gifts for the holiday season were displayed for sale, and a benefit was held to raise support for the nuns of Khachoe Ghakhyil Nunnery in Nepal. A reporter for the Independent, a leading London newspaper, interviewed Wendy and included news on Sakyadhita in her article on ordination for women.

European Buddhist Congress Meets in Berlin

The European Buddhist Congress, a coalition of Buddhists from all over Europe, meets once every four years. This year over 1500 participants gathered from September 24 to 27 this year under the banner of "Unity in Diversity." The city of Berlin was chosen as the venue to symbolize unity. Lay and ordained (and neither lay nor ordained) practitioners of Theravada and Mahayana met in the spirit of "creating space to meet together to give of our basic goodness."

Moderator for the gathering, Ms. Sylvia Wetzel of the German Buddhist Union, and both of the women speakers featured, Ven. Prabhasa Dharma Roshi and Ven. Ayya Khema, were founding members of Sakyadhita. Ven. Prabhasa Dharma explained that we create problems by clinging to concepts that were created to help us. The goal of all meditation practice is to go beyond the confusion of appearances to discover our own

Buddha mind. She described direct experience of the here-and-now as a homecoming to our own true nature.

Ven. Ayya Khema emphasized that peace is what unites human beings. Peace can only be found when we make peace with ourselves and discover the unity in humanity. Through purification, the heart of Buddhist meditation, we can develop unconditional love. When we no longer judge sense contacts as agreeable and disagreeable, we stop chasing after them. Thus, by creating peace and order in our own inner household, we contribute to a more peaceful humanity.

(Reported by Maryo Oosterhoff of Cork, Ireland)

Vinaya Research in Germany

For years, women have been asking questions on Vinaya and the history of the Chinese bhiksuni lineage. Now Sakyadhita is pleased to announce the publication of Ven. Jampa Tsedroen's Brief Survey of the Vinaya. Years of painstaking research have gone into producing this fine, compact volume, based on studies of Vinaya conducted at Tibetisches Zentrum, Hamburg. Cost of the book, including packing and postage, is:

Germany - DM 2.00

Other European countries - US$2.00

USA, Canada, India, Sri Lanka - US$4.00

Japan, Taiwan, PRC - US$5.00

Australia, New Zealand - US$6.00

Please send orders to dharma edition, Hermann-Balk-Str. 106, W-2000 Hamburg 73, Fed. Rep. of Germany.

A review of this book will appear in our next issue.

Mongolian Women's Associations

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Buddhism has been making a big comeback in Mongolia. Buddhism, integral to Mongolian cultural identity, has also become a major factor in the rise of Mongolian nationalism. During the years of Soviet domination, only Ganden Monastery was officially sanctioned, but now new Buddhist temples, often housed in makeshift yurts, are springing up every week.

In the midst of this Buddhist revival, two women's associations have also grown up. One of them, called Genney Tsogpa, with 21 women between the ages of 14 and 65, is located near Ganden Monastery. Tara is their main practice. The other association, Naro Khacho, with 17 women between 5 and 21, is located some distance away. Here the main practice is Vajrayogini. Both associations are advised by senior Mongolian teachers.

The women of both have received the five lay Buddhist precepts from Ven. Bakula Rinpoche of Ladakh, currently Indian Ambassador to Mongolia. Though speaking only Mongolian, the women chant all their prayers in Tibetan. Staying in their own homes at night, they meet and practice together during the day. Except for the very oldest, they are keen to receive the precepts of a sramanerika (novice nun) and study Buddhism in India.

(Reported by Ven. Thubten Tashi of Sera-je Monastic University, India)

Message from Myanmar

A person of fortune lives comfortably in this life;
a person of virtue lives happily in this life and forever.
A lamp looks bright while its oil lasts,
but smells bad as soon as it goes out.
Virtue is radiant as long as it is kept,
but loses its lustre and smells bad when broken.
To cross the sea, a boat must be kept in good repair;
to cross the ocean of cyclic existence, virtue must be kept intact.
Build a boat to cross the ocean;
climb the ladder of virtue to reach heaven.
Unwholesome deeds drag evil-doers to hell,
but not the doers of virtue.
A worldling possessed of virtue is noble,
secure against a fall into hell.
Lotus flowers grow on water;
Concentration develops upon virtue.
A well-informed person without morals
is like a lake without water.
An educated person without virtue

is like a tree without fruit.

An able teacher with bad character

is like a tree that pears tasteless fruits.

A good teacher without moral principles

is like a flower lacking in fragrance.

A person learned in scriptures, but wanting in virtue,

is like a poisonous tree.

A person high in position, but low is morals,

is like a tree without any substance.

Charity and contemplation yield good results

only when founded on virtue.

(by Daw Su Su Sein of Amarapura, Burma)

Buddhist Women's Conference in Sri Lanka

Sakyadhita is pleased to announce that the next International Conference on Buddhist Women will be held in Sri Lanka from October 25 to 29, 1993. The Conference location is the Sri Lanka Foundation Institue in Colombo and the general theme will be "Buddhist Women in Modern Society." Some of the topics to be addressed include:

•Maintaining Human Value in a Time of Rapid Change

•Dharma in Family Life

•Challenges in Monastic Life Today

•Self-Transformation Through Buddhist Meditation

•Peace and Conflict Resolution in a Threatened World

•Women, Buddhism, and the World Community.

Invited speakers include Ven. Ayya Khema, Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, Ven. Prabhasa Dharma, Dr. Rita Gross, Ven. Pema Chodon, Ven. Shig Hiu Wan, Ven. Jampa Tsedroen, Ms. Kusuma Devendra, Dr. Janice Willis, Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, and Dr. Kathy Ku.

Vegetarian meals will be provided. An optional special tour visiting sacred sites in Kandy and Anuradhapura has been arranged for October 30 and 31, at a cost of US$100.00. Rates for accomodations for the duration of the conference, inclusive of meals, are:

•Single rooms (12) with private bath , US$90.00

•Double occupancy (50) with private bath, US$75.00

•Dormitory with common bath, US$40.00

Registration fee is US$50.00 which many be sent to the account of Sakyadhita Sri Lanka, Account Number 0052741, Seylan Bank, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka. Donations (in any amount) to help others attend will be gratefully accepted. For further information, please contact Ms. Ranjani de Silva, No.50, Alwis Perera Mawatha, Katubedda, Moratuwa, Sri Lanka. Her telephone number is 605489.

Check-in will be October 31, in the afternoon, at the Sri Lanaka Foundation Institute, 100 Independence Square, Colombo.

We hope to see you there!

Ordination in the Jodo Shinshu Tradition

by Ruth Tabrah

Ordination in the Japanese Jodo Shinshu, or True Pure Land School, is a process of successive, voluntary stages. The following is a brief description of each:

1. Entering Ceremony (Nyumon-shiki)

The Entering Ceremony is "a ceremony through which a person joining this School promises to observe the duties of a lay follower (monto)". The Entering Ceremony is held by the temple resident (jushoku) at the request of affiliated lay followers. There is no definite rite for this ceremony, but it usually consists of a short sutra reading, followed by the promise of the follower to fulfil the duties. A lay follower's "sign" (monjo-shikisho) may also be granted to the recipient. This lay follower's "sign" looks somewhat like a shortened cleric's round surplice (wagesa), but it is not a cleric's surplice. To have received the Entenng Ceremony is required for lay followers wishing to carry on any function in the School's administration, local or central assemblies, or to apply for the title of instructor (kyoji).

The Shinshu communities in America also conduct a ceremony called "Affirmation Rites" or the "Sarana Affirmation Service" (in Japanese, kieshiki or "Refuge Ceremony"). This is the basic Buddhist ceremony of taking refuge in the Three Treasures and it may be combined with the Entering Ceremony.

II. Homage Ceremony (Kikyo-shiki)

The Homage Ceremony is "a ceremony which expresses the sincerity of the homage paid to the Buddha and the Founder". The Homage Ceremony is held by the Patriarch or his special delegate. It consists of the symbolic shaving of the head and the bestowing of a Buddhist name (homyo). A lay folower's sign is granted to the recipient. The Homage Ceremony is held two times a day almost every day at Nishi-Honganji Temple in Japan, where anybody may apply until one hour before the ceremony starts. The Homage Ceremony may also be conducted during the Patriarch's tours.

The Homage Ceremony does not grant any qualification whatsoever. If a lay follower has not received the Homage Ceremony during his lifetime, a cleric may confer it before the funeral. The term "kikyo-shiki" is sometimes translated as "Confirmation," which is rather misleading both in meaning and in comparaison with Christian rites.

III. Ordination Ceremony (Tokudo-shiki)

The Ordination Ceremony is "a ceremony through which one becomes a cleric (soryo) of this School by forging links from Master to disciple in the same faith". "Master" here means the Patriarch of Honganji, who holds this ceremony as the successor of Shinran Shonin, founder of the School. The ceremony consists mainly of shaving the head, together with the bestowing of the Buddhist surplice (kesa). One is also given a Buddhist name (homyo) and an ordination diploma (docho).

To apply for ordination, one must be at least 15 years old (as young as nine years old, in special cases) and be recommended by an affiliated temple. The candidate is given an examination which covers the general meaning of the Honganji Branch Rule (Shusei), knowledge of the Shoshinge-wasan service, and a character evaluation. Through the unique ordination of tokudo, one becomes a fully-fledged cleric (soryo) of Shinshu.

The word "soryo" literally means "Sangha companion;" hence it is translated here as "cleric". The word "priest" (and "priesthood") should be avoided, because it applies to someone granted special powers to perform rituals. So a priest differs from a layperson not only by task, but also by nature. A priest is an absolutely necessary intermediary

between lay people and the godhead, notably in religions based on sacrifices. All of these things completely alien to Buddhism in general and to Shinshu in particular.

There is no ordination hierarchy in the Honganji Branch of Shinshu. Accordingly, all their clerics share the same basic duties and rights, including wearing the clerical garment and the qualification to preach on the ordinary level. Clerics are classificd into clerical ranks, but this is an honorary classification, and does not grant any special qualification.

IV. Master (kyoshi)

"The master is conferred to the one able to become an example of ordinary cleric by fulfilling his cleric's duties." The master's certificate is conferred by the Board of Directors. The candidate must be a cleric at least 20 years old. The level of the master's examination is that of a senior high school. The examination covers the doctrine and history of Shinshu, the doctrine and history of Buddhism, the theory of religion, and the Honganji Branch regulations. It also includes the practice of services and rituals, as well as preaching.

The term kyoshi means "teaching master;" it cannot be translated as "sutra-teacher". The "master" is not a "higher ordination" as compared to an "initial ordination." Tokudo is the unique ordination in Shinshu. The master title by itself does not grant any qualification, but is required as a prerequisite for a cleric to apply as a candidate for temple-resident, Honganji Branch administrative staff, preacher, academic degrees, and so forth. The master does not grant any special qualification to preach. A master is qualified to preach on the ordinary preaching level only because he previously received the ordination (tokudo) which grants clerics the qualification for ordinary preaching. As far as preaching is concerned, the only diffaence between a cleric and a master is that the master may further apply as a candidate for the title of "preacher." The master is not an academic degree either.

There are five academic degrees in Honganji Branch, from scholast counsellor down to laureate. Accordingly, the master can not be compared with other Buddhist academic degrees. The master can in no way be equated with the Tibetan academic degree of geshe, which requires about 20 years of studies. The master also cannot be compared

with the Roman Catholic "monsignore"; this appellation officially applies to the bishop and is traditionally used for the clerics in charge at Vaticano Curia.

V. Instructor (kyoji)

"An instructor is the one who, without being a cleric, has received the capacity to preach (fukyo) from the Board of the Directors." To apply for the instructor title one must provide a written recommendation from a member of Honganji Branch's administration or from an affiliated temple, have received the Entering Ceremony (Nyumon-shiki), be at least 25 years old, and be morally correct, with a suitable knowledge of Buddhism and general instruction.

By becoming instructor, a lay follower is allowed to preach on the ordinary preaching level and to wear the tunic like a cleric, but with a lay folower's sign instead of the cleric's surplice.

VI. Preaching (fukyo)

By "preaching" is meant both the written and verbal diffusion of Jodo Shinshu doctrine and tradition. There are nine kinds of preaching, but these may be subsummed into three main categories: a) "personal instruction" by the Patriarch; b) preaching by people especially appointed by the Board of Directors, including trough the grant of title of "preacher" (fukyoshi). This category includes seven kinds of preaching according to the various needs, times, places and subjects; and c) ordinary preaching, which may be practiccd at any time by clerics and lay instructors.

VII. Followers and clerics

"This School is a brotherhood of people living in the same one-taste faith. The people forming this School differ in their tasks as clerics or followers, but share the same faith which tastes the flavor of the Dharma and the practice of gratitude towards the Buddha". The followers must be affiliated to a definite temple or religious society, and be

registered in its Followers' Roll. The followers affiliated to any Honganji Branch temple are also followers of Honpa Honganji's head temple in Kyoto. The clerics must be affiliated with a definite temple or religious society and be registered in the Clerics' Register at Honganji-ha Curia. Both followers and clerics contribule to the School's expenses. Both followers and clcrics may receive rewards as well as penalties from the School.

The Five Wonderful Precepts

by Thich Nhat Hanh

1.Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I vow to cultivate compassion and to learn the ways of protecting the lives of people, animals and plants. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to condone any act of killing, also in my thinking and in my way of life.

2.Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing and oppression, I vow to cultivate loving-kindness and learn the ways of working for the well-being of people, animals and plants, and to practice generosity by sharing my time, energy and material resources with those who are in real need. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others, but I will prevent others fiom profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other species.

3.Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I vow to cultivate my sense of responsibility in order to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society. I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without love and a long-term commitment. To preserve the happiness of myself and others, I am determined to respect my commitments and the commitments of others. I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to protect families from being broken by sexual misconduct.

4.Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to the suffering of others, I vow to cultivate loving speech and deep listening that will bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or bring suffering, I vow to learn to speak truthfully, with words that can inspire self-confidence, joy and hope. I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain, and not to criticize or condemn things I am not sure of. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division, hatred, or discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break. I will make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

5.Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I vow to cultivate better health, both physical and mental, for my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I vow to consume only items that preserve well-being, peace and joy in my body and in my consciousness and in the collective body and consciousness of my family and society. I am determined not to use alcohol or any other intoxicants, or to ingest foods or other items that contain toxins, including toxic products on T.V., in magazines, films, books and conversations. I am aware that to damage my body and my consciousness with these poisons is to betray my ancestors, my parents, my society and future generations. I will work to transform violence, fear, anger, and confusion by practicing a diet for myself and for society. I know that a proper diet is crucial for self-transformation, the transformation of the collective consciousness, and of society.

The Support of Precepts

by Heidi Singh (Bodhicari Vajira)

On Vesak, the day celebrated as the birthday of the Buddha, I was reflecting on the value of the precepts in our practice. Just two years ago, on Vesak in 1991, a new ministerial ordination was developed hy Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara in Los Angeles, the temple to which I have belonged for many years. There already existed the lay status of upasaka and upasika (observing five precepts) and of dharmacari (observing eight precepts). But it was decided by the far-sighted and compassionate teachers of Dharma Vijaya that yet another status of layperson, determined by the ministerial ordination of "bodhicari," should be established.

The bodhicari ordination involves the observance of twelve precepts. (The precepts themselves, in Pali and English, as well as the criteria for this ordination, are attached to this article.) It is of particular interest that the ordination incorporates the bodhisattva. The bodhisattva path has always existed in Theravada tradition, but has been overlooked in the past by commentators, especially in the West. The teachers responsible for taking this pioneering step and for developing the formulation and criteria of the bodhicari ordination are Venerable Walpola Piyananda, the Abbot of Dharma Vijaya; Venerable Dr. Havanpola Ratanasara; and Venerable Lenagala Sumedhananda. It was Venerable Piyananda in particular who envisioned and made possible this new expression of Buddhist practice, as a paradigm to be used by other temple congregations in America and abroad. So far monks, nuns, laypeople, and scholars around the world have expressed great interest in this new ordination. The general response has been overwhelmingly positive.

It was my good fortune to be among the first group of three persons ordained as bodhicari in May 1991, during the Vesak celebration at Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara. With me were Ms. Chintana Lintong and Mr. Stan Levinson. The ordination accommodates both married and single persons, as well as those observing brahmacharya vows. In trying to establish the full ministerial function of the bodhicari

path, I have been serving as the Buddhist chaplain at UCLA since February of 1992. Tending to the spiritual needs of Buddhists on a campus of over 30,000 students and cooperating on interfaith projects with colleagues from other religious traditions at the UCLA University Religious Conference has been both exciting and challenging work.

For me personally, I feel that the precepts are a source of support and strength in my daily life, as well as an ideal mode of behavior that to work towards. The precepts are a real responsibility for all of us, whether we are laypersons or monastics, regardless of the numher of precepts that we observe. Recently, I came across a striking statement by Philip Kapleau. In The Wheel of Death(1), he says that the precepts are the "active expression of your Buddha-mind." Even at the time of death itself, "embraced with sincerity, they will support and uphold you at this critical hour." What a wonderful thought this is! In the tempest-tossed sea of life and death, the precepts are a rudder that keep us afloat.

There is no doubt that if one earnestly attempts to practice the precepts in every moment, one is on the path to enlightenment, no matter how long it may take. Since sila (ethical conduct) is the very foundation of Buddhist practice, we may assume that without the foundation, there is no development. Without sila, there is no enlightenment. Philip Kapleau quotes Zen Master Dogen from the Shobogenzo:

By accepting and upholding the precepts in your deepest heart you can eventually attain to supreme enlightenment... Who could possibly reject this? Buddhas have shown to countless living beings that when they wholeheartedly take into their life the moral precepts they do in time attain Buddhahood, becoming Perfectly Enlightened... All the Realized Ones dwell here and embrace everything in their infinite wisdom. Those who live and have their being in this state see no distinction between themselves and others, between a subject and an object. At this time every thing - earth. plants, fence posts, bricks or pebbles, no matter what - functions as Buddha... The wind and fire [i.e., inner energies] fanned by the profound influence of Buddhas [as a result of the acceptance of the precepts] drive one into the intimacy of enlighyenment....This is the awakening of the wisdom mind.

Bodhicari Ordination

The following are the requirements for receiving the bodhicari precepts at Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara in Los Angeles:

1.Minimum 20 years of age.

2.Minimum of four years of college education or three years of dharmacari ordination.

3.Three years of training under a qualified senior monk.

4.Proficiency in Buddhist rites and rituals, teachings, and meditation.

5.Ability to explain the fundamental teachings of Buddhism such as the Four Noble Truths, karma, rebirth, dependent arising, the three signs, arahants, bodhisattvas, Buddha, and nirvana.

6.Firm commitment to observe the bodhicari precepts.

7.Good interpersonal relations and through virtuous qualities, such as compassion, loving-kindness, generosity, heedfulness, forbearance, mindfulness, and critical understanding of the Buddha's teachings.

8.Respect for senior monks and nuns, and friendliness towards them, especially to teachers and preceptors.

When receiving the bodhicari ordination, candidates begin by taking refuge:

Homage to the Blessed One, the Perfected One, the Fully Awakened One. (3x)

I go to Buddha for refuge.

I go to Dhamma for refuge.

I go to Sangha for refuge.

A second time I go to Buddha for refuge.

I go to Dhamma for refuge.

I go to Sangha for refuge.

A third time I go to Buddha for refuge.

I go to Dhamma for refuge.

I go to Sangha for refuge.

The Precepts

I undertake the precept to abstain from killing.

I undertake the precept to abstain from stealing.

I undertake the precept to abstain from sexual misconduct.

I undertake the precept to abstain from lying.

I undertake the precept to abstain from tale-bearing.

I undertake the precept to abstain from harsh speech.

I undertake the precept to abstain from idle chatter.

I undertake the precept to abstain from intoxicants.

I undertake the precept to abstain from wrong livelihood.

I undertake the precept to live every moment with loving-kindness towards all living beings.

I undertake the precept not to revile the three treasures, but to cherish and uphold them.

I undertake the precept to practice the ten perfections with compassion and skill .

I undertake these twelve precepts with full sincerity.

Notes

1. Philip Kapleau, The Wheel of Death (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p.80.
