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Contents

ON PEACE, JUSTICE, AND ECOLOGY

by Dr. Asoka Bandarage

Dr. Bandarage is Associate Professor of Women's Studies at Mount Holyoke College. Originally from Sri Lanka, she delivered the following talk on October 3, 1993 at the eighth anniversary of the New England Peace Pagoda in Leverett, Massachusetts.

The modern industrial capitalist age is commonly equated with progress, civilization, human freedom, and happiness. Indeed, the technological and material achievements of the age are awesome, and the comforts and conveniences they provide are desired by most people. Yet, in equating happiness with technology and materialism, we have not paid sufficient attention to the planetary destruction and suffering that have been caused by western, industrial civilization.

The material benefits of modernization and westernization have not accrued to all humans equally. From the beginning, industrial capitalism was built upon violence: conquest, slavery, debt bondage, and so on. The modern world order continues to be built upon extermination, especially that of indigenous and other people of color. Economic exploitation takes new forms today such as the "Third World" debt, IMF and World Bank structural adjustment policies, GATT, NAFTA, and so on.

The result of these policies is worsening income and wealth disparities between the industrialized North and the exploited South. Currently, the one fourth of the global population that live in the North consume over 60% of the world's food, 85% of the wood, and 70% of the energy. In the meantime, over one billion people in the South or the so-called "Third World" live in absolute poverty without access to basic survival necessities.

Disparities between social classes are increasing within both the South and the North. In Brazil, the top 20% of the population receive 26 times the income of the bottom 20%. In the United States, 2.8% of the population control 27.2% of the wealth; 11.1% have no wealth at all, and the middle classes are slowly disappearing. Gender disparities in access to resources and income are also worsening, with women and children being disproportionately the poor across the world.

Inequality and exploitation lead to tensions and conflicts. Although most conflicts are being expressed in ethnic terms, the underlying issues are often class based and rooted in the social structures of the global economic system. As social disparities and resistance increase, people have to be managed more and more through violent repression. Thus, we have a situation where the global economy is predominantly a military economy and the world's leading nations are the biggest weapons producers. The five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council--the U.S., U.K., France, Russia, and China--export over 85% of the world's arms, with the U.S. being the biggest exporter of weapons of mass destruction.

The proliferation of weapons has created an extremely volatile global situation with more and more regions of the world--from Central America, to Africa, to Southern Asia and Eastern Europe--losing the semblance of law and order. As reigns of terror spread across the world, "disappearances," torture, rape, and killings become commonplace. In many places, people are

afraid to speak the truth. They fear for their jobs, their lives, and the lives of their families. These conditions are not peculiar to the "Third World." In the western industrialized countries too, violence in homes, schools, and streets are increasing. As in the past, much of this violence is directed against people of color, the poor, and women.

Resistance and repression, however, cannot be understood at the level of militarism alone. We have to grasp the logic of "technocapitalism" and the military-industrial complex. From the beginning, technology and capital have been inextricably linked: technological advancement determines capitalist competition and growth. Everywhere the processes of commoditization and mechanization move simultaneously.

But the logic of technocapitalism is ultimately illogical. It destroys the natural integration of planetary life and threatens the very survival of life. Subsistence is undermined as people are forced to produce for export markets rather than for their own needs. The tropical forests and the coral reefs, for example, are destroyed in the name of economic growth and development. Agribusiness, industrial manufacturing, nuclear weaponry, toxic dumping, and so on, pollute the earth, air, and water. The damming of rivers across the earth poses a severe threat to ecosystems, and to the survival of people and their cultures.

The twin forces of technology and capital are destroying traditional communities and families, tearing people away from each other. Close human bonds are replaced with impersonal commercial, technological, and bureaucratic connections. Modernity increases alienation, distrust, and fear among people. It makes it easier, then, for multinational corporations and international agencies to manipulate and control people.

In the years ahead, the control of planetary life--both human and non-human--will broaden and deepen as biotechnology and genetic engineering extend to more and more areas. Already the corporations are controlling the genetic materials of plants, animals and humans. While corporations producing new hybrid varieties of plants and animals claim patent rights or ownership to these manufactured products, the original genetic material is rapidly being lost, along with their traditional control by local producers, including indigenous people and farmers. The global biodiversity treaty adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio and the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) now being negotiated may help further these trends. We must be aware of "green capitalism," that is, environmentalism as defined and managed by dominant global interests.

In the sphere of human reproduction, too, technology and capital are making rapid in-roads. As artificial reproduction advances, humans, like the Earth itself, may lose the capacity to reproduce naturally. There is indeed a close parallel between the conquest of Mother Earth and the conquest of the female body that bears life.

Population control, when coupled with age-old patriarchal traditions, results in sex-selective abortions and female infanticide. In China and India, the two most populous countries in the world, amniocentesis is routinely used for sex selection and female foetuses are aborted in large numbers. Female infants are also killed or abandoned in large numbers at birth. Already, the sex ratios of China and India are skewed in favor of males.

To this picture we must also add the growing traffic in babies, that is, the export of babies from the South to the North, surrogate mothering, and the booming trade in human foetuses and bodily organs for scientific experimentation. While these practices are meant to benefit the wealthier classes, in places such as India and Egypt poor people are forced to sell their kidneys so their families can buy enough to eat. These are the costs of technological and market expansion.

Life loses its sanctity as it becomes increasingly a commodity and an appendage to the machine. As the "technosphere" created by humans increasingly undermines the natural "ecosphere," our own tensions, fears, hatreds, and alienation increase. We are not machines, but an aspect of nature. We have to honor the laws of nature over the laws of the machine.

There are social movements across the world now for peace, justice and ecology. These include the struggles of native peoples against deforestation and damming of rivers, the struggles of local farmers against biotechnology corporations, and the protests of people's organizations against disappearances and killings. These struggles need to be better integrated and their common agenda firmly placed on a non- violent and spiritual path. This is the only way these movements can overcome the violence and destructiveness of the dominant world order.

The teaching we need in order to walk this path already exists. The challenge facing humanity is not the development of more and more technology, markets, and bureaucracies, but the development of wisdom and compassion, that is, spiritual development. This is the teaching of Fujii Guruji, the founder of the Nipponzan Myohoji, and, of course, the Buddha himself.

The Buddhadhamma explains the laws of nature. It shows that the roots of human problems lie in ignorance, greed, and hatred. Indeed, it is clear that technocapitalism is built on the illusion that we can conquer nature, and that progress and happiness depend on unbridled competition and aggression, in other words, greed and hatred.

To change the social structures of militarism and injustice, we have to change our own consciousness. We must move from ignorance to wisdom, from the illusion of a separate self to an understanding of the laws of nature and the reality of impermanence. We have to overcome the fundamental dualism of the self versus other, upon which modern industrial capitalism and its competitive, individualist ethos are founded. We have to understand and honor the inherent interconnectedness of all life. This cannot be done merely at the intellectual level; true understanding comes only with compassion.

In a world full of hatred and aggression, it is not an easy task for us to develop loving kindness and compassion. Yet this is precisely the challenge facing us: the challenge of psychosocial transformation. Fortunately, there are some important examples before us. Through their daily practice of mindfulness, discipline, and compassion, the monks and nuns of Nipponzan Myohoji show the way. These monks and nuns are not merely seeking their own individual peace; they are working for global peace, engaged in many different endeavors around the world. Fujii Guruji showed that the clergy must respond in new ways to the crises facing humanity at this time; it is not sufficient for clergy to simply meditate, cut off from the rest of the world. Guruji taught the path of engaged Buddhism. In a Dhamma talk delivered on December 1, 1973, he said:

"Non-violence and peace in the first place cannot be cultivated by politics, economics, or military force. They can only be cultivated by pure spiritual practice and discipline....Non-killing and non-stealing are not only religious disciplines, but also the foundation of world peace and genuine prosperity for humanity.... Now, religious people from all corners of the earth must unite to practice the true essence of religion in order to relieve the suffering brought on by modern civilization and restore hope to humanity."

Nuns Seen as Ideal Teachers of Society

by Heng Sok Chheng

The role of nuns has been largely ignored for years. That might be about to change. Nuns have long held a low position in Cambodian society, largely unrecognized and overshadowed by their male counterparts. Most nuns are poorly-educated and do not receive any Buddhist training or official recognition. Their public image is maligned by those among them who beg for money or food. But their typical maturity and experience of life make them ideal for positions of guidance, and moves are afoot to encourage them to take a bigger role within Buddhism and the wider community. Several local and foreign NGOs are pushing for greater equality, status and responsibility for nuns, though they face opposition from monks with more conventional views.
Currently to become a nun a woman just goes to a pagoda, has her head shaved and wears white robes. Considered "lay devotees," nuns are not ordained. Their knowledge and practice of Buddhism is limited to listening to monks, reading Buddhist scriptures, and meditating.
Generally, women become nuns, or *Don Chee* or *Yay Chee* as they are called, when for whatever reason, they do not fit into family life. They may be separated or divorced, or have problems or a lack of support within their families and consider they have no future there. Most tend to be aged 40 or over-- some choose to devote themselves to Buddhism to prepare for their deaths-- although a few younger women are said to be becoming nuns rather than pursue traditional family-oriented life.
The main duties of nuns are cooking for monks, cleaning and decorating pagodas,and often helping to care for orphans. A German NGO, the Henrich Boll Foundation (HBF), has just launched a project to widen the social work that nuns do.
HBF's representative in Cambodia, Dr Heike Loschmann, says the project is aimed at boosting nuns' self-confidence, knowledge, and skills. Nuns would be encouraged to branch out into areas such as mental health counseling for children and women, and participate in nutrition, sanitation, education, contraception, family and anti-AIDS community programs.
Training nuns in "the Buddhist ways" would be an important component of the project.
"Our vision was that Buddhism could not only help the weak and the poor to help themselves, but also provide a basic value system of morals and ethics," Loschmann says.
HBF recently organized a seminar in Phnom Penh on the role of *Don Chees* and lay women in the reconciliation of Cambodia, attended by nuns from around the country as well as overseas.

One who attended the conference was Cambodian-born and former French nun Sokchom Charuwana, who has returned to her homeland to work with nuns.
Charuwana has established the Nuns' Association for Cambodian Development in Battambang. The organization, sponsored by French and American donors, operates out of Wat Slaket in Battambang.
Charuwana, 62, left Cambodia for Singapore in 1972. She moved to France in 1975, where she became a nun in 1983. She traveled to Sri Lanka to become a Buddhist nun in 1987, before returning to Cambodia in 1992.
Charuwana is now planning to build nunneries and centers in other provinces to train nuns in fields such as community health. She sees her organization's role as to instill *dhamma* (Buddhist virtues and principles) in poor women and children, because "as they learn *dhamma*, they learn how to relieve their problems".
Nuns, she says ,are not considered equal to monks. For instance, monks get 10 years of Buddhist education, while nuns get no training or certification. Charuwana, while saying that she is not angry at the inequality, hopes that nuns and monks will one day be considered as equals.
Some monks are opposed to that idea, she says, because they consider it against the long tradition of Buddhism in Cambodia. But others, such as her mentor the Venerable Moharacha Bourkry, one of the country's highest-ranking monks,are supportive.
Charuwana says the low status of nuns is not peculiar to Cambodia, but exists in other countries such as Burma, Laos and Sri Lanka. One reason why Cambodian nuns are sometimes disparaged is that some frequently wander the streets begging.
Charuwana says instilling Buddhist training and beliefs in nuns, to ensure that all behaved appropriately, was a key way to boost public acceptance of them. But she says it is only a small minority who spoil the image of the majority of nuns who are keen to contribute to improving the lives of Cambodians.
There are believed to be about 4000 nuns in Cambodia-- the exact number is unknown-- but that could soon rise dramatically if attempts to widen their social role and status are successful.
With more than 60 percent of Cambodia's adult population estimated to be women aged over 35, many of them single or widows, advocates of change say there is a ready supply of potential recruits to help take the sisterhood into a new era.

Reprinted from the Phnom Penh Post, May 19, 1995

Reflections from a Nunnery Rooftop

by Kim Gutschow

It is pitch dark on the roof of Chubchizhal Nunnery, in Karsha, Zanskar. I stand looking out into the glistening bowl of peaks that cradle the central valley of Zangskar. Here, the three main river

gorges (the Stod, the Lungnag, and the Zangskar) converge into a region known as *zhung khor* (literally, "the middle of the kingdom"). From the roof of the cliff side nunnery, I can see the stepped profile of Karsha monastery where the evening symphony is about to begin.

During 'The Great Prayer Festival' (*monlam chenmo*) here in Karsha, three prayer sessions are held each day in the lower, and oldest (11th century?) temple of the monastery. The entire congregation of monks gather in a vast, gloomy hall where temperatures drop far below freezing, to pray for the enlightenment of all sentient beings and bless the coming New Year. Each day concludes with a haunting religious melody composed on two long brass horns (*dung chen*). These instruments complement each other well. The somber, deep thrust of the horn resonates long after the light sparkle of reed has died away. As if heralding the colors of sunset, the purple tones of brass and the orange lament of reed call down into the valley below.

Just as the monastery duet tapers out, a quavering voice can be heard from the village temple (*chamspa lha-khang*) at the base of the cliff on which the monastery sits. From the temple loudspeakers comes the evening offering song which concludes the gentle roll of "Mani" (prayers) that have been issuing forth from the temple all day. The reverberation of "Om Mani Padme Hum" floats out over the village, a blanket of blessings to protect against the coming uncertainties in the next year. From the roof of the nunnery, I stare out into the solitary white fields of snow, capped by the almost fearsome towers of ice across the valley. I can see the comfort of steeping this desolate landscape in prayer.

Again, as if on cue, before the last strains of the offering song have died out, I hear a distant rumble from the Karsha ravine. It seems a divine hand is orchestrating this evening symphony. The whisper of falling snow and rock gathers momentum, reaches a thunderous peak, and slowly fades back into a whisper. Looking into the black space of the ravine, I see a distant cloud of white, a lingering postlude to this dramatic climax.

The final movement of the evening symphony begins. From the steps of the village temple below, the quaver of *surna* (oboe) and *daman* (drums) drift up. The lay people of the village make their final song of thanks to the "Head Teacher" (lob pon) of Karsha monastery, who has been leading the daily prayers. This song (*lharnga*) is a frail tremble, a humble musical offering to the all-powerful deities, while the earlier monastic duet had a mystic confidence as if already on the plane of the gods.

In Zangskar, the sacred and the profane, the cultural and the natural, the secular and the ecclesiastical cannot be easily separated. Similarly, life at a Zangskari nunnery cannot be divided from the daily mundanities of village life below.

Although each nun at Chubchizhal nunnery has a "room of her own"- a tiny stone cell- high on the cliff above the village, they must descend every day to work in their family's households. The cluster of cells which are grouped around the new assembly hall where the nuns gather for collective worship is inextricably tied to the daily exigencies of village life. Each nun is bonded to her family by lifelong obligations of reciprocity.

Nuns can be found washing, roasting and grinding barley, at the water mills, in the fields, and in the kitchens of village houses, irrigating, weeding, harvesting, threshing, winnowing, and carrying the crops and chaff back to the *bang-nga* (grain store). In short, they will do nearly every task a village woman will do, with a single exception: nuns are forbidden from carrying the *zor-ra* (scythe), in the Zangskari version of the Vinaya. This restriction is imposed because it is feared they might accidentally take the life of a bug while cutting the grass at harvest time.

Nuns are found side by side with their village sisters; in the hearths, the stables, the fields, and the high pasture camps where *dzomo* (female yak-cow crossbreed) are kept. The most noticeable

distinction between a nun and a laywoman is that the latter is decorated in turquoise, coral, Chinese silk, and startling white conch bracelets, while the former is simple clad in dark maroon robes and sash, set off by a smooth shaven head. A sleeveless silk undershirt of canary yellow or pink is the rare witness to femininity a nun might allow herself.

The 'heart-mind" (*snying-gi sems*) reveals the deeper difference between nuns and village women. The nuns display remarkable selflessness and compassion. Their lives are built around obligation to their families, the nunnery, each other, and - ultimately - to the *Dharma*. They do not appear to know covetousness: time and time again I have watched a nun give away a gift she has just received. If a relative asks for something, the nun gives what she has. Ani Putid brings me a half-cup of precious milk one morning, from the sangha's cow, and I have no choice but to accept. As I do so, I am aware that she herself has no milk that day, nor milk powder, for she was reduced to collecting alms this past fall (her nephew has refused to give her enough grain to survive on this year).

Most nuns express their vocation as a blessing. They are glad to be nuns because it gives them an opportunity to practice religion in this lifetime. Unlike village women, who are strapped from dawn to dusk with household chores, nuns have the opportunity to learn to read *pe-cha* (religious texts) and to practice religion on a deeper level. The nuns see their present lives as the result of the benefit of previous karma.

Most nuns view this life as a preview to the more desirable one as a monk. If asked, a nun usually says she wishes to be reborn as a monk in the next lifetime. She believes a female body is inherently inferior to a male one, and so does not question the religious precepts and conventions which make even a learned nun sit below the youngest novice monk.

During a tea break in one of the daily pujas at Chubchizhal, we were joking about the karma that had brought us together. I told the gathered nuns that they must have accumulated a great deal of karma so as to be nuns in this lifetime. Ani Yeshe responded, "But you are accumulating good karma in this lifetime, because you have found sponsorship for our nunnery. In your next life, you will be wealthy, wear fine clothes, and eat delicious food..." I answered, "Actually, I don't wish to be reborn wealthy..." Ani Yeshe deftly changed her tact: "Okay then, you will be reborn as a monk in Karsha Monastery. You will sit on a glorious throne among silk brocades..." I finished the sentence which I'd begun, "But I want to be reborn as a Zangskari nun and hopefully become a Geshe (a Tibetan Ph.D.) as well. If I don't have a chance to become a nun in this lifetime, I shall pray to be reborn in Zangskar in my next life..." The nuns pushed ahead with their questions, "But what about this lifetime? Will you become a nun or get married? And whom will you marry: a Zangskari or a foreigner?..." These questions have been a running theme in the three years I've been coming to this nunnery.

One day as we were gossiping after puja, Ani Yeshe asked me why I don't marry a Zangskari. I laughed and said, "I like to read books and I'm a terrible cook; I wouldn't make a very good Zangskari housewife." Ani Yeshe shot back, "Well then, you can bring your customs into a Zangskari marriage. Let your husband cook..." I thought for a moment and responded, "Do you really think this could happen in Zangskar? Have you ever seen a household where the wife sits and reads while the husband does all the housework?" They laughed hilariously at the absurdity of this prospect.

When the laughter subsided, I reflected seriously on the ambivalent status of nuns in Zangskari society. They do not quite fit Zangskari ideals, one way or another. As female celibates they can never approximate the Buddhist ideal of a male celibate, nor can they ever live up to the feminine ideal of a married woman with children.

A nun will never be accorded the same respect as a monk. She sits behind the monks in all community rites and initiations and she will rarely be asked to perform basic household rites except in times of intense ritualistic activity (such as harvest time) when no monks are available. The nuns of Chubchizhal perform certain duties for the monks which symbolize their inferior status. Nuns traditionally must wash and roast all the grain which Karsha monastery collects as tithe from all over Zangskar every year.

Because the nuns must also assist their families at harvest time, and because the grain must be roasted and ground before the water mills freeze up with the onset of winter, the nuns alone may not be able to completely process all of the monastery's grain. In this case, village women will be hired to finish the task. Significantly, the nuns receive no compensation for their services, other than a nod of thanks (*juley*).

The monastery and nunnery in Karsha village are closely linked by reciprocal ties of varying form. While monks do not owe any traditional obligations to the nunnery, they will come to assist the nuns, if specifically asked to do so. Monks help with the annual Yogini fire sacrifice (*Nal-jor mai jin sreg*) and when an important dignitary comes to visit the nunnery. In brief, nuns modestly defer more complex rites to the monks from the neighboring monastery.

A similar relation of deference and humility may often exist between a nun and her family. A nun performs some of the most menial and mindless tasks in her household, simply because she cannot, in good conscience, refuse while other members of her family do so without impunity. Nuns feed and milk the cows and serve as dishwashers in large festivities such as weddings. It is rare to see a nun being served or attended on in a household; far more likely that she is the one pouring tea for visitors and family members.

While Zangskari nuns feel themselves blessed to be able to pursue a religious vocation, their society undermines this pursuit by keeping nuns in the role of household servant. Ultimately, the nuns describe themselves as servants of the *Dharma*, but in practice they serve more samsaric and worldly masters. While the nuns have not had the same educational advantages and ritual finesse as monks have, one should look at the historical context in which these two orders developed. If Zangskari nuns are given time and resources to devote themselves to ritual studies, they may bear the *Dharma* more free of village commitments, as the Buddha originally intended them to.

Kim Gutschow is a Ph D candidate in Anthropology at Harvard University. She has been living with the nuns of Chubchizhal nunnery on and off for the past three years.
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The Buddhist Nuns of Ladakh

by Dr. Paula Green, Director

Karuna Center, Massachusettes

Ladakh, in the Indian Himalayan mountains, is a remote and starkly beautiful region. Hemmed in by towering snow-covered peaks, Ladakh received few visitors until recent technology brought roads through the mountains and an airport was built in the capital city of Leh, 11,500 feet above sea level. Now visitors come to Ladakh, bringing new ideas to this age-old culture.

The people of Ladakh practice the Mahayana Buddhism that evolved in Tibet and other Himalayan areas. Buddhist tradition is very strong in Ladakhi villages, and many young children are given by their parents into the monastic tradition. Villagers offer their support to large monasteries where young boys, newly ordained as monks, study Buddhist scriptures and chant ancient texts. Food, clothing and cash contributions, modest but predictable, ensure the survival of the monasteries.

Additionally, senior monks offer prayers, or pujas, at the homes of all villagers, for which donations to the monasteries are received. The monks live frugally, educate their young within the monasteries, and build lives together as an ordained community.

Ladakhi nuns are less fortunate than their brothers. There are few nunneries for communal living, no education for ordained girls, and no financial support from villagers. Nuns are expected to spend their lives at home with their parents and siblings. They perform household and field tasks, care for the newborns and the infirm, and provide for parents in their old age. Nuns, in effect, are unmarried servant daughters, for whom religious community life is but a dream.

Until recently this unequal status for ordained women was not questioned. Now, however, with a greater interest in schooling throughout the society, many Buddhist nuns are seeking an education and challenging their traditional domestic role.

Lopsang is 50 years old. Her maroon robe is tattered and her shaved head is bound by a ragged scarf. A nun since she was 7, Lopsang received neither a Buddhist nor a secular education. She is exhausted from years of care for the 6 children of her deceased sister as well as from the primary responsibility for her aged parents. She cannot hold back her tears when she talks of her longing to leave home, live with other nuns and study the Dharma. She feels it is too late to learn to read, but she would be content to chant scriptures and perform simple religious ceremonies.

Sonam, at 73, is tiny and bent with age. She chose to become a nun at age 20, because she felt the essential emptiness of secular life. As a young nun she walked from Ladakh to Tibet, a journey of many months over the world's highest mountains. She still has scars on her back from the ropes that cut into her flesh from carrying her basket of belongings over the passes and peaks. Sonam dreams that before her life ends, she will see a small nunnery arise for the ordained women of her Ladakhi village, with a teacher, a classroom and precious books for learning about Buddhism.

Dolma, age 24, has a beautiful face and bright smile. She was given to the religious life by her parents when she was 8, and feels fortunate that this choice was made for her, since it gives her a religious calling and vocation. She is determined to receive both a secular and a Buddhist education, and to join with other nuns of her village to develop a nunnery where the ordained women can live and study together. She lives at home where she tends the family and the herds. A young woman with shaved head and maroon robes, she yearns to fulfill her destiny as a nun.

Tsering is only 10, yet she also wears the maroon and gold robes of Ladakhi nuns and has close cropped hair. She and the other ordained girls are lively and fast moving, finding time to play games in the courtyard when they are not needed to fetch water or carry grain to the animals. Tsering does not go to the government school because secular schooling is considered inappropriate for ordained children. However, there is no Buddhist school for nuns, so Tsering

receives no education, which makes her very upset. She is eager to read and write, because at present she cannot even sign her own name.
The Buddhist nuns of Ladakh are now reaching out. Unless nunneries are supported and education offered, few young woman will remain ordained. Indeed, there is danger of the tradition of nuns dying out completely in Ladakh. Ladakhi Buddhism needs educated nuns who are steeped in the religious life and whose communities are places of prayer and refuge. Educated ordained women can contribute greatly to the preservation of spiritual life and to the highest values of Ladakhi society. A renewed order of nuns, supported and educated by Ladakhi people and institutions, would be of enormous benefit in this era of rapid change and development.

Marriage Transformed

by Rosanna Hsi

Nine years ago, I felt that marriage was a cosmic joke. I asked myself why two people like Peter and me, with so many differences, would want to get married, only to torture each other with arguments and fights. There was no happiness in our marriage. That year, Peter was trapped in a traumatic hotel fire in the Philippines and survived only by climbing down bedsheets tied to a balcony. The fire that appeared to be a disaster turned out to be the greatest blessing.
When he returned to Honolulu, he first became a vegetarian as gesture of gratitude for his life. The vegetarian food at the temple led us to studying the teachings of Buddha there. Peter took to the sutras like fish to water and felt that he had found his way home. I continued to accompany him in attending weekly classes at the temple even though I was overwhelmed by the profound wisdom of the Buddhist sutras. Thus, nine years ago, we began our journey together on the spiritual path as Buddhists. This has blessed our lives and our marriage with happiness from within.
Sakyamuni Buddha's message of realization to us is that latent in all sentient beings lies our Buddha nature. Because of our attachment and our impurities within, we don't realize its presence. In order to realize the Buddha nature within, we must start on an inner journey to overcome all our attachments. Especially our bondage to ourselves and to greed which are the sources of all human suffering. Our commitment to the noble calling motivated and inspired us to the courageous task of a life-time -- to take on a personal responsibility in changing ourselves instead of each other. The traumatic fire had a strong impact on us. It showed us how impermanent life can be and how foolish it is to be attached to it.
Incredible things happened to each of us, individually and as a couple, as we let go of our attachment to things and to ourselves. My physical appearance took on a change. As I became more flexible, balanced, and open in my attitude and in my dealings with people, my face became gentler and the tightness in my face softened. With a clear sense of direction towards my goal, I felt a heightened sense of well-being.
Peter's transformation was amazing. His anger was replaced by compassion; his greed was replaced by love for service and his blister from anxiety and tension was replaced by bliss.

As a couple, we noticed that we became more gentle and compassionate with each other as we let go of our stubbornness and of our own set ways and opinions. We no longer had to fight to the bitter end to prove ourselves right. We started cultivating humor in our marriage -- we don't take ourselves seriously. Being less self-centered has also helped us to be more considerate and more respectful of each other. Above all, we are willing to improve ourselves rather than trying to change each other.

Because of the commitment and values we share as a Buddhist couple, we are motivated to put ourselves aside together with all our petty likes and dislikes in order to help each other attain the noble goal. We treasure our lives together and realize that karma has put each of us as a help-mate for the other towards the attainment of Buddhahood. Much of our daily lives, even our evening walks together, is centered around sharing the Dharma (Buddhist practices) and in encouraging each other along the way. Our selfish wishes are put aside as we respect and honor the space and quietude needed in order to meditate, pray, and read the Buddhist sutras.

As we learned to liberate ourselves from the bondage and unhappiness within, we gained an empathy for the suffering of others. As we learned to be kind, gentle, and loving to ourselves, we are able to be more compassionate with the plight of all sentient beings. We are keenly aware of the precariousness of life and of the urgency of doing as much constructive good as possible. We are committed as a couple to sowing good seeds and doing good deeds to benefit ourselves and others in our lifetime together. Most of all, we want to share the Dharma, which is the best way to alleviate suffering because it gets to the source of unhappiness. We know that the good seeds we have planted will continue to grow for posterity even after we are gone. We share the Dharma with others through our words and deeds.

As an architect, Peter was able to play an active part in creating low-cost housing for the needy. He has been fortunate to have the chance to design and remodel many temples in Honolulu. He has been instrumental in promoting vegetarian eating and in leading family members and friends on the road to a healthier life-style.

I enjoy sharing the Dharma through writing and interpreting. Even though I feel inadequate, I put aside my feelings and allow myself to be the instrument in propagating the teachings of Buddha. At a recent ceremony celebrating the birthday of Sakyamuni Buddha, I had the opportunity to translate the Abbess's talk from Chinese to English. My love and concern for the elderly have grown more humanistic as I minister to them with more compassion. When I visit the home for the elderly, my heart goes out to those sick in bed. As I massage them with my Chinese ointment, I would urge them to pray and chant the name of Buddha whenever they can.

Compassion cultivates in me the highest sense of respect for all life, big or small. This new sense of awareness emerged only after I became Buddhist. Much to my surprise the ants and cockroaches that I used to kill without any consideration, I can no longer bear to kill. I now find ways to remove them from my home instead.

In reflection, it was the greatest blessing of our lives to have turned to Buddhism nine years ago. Buddhism has transformed our lives and our marriage through its spiritual richness. With deep gratitude, we will be celebrating our 20th anniversary this December. Our commitment to the noble calling of realizing our Buddha nature motivated us to master our vices and to cultivate the inner virtues of restraint, compassion, giving, contentment, gratitude, and wisdom. It is through this spiritual wealth that we experience bliss in the Dharma and awaken to the beauty of our own true nature.

Rosanna Hsi is a native of Hong Kong.

Feedback is most welcome. Please contact her at:
3869 Pokapahu Place, Honolulu, Hawaii 96816 USA.

A RETREAT AT PLUM VILLAGE

by Shelley Anderson

In her ground-breaking work on women and Buddhism, *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism*, Professor Rita Gross examines several issues that must be addressed if Buddhism is to live up to its message of liberation for all beings, and if Buddhism is to develop lasting roots in the West. Among these issues are the need to ensure women's full and equal participation; to model a fully developed lay practice, as opposed to a traditional emphasis on monastic practice; and the need to look again at the sacredness of ordinary life.

Professor Gross's insightful analysis came back to me many times as I participated in the annual family retreat at Plum Village, a retreat center in southern France founded by the Vietnamese Zen monk Thich Nhat Hanh. Some 500 people, mostly Westerners from Europe and the U.S., participated in this retreat, along with the small permanent community of novices, nuns and monks. The 1994 retreat was special because it included a week-long Fragrant Mountain Ordination Ceremony, during which many novice nuns and bhiksunis were accepted into the Order.

The equal position of women was immediately evident: the head of practice for the Upper Hamlet (Plum Village is divided into two hamlets separated by a kilometer) was a nun, Sister Jina; the majority of those taking the five precepts and the 14 precepts (of the Order of Interbeing, formed by Thich Nhat Hanh in 1966) were women; an equal number of women and men received the transmission during the ceremonies for new dharma teachers. It was very moving, during the weekly silent formal lunch, to see the two lines of nuns and monks walking with their bowls side by side, rather than the nuns walking behind the monks. During the daily Dharma talk (sometimes given by Sister Chan Khong, or by an experienced laywoman like Joan Halifax), great care was taken to use language that included both male and female pronouns and experiences. It was also moving to see a group of visiting nuns from the Tibetan tradition receive special instruction from Sister Annabel Laity, to prepare them to take various precepts during the Ordination Ceremony.

Thich Nhat Hanh has consistently supported women's ordination, so it is no surprise that Plum Village's core community is composed of more nuns than monks. The sangha of nuns at Plum Village is organizing a seminar on "The Shaping of Nuns in the West," tentatively scheduled for June 7 to 12, 1995, to look at the establishment of communities for western nuns, of different traditions. They are inviting interested nuns, monks, laypeople, Buddhists and non-Buddhists to attend, and asking for articles on the following topics: Eastern practices of community living that may be useful in a Western community of nuns; Western practices within non-Buddhist communities of nuns, that might be useful to Buddhist nuns; and suggestions on what can be done to help assist in the revival of the Bhikkhuni Order within the Theravada tradition. Other

suggestions for topics, as well as ideas for seminar activities, are welcomed. (Contact Sister Eleni, Plum Village, Meyrac, 47120 Loubes-Bernac, France. Fax +33 53 94 75 90.)

The Order at Plum Village is particularly concerned about the practice of engaged Buddhism, or social activism guided by Buddhist principles. The Order of Interbeing (Tiep Hien in Vietnamese), began in the mid-1960s with six members, three women and three men. There are now 150 members, laypeople and monastics, and thousands of others who recite the Order's 14 precepts. It is an international order, with Dharma talks translated into English, Vietnamese, French, German, and Italian. Halifax is an environmental activist, who is also concerned about preserving indigenous cultures; senior student Therese Fitzgerald, with her husband Arnold Kotler, runs a Buddhist publishing house and helps Thich Nhat Hanh organize retreats around the world. Sister Chan Khong is deeply involved with helping Vietnamese refugees threatened with repatriation, and organizes material and spiritual aid for the Order's work with the needy inside Vietnam. Mai Nyugen, a Vietnamese boat person who now helps other refugees in Britain, is a lay member of the Order. She is planning to return to Vietnam to set up a project to help women and children threatened with prostitution. Sister Lee, a novice from the USA, is preparing to work in Thailand, setting up a hospice for children with AIDS.

The Order is an example of cooperation between laypeople and monastics, between nuns and monks, and of what the encouragement of a supportive and skillful teacher can do. Lay practitioners are encouraged to develop models of how to integrate the practice of mindfulness in their daily life. This respect for lay practice in itself shows a respect for the sacredness or ordinary life and, by extension, for women, as it is women who are held responsible for and usually most involved in organizing daily chores like cooking, clearing, and child raising. During the retreat, there were daily Dharma discussion groups, where participants shared their experiences of how to bring the practice of mindfulness into everyday life. The suggestions were creative: when your computer screen flashes "Please wait," use the time to remember your breath, rather than being impatient with the delay; use the ringing of the telephone also to remember your breath and relax; compose *gathas* for driving your car and sending a fax.

Several techniques have been developed at Plum Village to help with family practice. There is a peace treaty that family members can sign, which offers practical guidelines on how to resolve conflicts; there is also a beginning anew ceremony, where family members can look at old hurts and recommit themselves to a peaceful family life. Families are also encouraged to use the mindfulness bell, a small bell any family member, no matter how young, can ring when time is needed to restore calm.

Child care for children six years or older was provided at the retreat. As Rita Gross points out in *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, child care is essential for women, if they are to have the time to meditate and study. The child care program included mindful walks in the woods, where children learn to look deeply at nature and the interconnectedness of life; and a physical exercise program called Kung Fu Fun. Children also drew note cards, decorated with glitter and painted with messages like "Be Peace," and "Flow like Water." that were sold to raise money for hungry children in Vietnam. The first half-hour of the daily Dharma talk was directed at the children. The talk frequently included Vietnamese folk tales, with a moral about compassion. The children would leave, after bowing respectfully to those who remained behind for the rest of the dharma talk. Teenagers and younger people in their 20s formed their own discussion groups after the Dharma talks.

The entire retreat confirmed my impression that Plum Village is a laboratory, and the annual family retreat an experiment in applying the teachings to the 20th century. It is a vital experiment

that is bringing Buddhism out of the temples and into a world that is starving for the message of freedom and compassion.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Buddhist Nuns In Bhutan

by Karma Lekshe Tsomo

Buddhism in Bhutan began in ancient times. Legend has it that the two oldest monasteries established there were among the 108 monasteries created by Songtsen Gampo, the Dharma king of eighth-century Tibet, in one day. Both are still standing and in good repair, due to the patronage of a long line of Bhutanese spiritual and secular rulers.

Bhutanese Buddhism thus derives from Tibet, but developed its own distinctive traditions of the Drukpa Kagyu school which date from the twelvth century and continue to the present day. The Drukpa school, from which the country (Drukyul, meaning "Dragon Land) takes its name, has flourished under State patronage in this thoroughly Buddhist land. The rulers promoted this particular school to forestall the problems of sectarianism, but teachers of other schools have appeared and made their influence felt, most notably the great Tibetan master Dilgo Kyentse Rinpoche of recent times.

It had always been my dream to travel to Bhutan and to visit the treasured monasteries of that fabled land. After years of friendship with an outstanding Bhutanese bhiksuni, I especially wished to visit the nunneries there. However, due to government's wise policies of measured development and also due to tragic thefts of religious treasures in recent years, tourist visas are extremely limited and usually handled through travel agencies who charge the limit. Imagine my delight when, after five years of attempts, I was at last able to realize my dream.

In the modern world, where jeans and coca cola are symbols of a dubious international cultural hegemony, it is refreshing to see an ancient culture that is protected and promoted by the government. The government's policies in the face of modern development and terrorist attacks in the south have been strongly criticized in the press, but all the Bhutanese I spoke with, of various ethnic backgrounds, respect and support these policies. The young king is widely admired and is an ardent Buddhist practitioner. He and his queens have completed the four foundational practices common to all schools of the Tibetan tradition. They go on frequent, intensive retreats and personally fund many Buddhist centers throughout the country.

Such a valuable tradition should not be allowed to decline, and all efforts at revitalization are very timely, especially efforts to encourage the spiritual practice of women. I was fortunate to

visit all four nunneries in the country this summer. All the nuns I met are devout practitioners, interested in furthering their education in Buddhism. Paro Kila Gonpa has already established a formal education program.
Two of the nunneries in Bhutan are very ancient and have legends and relics to prove it. Both follow the Drukpa Kagyu tradition. Chachung Karmo, six hours' walk from the nearest road through leech infested forests, is an isolated retreat that has served as a practice center for women for hundreds of years. Falling almost into ruin during the beginning of this century, it was revived and restored by the famous nun master known as Jetsun Lobonma. The other ancient monastery we visited, Paro Kila Gonpa, is nestled among the rocky peaks above the town of Paro and is approached by a lovely hike through forests sprinked with wild iris. The nuns and visiting lay practitioners were busily engaged in an extended fasting ritual of the Avalokitsvara, bodhisattva of compassion, undertaken on special occasions each year.
At each nunnery we visited, we expressed our support for the fine practice of the nuns and admired their fortitude. We made offerings of textbooks on grammar, along with the root text and Bhutanese commentary on *Engaging in the Bodhisattva's Deeds*. Prospects for the future are bright for the women of Bhutan. With government support for the preservation of ancient Bhutanese monasteries and traditions, Buddhism is flourishing and striving to meet the challenges of modern society. All the high-ranking scholar monks and meditation masters I met were extremely sympathetic to the advancement of Buddhist women. With their help and encouragement, and especially the determination of the nuns themselves, women may assume a larger role in the religious culture of this magical Buddhist kingdom.

United States

Summary of the Sangha Conference

Land of Medicine Buddha, California

July 8-10, 1994

First we each introduced ourselves and told our story. Then we put forth topics which were written on a big sheet of paper. After we could see all the topics, we each had up to three votes to decide the priority:

Career training (4)
Role models, dealing with projections (2)
Full ordination (4)

Friendship & mutual support (5)
(Creating community)
Orientation before/after ordination (4)
Communal vs. single living (0)
Separating dharma from culture (2)
(Integrating monastic life with culture)
Surviving crises (7)
(How to relate to our teacher, how to know what to do)
Future vision/5-year plan (2)

The discussion began with Friendship and Mutual Support. We agreed that this was important. We added the subheading "Ways of creating community". Conferences like this one are a good way to create a sense of community even though we live far apart. We each wrote down our name and address on a sheet that was then copied and distributed to that we can keep in touch individually.

Other ideas under this heading included: A pilgrimage of West Coast centers, a West Coast Sangha newsletter, a list of older sangha interested in helping new sangha. We also talked a bit about e-mail communication, as well as other computer-supported ways to create community, which can be useful with a group that isn't in physical contact.

It was discussed and agreed that orientation before and after ordination are very important, and should be made a priority. This is rather difficult to arrange, however, given that our communities are scattered and diverse, but can be an aim for the future.

Under Career Training, there was some confusion and disagreement about what this meant: training for while you're ordained or for when you disrobe(!). Another word for career might be "vocation" (calling) which is what the Christian monastics call it. One participant thinks hospice work is an area we should move into. The same person also thinks we could issue certificates for Counseling, to give some recognition for something we already do as sangha. One nun has taken it upon herself to get further training in psychology and management skills.

Surviving Crises: during the evening, a smaller number of us talked about crises that we had been through/are going through. Some of us are facing an Ethical Crisis in the community we live in: how to handle misconduct, personal disillusionment, chaos in the community. Whether to speak up. The two ethical situations that were mentioned have to do with money (a teacher being motivated by money), and inappropriate sexual relations between residents. The consensus was to speak up and to include a facilitator and/or ethics committee in the resolution of the crisis.

Some of us are facing a Crisis of Faith. Having to find our own wisdom and maturity. What if what the guru (or teacher or abbot) is telling you to do is really not working for you anymore. Feeling like your needs are not being considered. The conclusion was to reach out to other resources in the way of other mature dharma practioners and even other teachers with whom you do not have the formal guru-disciple relationship. Support and solutions may also come from counsellors and techniques that are not necessarily Buddhist. Another suggestion was to sleep on a problem before making a decision, then pray for obstacles if the decision one makes is not

right.

Full ordination, especially for women, was a topic that interested almost everyone, but we had to wait for Thubten Chodron to join us, as she was the only bhikshu(ni) there. When we did get together, we got her to talk about how and why. Her responses were interesting and inspiring, giving some idea of the benefits and logistics.

Tenzin Khachoe brought us information of a full ordination that was going to be held in Los Angeles, sponsored by the International Buddhist Meditation Center in December, 1994. It was to be conducted by male and female masters with witnesses from many many different Buddhist traditions, Tibetan, Japanese, Thai, Sri Lankan, Vietnamese, and Chinese. The ordainees, who also would be from several different traditions, were to be allowed to keep their own robes. As a result, five of the nuns who were at the conference were able to take vows as fully ordained nuns.

Sunday morning, Lama Zopa Rinpoche joined us. (This part was taped.) The first question was about feeling distant from the guru and low on inspiration. Rinpoche talked about purification and accumulation. Then he said, "Enjoying life by correctly devoting to the Virtuous Friend."

The next question was about forming a nuns' community. There were various opinions about whether this is a priority, whether it's feasible. Rinpoche asked how we feel about Vajrapani. One participant felt it is important to be physically close and accessible to the outside society. Rinpoche liked the idea of social service. Rinpoche thinks we need more nuns. Roger thinks the most important kind of training that the Sangha can get is Dharma education. This is the one thing that the public depends on us for. This is our social service.

Rinpoche also mentioned that the Sangha Fund is getting more support and donations these days. After that, he gave a short talk about the benefits of ordination. Rinpoche had also mentioned previously that he would like us to invite the sangha community at the conference to consider retreating or working as caretakers at the new land which has been offered for our use for shamatha practice. This was done the first day. Later, Rinpoche expressed some disappointment that the conference attracted mainly Tibetan Buddhist Sangha, since he had hoped to invite monastics from other traditions, such as Zen, to use the land, too.

Afterwards, also, over lunch, we talked more about a nuns' community. It was agreed that none of us is currently available to go to live somewhere else. However, Damcho Sangmo offered to be the contact person for proposals, etc. There is also a fund at FPMT set aside for this purpose.

There were several topics that we didn't get to, even though we were talking constantly for two days. In the future, I think that we should try to make more time for the conference. Also to try to stay in contact with the members of the group and any others who might be interested to join. There was a general feeling that it would be good to have more of these Sangha meetings in the future.

(Notes by Lobsang Drimay and Jigme Palmo)

India

Life As a Western Buddhist Nun

"...She is a nun because she is a beggar for alms, ...because she is one who wears the patchwork robes, ... a nun because of her acknowledgement, a nun (to whom it was said) 'come, nun' ...A nun is auspicious, ...a nun is a learner, a nun is an adept..."
(Book of the Discipline)

An intensive three-week training program for Western buddhist nuns of the Tibetan tradition will be held in BODHGAYA, INDIA, from FEBRUARY 5th TO 25th 1996
Organized by venerables Tenzin palmo, Thubten Chodron, Jampa Chokyi, Sangye Khadro and Siliana Sponsored by Sangha Trust/NWDA
For many years the Western Sangha and especially the nuns, have felt a need for proper training, support and conducive circumstances for Dharma practice. During the Conference of Western Buddhist Teachers which took place in Dharamsala, India, in March 1993, venerables Tenzin Palmo and Thubten Chodron presented this problem to His Holiness the Dalai Lama and H.H. advised:
"For sometime I have felt that the quality of the Sangha must be seriously looked at. Nowadays many people are rushing to take ordination and the number of monastics is increasing, but the importance of the quality is not being adequately considered. However, if there are many unqualified monastics, that will have only a negative effect on society...One thing that can be done to ensure the quality of the Sangha is to develop some form of training, perhaps an intensive course for several weeks, during which the basics of monastic life can be introduced to those newly ordained and candidates for ordination."
Subsequently, five Western nuns gathered to discuss a way of implementing the advice of His Holiness by offering a training and educational program similar to the extremely beneficial ordination period of the Chinese monasteries.

PURPOSE
*To provide extensive teachings on Vinaya and instruction on monastic behavior.
*To offer a forum for discussing topics which are seldom addressed directly in the traditional Dharma teachings, by incorporating historical, sociological and psychological perspectives.
*to give the opportunity for nuns to discuss the questions and difficulties facing Western buddhist nuns.
*To establish a feeling of community and support among Western buddhist nuns of the different Tibetan traditions.
*The course is directed primarily at Western nuns from all traditions of Tibetan buddhism. Western nuns from other buddhist traditions are also welcome, as will as Tibetan nuns who have

proficiency in English. Lay women who are seriously thinking about ordination will be considered on an individual basis.

Buddhist Monastic Dialogue, 1995

A week-end conference for Buddhist monks and nuns

Vajrapani Institute, Boulder Creek, California

July 21-23, 1995

Announcing the second annual Buddhist Monastic Dialogue! This will be a conference for ordained monastic sangha, of any Buddhist tradition. During the weekend, we will meet other monks and nuns, explore our common issues, strengths, obstacles, solutions, and resources, discuss what it means to be ordained in the west, and practice together. We will emphasize finding ways to support and strengthen our respective lifestyles and practices, so that our lives can be of most benefit to ourselves and to others.

Tentative Schedule:
Friday July 21:
Check-in 4:00 p.m. (earlier O.K.)
Dinner 6:00 p.m.
First Session 7:00 p.m. Getting to know each other, identifying key issues.

Saturday, July 22:
Discussion of issues and resources, practicing together.

Sunday, July 23:
Benefits of ordination to self and others, exploring our commitment to this lifestyle, planning for further cooperation and mutual assistance.

Check-out after lunch, which is at 12:00 p.m. (The conference may continue after that, if there is interest)

The weekend accommodations will be sponsored by Vajrapani, so the only cost will be for

transportation and food, which is $30 for the weekend.

For further information, please contact Ven. Jigme Palmo at (408) 476-8435 (before May 30) or Ven. Losang Tel: (408) 338-6654 or Fax: (408) 338-3666. Scholarships may be arranged.

SAKYADHITA U.K.

International Association of Buddhist Women

Sakyadhita will hold an open meeting:
31st, August 1995
From 2pm - 6pm
in the Small Hall at

CONWAY HALL
RED LION SQUARE
LONDON WC1 4RL
(Nearest Tube Station Holborn)

VEN. AYYA KHEMA will be speaking to us. She will be giving a talk entitled "THE BUDDHAS TEACHING FOR OUR TIME"

There will be a report on the Sakyadhita Conference which is being held in Ladakh on August 1st - 7th, 1995.

We hope the meeting will afford all, especially Buddhist women of different Traditions to meet and discuss with fellow Buddhists.
Tea and biscuits will be served; books and malas on sale and a raffle to raise funds. All donations gladly accepted to cover costs.

If you have any questions about Sakyadhita or the forthcoming Conference please contact: Wendy Barzetovic, 27, Ford St., Nuneaton, Warks, CV10 8AR, Tel: 01203- 351123.

Book Review

Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism

by Miranda Shaw

(Princeton University Press, 1994)

I went from bookstore to bookstore searching for *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism*, but everywhere I checked the newly released book was already sold out. It is rare that a book on yoga generates so much excitement with those who managed to get hold of a copy electrified by the contents. Fortunately the publishers rushed a second printing to press and I was finally able to discover for myself what all the excitement was about.

Westerners often gave the mistaken impression that enlightened masters and founders of great yoga lineages are almost all male. Harvard scholar Miranda Shaw buries this erroneous belief under an avalanche of evidence of the enormous role female masters have played in the development of the yogic tradition. Shaw spent two years doing field work in India and Nepal, and several more culling extensive collections of Sanskrit and Tibetan texts for information about the lives and teachings of enlightened women.

Amazingly, stories about these extraordinary women have always existed but male historians have tended to ignore them, even in cases where the so-called "founding fathers" of spiritual lineages are clearly described in written and oral histories as having "spiritual mothers" who passed on to them the sacred teachings that these men are supposed to have inaugurated.

Passionate Enlightenment is filled with biographies of extraordinary women of spirit. Like Siddharajni, a 12th century yogini from Uddiyana in northwestern India, whose rituals and meditations are practiced to this day by much of the Tibetan culture even though Siddharajni's name has been largely forgotten; or Bhiksuni Lakshmi, a Kashmiri abbess who cured herself of leprosy and whose healing techniques are still frequently used by Buddhist practitioners. The stories of these and numerous other female saints and teachers make for inspiring reading.

Tantra is a vast system of beliefs, yogic practices, and scriptures designed to help one uncover the undying reality within oneself. Tantra employs many methods to speed the journey toward enlightenment; including meditation, ritual, self-inquiry, study, artistic expression, devotion, and selfless service. Shaw, who is now at Princeton University, devotes several chapters to the most misunderstood aspect of Tantra-- Sacred sexuality.

She shows how some enlightened women recognized the uselessness of celibacy as a spiritual practice when the mind itself is not purified, and how they went about transforming their attitudes toward sex, developing a religious vision in which men and women achieve enlightenment together in an atmosphere of mutual respect and devotion.

Passionate Enlightenment is a major contribution to the history of women's spirituality. Revealing how Shaktism (the Goddess tradition of India) helped shape the illumined understanding of Buddhist and Hindu women and men of wisdom, framing a non-sexist worldview (many tantric texts emphatically condemn misogyny) in which ordinary life is celebrated as the play of purified awareness. The avid readers who purchased every copy of the first printing of this book the day it went on sale were right: this is one of the most exciting and inspiring books on yoga published in years.

Reviewed by Linda Johnsen. Reprinted fromYoga International, May/June 1995.

LEARNING TRUE LOVE:

HOW I LEARNED AND PRACTICED SOCIAL CHANGE IN VIETNAM

by Chan Kong

This book by Vietnamese Buddhist nun Chan Kong (formerly Cao Ngoc Phuong) will be of interest to many people: to peace activists, to researchers in women's studies of those interested in women and Buddhism, but perhaps most of all to everyone interested in engaged Buddhism. It is a simply written and completely engrossing account of one woman's life. Sr. Chan does not like to describe her memoirs as an autobiography, as it is not her story alone that she describes. Nevertheless, *Learning True Love* is a very valuable addition to a too-small category of writings--the lives of Buddhist women, telling their own story.

Born in 1938 to middle-class Vietnamese family, Phuong was greatly influenced as a child by the generosity and kindness to others of her grandparents and parents. She reflected this upbringing as a girl, when she would spend her pocket money on buying noodles for street children. Defying tradition, she was sent first to an all-girls school and then to university for an education. It was while studying science at the University of Saigon that Phuong's interest in social change really developed. Along with her classes, she worked in Saigon's slums, setting up day care centers, arranging for medical care, distributing rice and helping to educate the children,

This interest in social affairs came naturally, too. The war with the French colonialists was raging as she grew up: her father detained when Phuong was seven, was almost killed at one point. The suffering caused by war could be seen all around. Phuong would frequently try to enlist the help of Buddhist monks in her work to relieve this suffering, only to be told that social work was `merit work' that would never lead to enlightenment. "Even though Catholics are in the minority in our country," she would ask monks, "they take care of orphans, the elderly, and the poor. The Buddha left his place to find ways to relive the suffering of people. Why don't Buddhists do anything for the poor and then work for the poor; if she practiced hard enough, she might be reborn as a man, then, perhaps dozen of lives later, a bodhisatta. This answer did not feel right. "I did not want to become a man or even a Buddha," she wrote about this period of her life. "I just wanted to help the children whose suffering was so real."

In 1958, Phuong was to meet a monk with a different answer. The meeting would change her life. Thich Nhat Hanh was a radical young monk who coined the phase "engaged Buddhism"--social action based on Buddhist principles. Thich Nhat Hanh (or Thay--"teacher," an informal

word many Vietnamese use to address a monk) encouraged her work for social change, saying that enlightenment could come by living daily life in the deepest, most mindful way possible. He also explained his own work in village development. "From that day on, I knew he was the teacher I had been looking for," she writes. Slowly, a small sangha of other university students formed, under Thay's leadership. This group continued working in Saigon's slums and established night schools for poor workers, while continuing to study Buddhism.

The work grew increasingly difficult as the war between south and north Vietnam increased. By 1963, the south's Diem regime, controlled by Roman Catholics, declared that the Buddha's nativity could no longer be celebrated as a national holiday, and outlawed flying the Buddhist flag. Protestors, including many students, monks, and nuns were arrested and tortured.

Phuong's work in the underground nonviolent resistance to this--and to the Diem regime's many other human rights abuses, and to the war itself--would ultimately mean exile for her. Throughout the suffering--the murder of her co-workers, the self-immolation of her friend Nhat Chi Mai, the repeated bombings of medical clinics and schools she had helped to build--Phuong takes refuge in the teachings, in regular days of mindfulness, and in walking meditation.

The practice sustains her through her work in the early 1970s with Thich Nhat Hanh as part of the Vietnamese Buddhist Peace Delegation to the Paris peace talks; through their later efforts to save Vietnamese boat people; and in her continuing work with the Hungry Children Committee, which collects money and medicine for the destitute in Vietnam. Recognizing a life-long dream, Phuong lives now as an ordained nun in Plum Village, Thich Nhat Hanh's meditation retreat in France, where she teaches the Dharma and directs the work of the Hungry Children Committee, providing scholarships for poor Vietnamese children, and establishing mobile medical teams to help villagers.

Learning True Love saddens and inspires in turns. There is tremendous sadness at the waste and suffering of the Indochina war; there is also great inspiration at what one determined woman, moved by compassion, can accomplish. *Learning True Love* is a handbook for anyone who wants to learn how to remain calm in the midst of suffering, who wants to address the world's pressing problems by being in the world, but not overwhelmed by the world. Rita Gross observed in her study on women and Buddhism, *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, that Buddhism, unlike Christianity, lacked a prophetic voice--a deep concern for the poor and a sense that justice will be established on earth. It is a real pity that Gross did not have access to *Learning True Love*. The book, and Sister Chan Khong's life, is an example of Buddhist compassion in action, and an inspiration for social change activities of every faith.

(For information about Sister Chan Khong's work, write to: Hungry Children Committee, c/o Plum Village, Meyrac, 47120 Loubes-Bernac, France).

(Published by Parallax Press, P.O. Box 7355, Berkeley, CA 95707.)

Reviewed by Shelley Anderson

CROSS-CULTURAL FUNDRAISING

JEWELS OF THE DHARMA

SPIRITUAL DANCES FOR WOMEN'S CULTURAL PRESERVATION

by Samantha Tavares

Music, dance, chants, and other art forms are traditional ways through which women in many countries have promoted their spiritual and cultural beliefs.

In African and Latin American cultures, women have been responsible for propagating both traditional and innovative folkloric art forms to ensure the preservation of their unique spiritual values. A common characteristic of these diverse cultural projects is a focus on developing women's awareness of their potential for growth and change within societies which may not encourage the direct expression of women's spiritual beliefs.

On March 19, 1994, the Afro-Jazz Dancers sponsored a fundraising performance at the University of Hawai`i in Honolulu, to help promote and support the Jamyang Choling Institute for Buddhist Women.

The performance included eleven chant and dance pieces from Brazil, Panama, Haiti, West Africa, Cuba, and other African and Latin American countries. All the chants and dances utilized the spiritual power of African drums to foster concentration and altered states of consciousness in the participants and spectators.

The Afro-Jazz Dancers are women dedicated to propagating the chants, dances, and religious traditions of African and Latin American countries. Although these women have relocated to Hawai`i from their native countries, they try to preserve the spirit of these art forms. The group was founded by Adela Chu, a Panamanian/Chinese dancer who has for many years combined the spontaneity of Latin American and African dances with spiritual insights from the Chinese Buddhist tradition.

This fundraising event is a symbol of Latin American and African women's intentions to support the spiritual development of their Tibetan Buddhist sisters who are, like them, struggling to preserve their cultural traditions in Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, and other regions of the Himalayas.

It is the hope of the Afro-Jazz Dancers that their efforts serve as a model for other women's spiritual groups who could also volunteer their talents to promote and support the spiritual development of our sisters from Jamyang Choling Institute for Buddhist Women.

(This issue was compiled by Karma Lekshe Tsomo, with the kind assistance of Faye Newfield and Ramdas Lamb.)