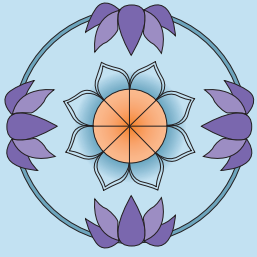


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Catching the Mind Moment

by Tom Davidson-Marx

A few folks have asked me if I feel lingering effects from my recent experience with COVID-19. “Not really,” I usually reply. But just between you and me, I find washing the dishes much more fulfilling than before. I used to find myself wondering pre-COVID-19 if washing dishes was getting in the way of my life, if it was some big interference in other plans I had. Washing dishes seemed like lost time.

Now things are different. Washing dishes in the kitchen sink, the old-fashioned way, is my life at this moment. It’s all of me – sudsy and slippery, saluted by dishes and lunch containers, knives, forks, spoons, tumblers, pots, pans – all inviting me to go deeper inside this sink and roll up my sleeves.

Washing dishes grounds me in this very mind-moment. One lunch container dyed red from pasta sauce. One sticky fork. When I don’t catch the mind-moment, the sink, the dishpan, and the counter spaces all seem so crowded with dish things. I can’t see a beginning or an end to them. But when I do catch the mind-moment, the most ordinary things take on

inexpressible beauty. I take in the view of those myriad dish things, like anxious puppies at the Humane Society, waiting to be taken home.

When we cultivate simple, mindful awareness as a formal sitting, standing, or walking practice, we call it “meditation.” When we practice it in our daily life, we call it “the dishes,” “the laundry,” or “the yard full of leaves, unraked since the last windy spell.”

It’s hard for us sometimes to believe that simple mindful attention is all there is to it. We complicate the matters with our judgment, putting down the ordinary as insignificant, pining after the idealized spiritual, never fully realizing that they are the same thing, never fully recognizing the consequences of our mind states and simple actions.

As I scrape out leftovers or throw peelings in the compost, I imagine what flowers may bloom the next year. If disenchantment arises, I read an excerpt from Thich Nhat Hanh’s teachings, reflect on it deeply, and put my dish-washing-averse mind to rest.

No dishes, no lotus!





Eighteenth-Century Advice for Modern Women of Privilege

by Alison Melnick Dyer

These days it is easy to have a sense of hopelessness. Here in the United States and in many parts of the world a pandemic rages, racism runs rampant, and environmental degradation remains unchecked. Many people wonder about what they can do to change this situation. We can learn from the examples of great Buddhist figures from the past how to improve our current circumstances. One figure worth our consideration is the 18th-century Tibetan Buddhist nun Mingyur Peldrön (1699–1769). She offers some useful inspiration for Buddhist women living today, especially those who experience a great deal of privilege even as they face the challenges of being a woman.

I am in the process of publishing a book about Mingyur Peldrön that discusses her life, and her religious and social stature. The book focuses on the lengthy hagiography (saint's life) written about her, that was composed by her male disciple Gyurmé Ösel. We need to keep in mind that this story is in a hagiographic style. While it describes the events of Mingyur Peldrön's life, it does so in ways that incorporate mundane as well as supernatural events to reinforce her enlightened persona. Thus, in talking about her I do not intend to convey 'what really happened' in her life. Rather than the veracity of these events, I am interested in sharing the broad aspects of Mingyur Peldrön's story as they were depicted by her disciple, insofar as they can inspire ideas for how to improve the world around us, especially those of us with some degree of privilege.

Mingyur Peldrön was a prominent teacher, practitioner, and community leader in eighteenth-century Central Tibet. Born and raised at Mindröling Monastery, she grew up in a world of privilege, though she missed some of the educational opportunities that her brothers received. Her early and continued access to religious education and training runs counter to how many Buddhists in North America tend to think of Buddhist women in history. Throughout her childhood she studied with a few prominent teachers at Mindröling, all of whom were men. By her early twenties she taught everything from *ngondro* (preliminary practices) to advanced *Dzogchen* (Great Perfection) practices. Early on, the adults in her life decided that she was expected to receive and pass along the lineage transmissions for her family, and that she would adopt the life of a nun before she was eighteen. According to the story, she was thrilled with this decision and pursued the path of a religious teacher until her death at age sixty-nine.

Mingyur Peldrön came of age at a time of civil war and fled into exile shortly before Mindröling was destroyed in the fighting. Her story recounts the trauma she experienced in this flight and her worry that neither she nor the teachings would survive. She spent a few years as a refugee in Sikkim, where her religious education and her close connection to

Mindröling's founders (her father and uncle) meant that she had an unusual opportunity to give public teachings. She and the women of the family who had fled with her were all treated as the guests of the Sikkimese royal family. Upon her return to a destroyed home, she dauntlessly spearheaded the reconstruction of Mindröling and was later joined in the effort by her brother. She used her connections to the political leaders of the time to gain financial backing for this rebuilding.

While Mingyur Peldrön was first and foremost a Dzogchen practitioner and educator, she was also a vocal advocate of women's religious education. In her advice to religious women, she urged them to always persist in the face of hardship. She met with many of the notable political and religious leaders of the day, and their wives and daughters. She used her advantages to support women on the Buddhist path. These included acting as a financial benefactor for indigent nuns who could not have been able to follow this path otherwise, and passing on the teachings that her students requested. One of her most persistent arguments was that women should be able to teach the dharma, and she imparted her religious education so that they could do so.

The story of Mingyur Peldrön's life elevates her to a significant position and offers an interesting form of inspiration. It shows how women of privilege can use their benefits to support those who need it the most. It points to the complexity of individual positionality. For example, a woman can be denied certain aspects of formal education and still be the most highly educated woman around. Even as she experiences gender bias and other harms, she can use her privilege to remedy social inequities. Mingyur Peldrön is a great example of inspirational women who used their privilege for the benefit of others, and who sought the Buddhist path even though at times they were subjugated by patriarchy. As stories of prominent Buddhist women make their way into the English language, English-speaking Buddhists are learning that the history of women in Buddhism is peppered with inspiring tales of women's pursuit of enlightenment, and that some of these women were very privileged indeed.

Mingyur Peldrön gives us a different way of thinking about early modern Buddhist women and can motivate those who *do* have privilege and think about how they can use it. This means acknowledging our privilege, and then actively using it for the benefit of others. For example, financially prosperous women can anonymously support teachings so that those with less financial privilege can attend without needing to pay high registration fees. They can advocate for dharma teachings and transmissions that accommodate practitioners who cannot attend week-long sessions because it would be impossible for them to take that much time off from work and family obligations. They can find ways to create dharma programs that take into account the time and financial constraints of their fellow practitioners. Women with race-based privilege can speak out about power imbalances in their communities and actively work

toward shifting racist dynamics. They can train themselves to see those imbalances more clearly. In predominantly white sanghas, they can advocate for spaces free from harm for their fellow practitioners who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). They can listen to Buddhists who are not white to learn what those spaces might be, and think creatively and offer their resources to support its formation. They can learn and talk about the dangers of micro-aggressions, and dismantle the systems of oppression that reinforce race-based power imbalance in the sangha.

Rather than the more frequent ‘rags to nirvana’ stories, Mingyur Peldrön’s life shows us that not all women had to battle their families for a Buddhist education, or run away from home to follow the path of the dharma. At least one woman was born with Buddhist privilege and did all she could with it to uphold her religious family as well as help women who lacked that privilege. Her story gives a sense of how we can recognize our own privilege, and then use it for the benefit of others on the path. We can learn a lot about our collective Buddhist past by exploring these stories and then using our own privilege to benefit the Buddhist community as a whole.

Alison Melnick Dyer is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Bates College. Her scholarship focuses on the intersection of gender and privilege in Tibetan Buddhist history, especially in the Drikung Kagyu and Nyingma traditions. She is currently completing a book about Mingyur Peldrön.



Contraband

by Rachael Siciliano

“Under no circumstances, may you bring anything into the women’s prison,” warned the corrections officers (COs) during the volunteer training. “No belts. No watches. No barrettes. No hair bands. Absolutely no phones. No keys. No ID. You may carry teaching materials in a clear plastic bag, but you may never, ever, give them to the inmates. You may bring one pen to mark attendance, but if you enter with a pen and leave without a pen, then you’ve brought contraband into a prison. That’s a felony, punishable by up to five years in prison.”

New to the punitive justice system, we volunteers cannot imagine what these women might do with our misplaced objects. So the COs show us: they crack open a book to reveal drugs in its carved out center. They don body armor woven from newspapers, that are surprisingly puncture-resistant. They shroud a table in artisanal pen shanks.

Scared, some would-be volunteers leave.

Others finish the training only to have our friends terrify us. “Wait, what? You volunteer at a prison! Is it safe? Aren’t you scared?” Once we assure them we’re safe, the women are polite, and, really, how scary can it be to meditate. Our friends shift their focus from cartoon villains – every person convicted of a crime is an unredeemable criminal—to cartoon heroes—you and the women are *bodhisattvas*.

“You must be such a comfort to them.”

“You are so good.”

“With nothing to do but meditate, surely they will become enlightened.”

Villains don’t deserve our help, and saints don’t need it. But people do. This could be why our friends struggle to see incarcerated people as people—sometimes quirky, sometimes kind, and always complicated. Sometimes women meditate for multiple sessions, then scowl at us from across the courtyard. Sometimes they come each week only to fidget and stare. One Super Bowl Sunday, while the other women watched the game, a lone woman appeared. She didn’t want to meditate. She wanted to watch the game. But she didn’t want me to feel abandoned.

When we enter the prison, we surrender our keys and IDs. Once inside, we reveal no personal information, share no opinions, show no emotions, and take no sides. All we are allowed to offer is our teaching.

But something else slips in with us under the razor wire curls – contraband so precious we

can't believe the guards miss it. Presence: our presence, the women's presence, the practice of presence.

Immersed in the punitive justice system, the COs can't imagine what these women might do with mindful presence. But we can. Whether they simply like sitting with others or meditate daily, these women can turn this presence of mind into clarity, composure, and compassion – powerful weapons that may someday set them free.





Mahāpajāpatī, Misconceptions, and Religious Literacy: Pedagogical Reflections on an Early Buddhist Story¹

by Andrew Housiaux

As educators, how can we help our students come to an accurate understanding of Buddhism? What strategies can we use, and what are some challenges we will likely face? This article responds to these questions in two parts. First, I make some brief remarks about pedagogy. Then I describe this pedagogy in practice, focusing in particular on the way my students make sense of the encounter between the Buddha, Mahāpajāpatī, and Ānanda.

To begin, it's important to understand that beginners and experts think differently. Experts have mental models, or schema, that help them organize their knowledge and link new ideas to that existing knowledge. Beginners lack these cognitive structures, and as a result, their understanding is often fragmented and incomplete.²

Thus, one of our primary jobs as educators is to introduce students to mental models that have value in our classes—and value long after they leave our classrooms.

It is not always easy to remember what it was like to be a beginner or to think like one. Put differently, the mental models that experts have internalized may seem trivial to fellow experts, even if they provide significant explanatory power for a novice. My pandemic cooking experience offers one example of the deep value of schema to novices. To a Michelin-starred chef, the idea of well-balanced dish needing salt, fat, acid, and heat (as chef Samin Nosrat tells

us) is obvious. For me – a novice cook trying to feed my family moderately palatable food during this pandemic – it was closer to a revelation.

Beginners also approach new subjects with misconceptions. Students who are new to Buddhism (and even those who are not new) can land in our courses with any number of misconceptions: Buddhism is all about peace, all Buddhists meditate, the Dalai Lama is some kind of Buddhist pope, and so on.³ Perhaps the biggest misconception is one that is rarely articulated: all Buddhists are the same.

By looking at a few paragraphs from the Pāli canon and the ways they have been interpreted over time, I help my students see how Buddhism is internally diverse, and not monolithic.⁴ When Mahāpajāpatī, the Buddha's aunt, wishes to ordain, she asks the Buddha three times for permission to do so. He refuses her request. She then approaches Ānanda, the Buddha's attendant and disciple, to intercede on her behalf. He does, asking an additional three times. The Buddha refuses again. It is only when Ānanda changes the nature of the question from one of permission – may women ordain? – to one of capacity – do women have the potential to attain stream entry, once-returner, non-returner, and arhat? – that the Buddha's response changes. He acknowledges that women and men have equal potential to awaken, and when Ānanda asks if women can then go forth and be ordained, the Buddha agrees – with the infamous restriction of the eight special rules.⁵

This brief exchange inspires several weeks of investigation that gives students more accurate mental models and helps them see clearly the internal diversity of Buddhism.

After discussing the passage above, we examine the eight special rules. What do they tell us about the regulations of the monastic community that subordinated women to men? Students who previously believed Buddhism was founded in equality are challenged by the first of the eight special rules, which says, “a nun, even of a hundred years standing, shall respectfully greet, rise up in the presence of, bow down before, and perform all proper duties towards a monk ordained even a day.”⁶ After I help students understand sexism in terms of systemic power rather than individual actions, they better understand how inequality can result from the combination of a founder's words, communal practices, and society's preferences for men over women.

Just as important as our study of monastic law is our study of women's voices. We spend several classes studying the poems of the enlightened women of the *Therīgāthā*. We read them for their expressions of Buddhist ideas and to see what inferences we can make about the lives of women, both before and after their ordination.

We also engage with scholarship about this period. For example, in *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, Rita Gross looks carefully at the eight special rules, the *Therīgāthā*, and their

broader historical and social context.⁷ This reading also helps students think about the Buddha's omniscience, his prophecies about the decline of the Dharma, and the ways people read and interpret texts with particular values and goals. While students do not always agree with Gross, they come to see her intellectual work as central to their own learning and to the work of religious studies.

Finally, we watch a documentary, "The Buddha's Forgotten Nuns" that looks at contemporary efforts to restore the *bhikkhunī* lineage, especially within the Theravāda tradition.⁸ This documentary features multiple perspectives: Western nuns seeking *bhikkhunī* ordination within the Thai Forest tradition, Thai *bhikkhunīs* like Ven. Dhammananda who lead communities of nuns, and Thai *maechi* who see no need for higher ordination because, in their view, liberation is a matter of the mind and heart—not external circumstances. It also contains perspectives from former female monastics in the Thai Forest tradition, western *bhikkhunīs*, and two groups of western *bhikkhus*: monks in Australia who did ordain *bhikkhunīs* (and were then expelled from their Thai Forest lineage) and a group of monastics in England from the same tradition who refused to do so.

As students grapple with diverse interpretations and assertions about the Buddha's intent, they realize that Buddhists are not a monolithic group; their beliefs, interpretations, and practices have changed over time and diverge significantly from each other. Students encounter multiple contemporary communities of Buddhists who all look back to the words of the Buddha but arrive at radically different conclusions about their significance for monastic life today, especially as they pertain to the *bhikkhunī* lineage and ordination.

I began this essay by saying that one of my fundamental presuppositions as an educator is that beginners and experts think differently, and that one of our major tasks as educators is to give students the schema – the mental models – to think more like experts.

This task is particularly important because most of my students are taking their first and *last* course in Religious Studies. My job is not to teach them to become professors. Few, if any, will. My job is to help them understand the internal diversity of religious traditions. By seeing the ways in which religious and scholarly authorities interpret texts to arrive at conflicting conclusions, my students realize that religious traditions are not uniform and unchanging but multivocal, messy, and contested.

If we do this work well, our students will leave our classrooms prepared to understand not just debates over gender in early Buddhist monasticism, but also principles of Supreme Court jurisprudence, and ways in which religious figures of all stripes arrive at conflicting positions.

They will be religiously literate and discerning citizens at a time when both qualities are

urgently needed in our classrooms and in our public sphere.

Andrew Housiaux is the Currie Family Director of the Tang Institute at Phillips Academy, a high school in Andover, MA. His teaching and research focus on the ways in which adolescents can use insights from the disciplines of philosophy and religious studies to lead more reflective and moral lives. He was a Religious Literacy and Education Fellow in Religion and Public Life at Harvard Divinity School in 2019-2020.

Notes

¹ A version of this article was first presented at the American Academy of Religion meeting in December 2020 as part of a panel discussion on Buddhist pedagogy, organized by Gloria I-Ling Chien and Trung Huynh.

² This idea is well-attested in educational literature. One discussion of this principle can be found in Hendrick and Kushner, *How Learning Happens: Seminal Works in Educational Psychology and What They Mean in Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 3-12.

³ Uncovering student misconceptions is a deep pedagogical challenge. On the topic of misconceptions about Buddhism, Donald Lopez and Robert Buswell's "10 Misconceptions about Buddhism" is informative. See <https://tricycle.org/magazine/10-misconceptions-about-buddhism/>

⁴ The Harvard Program in Religion and Public Life (RPL) has produced some excellent resources on this topic. One example is here: <https://bit.ly/2WmSnqQ>. For more about the RPL, see rpl.hds.harvard.edu

⁵ We use the version of this encounter presented in Susan Murcott's *First Buddhist Women* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax, 2006), 25-30. Murcott refers to the *Cullavagga* (Cullavagga X.10) in her text.

⁶ Murcott, 214.

⁷ In particular, we focus on Gross's discussion in chapter four, "Sakyadhita, Daughters of the Buddha: Roles and Images of Women in Early Indian Buddhism." Rita Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993).

⁸ "The Buddha's Forgotten Nuns," dir. Wiriya Sati (2013).



Pandemic Insights

by Margaret Coberly

When do you think everything will get back to normal?" she asked, tears hanging in her trembling voice. "That's all I want, really, just for life to be normal again, like it was before this, this . . . virus *thing* happened."

It wasn't a complicated question but more of an emotional plea from a lovely friend with a privileged life. "Well, if by normal you mean typical or expected, that possibility is long gone," I sighed. "Things change and we adapt, don't you agree?" There was a long silence.

"No, you can't be serious. It's too depressing to think that things won't get back to the way they were ever again.!"

"What way?"

"Well, you know, having drinks together with a bunch of friends, going out, going to restaurants and bars, shouting at each other to be heard. That's the way." Then she added in

a more petulant tone, “Kissing cute guys on the mouth! The fun intimate things we could do before we had to wear masks everywhere, and there aren’t even any places to go anymore. It’s ALL shut down, the whole world is shut down. I don’t have any friends living with me. I’m all alone, and I hate being by myself all the time, thinking, thinking. I can think myself into a muddy ditch and then I’m in the doldrums guaranteed. I can’t stand being alone with myself all the time. I need friends to be happy.”

“Hey,” I interrupted cheerfully, “You are the one who decides how you view things. That’s how it works. It’s your thoughts that make you sad or happy. Your best friend is your own inner knowledge. Your best guide is the realizations you’ve gained over time.”

There was a sudden commotion. “Holy Toledo,” she blurted out, “Someone’s knocking on the front door. What shall I do? What if it’s my neighbor, the cute one, and I look like hell. I gotta go.” She hung up.

I sat for awhile staring at the wall. What if millions of people are breathing suffering and pain into the air we breath? Can I generate love and compassion to help balance it out? All thoughts and feelings — happy, unhappy, dissatisfied, confused, content, or at peace — arise from my own mind.

We can’t ignore the pain and suffering of the pandemic, but we can make the most of this precious time and practice sitting in silence. Letting go of attachments, we can just watch the thoughts drift by with relaxed awareness. What we think is what we become, in each precious moment. Do we really want to get back to normal?

Instead of longing for the past, we can take this opportunity of pandemic-enforced isolation to reflect on the power of the mind. In the eloquent words of Lama Mipham, a scholar in Tibet during the 19th century:

Mind is the root of both Samsara and Nirvana:
There is no entity of reality that has not sprung from mind.
The frolicking and dancing of worldly and transworldly apparitions
in all their multiplicity
Comes to an end when its creator, mind as a magician,
has been overpowered.

Margaret Coberly is an R.N. and a retired Professor of Psychology and Dean at Windward Community College. She lives in Honolulu near her kids and grandchild.



Women in Buddhism: Spiritual Equals and Contemporary Trends

by Vinita Agrawal

What matter being a woman
If with mind firmly set
One grows in the knowledge
Of the right law, with insight?
(Sanyutta Nikaya)

In human society, there is a certain discomfort when women aspire to tread the path of liberation. By some unspoken understanding, the path seems to be reserved exclusively for men. Research to better understand this bias is worthwhile and significant.

The unease many people feel when women enter the *sangha* (the monastic order) stems from males – the flag holders of patriarchal societies throughout the world. Apparently, even Śākyamuni Buddha was not free from reluctance when ordaining women. The Buddha's hesitation, however, needs to be clarified and contextualized.

According to Geshe Lhakdor, director of the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala, India, "Buddhism, since its inception has been and continues to be a reflection of the society in which it thrives. When the Buddha was alive, women were looked upon as lustful temptresses at best and bewitching evil incarnates at worst. The Buddha's reluctance to allow women into the Sangha stemmed from this pervasive perception. He never, not for one moment, doubted women's intrinsic capacity to attain enlightenment and become *arhats*."

Tracing Patriarchal Traditions

The Brahmanical Hindu tradition at that time did not grant any parity to women. Women had a very marginal place in that patriarchal society. In that sense, the Buddha's decision to permit women to join the sangha was progressive in treating women as equal to men in terms of spiritual pursuits. Women from all walks of life entered the *sangha* – wives, mothers, courtesans, prostitutes, teachers, and wanderers.

The public face of Buddhism in the Asian cultural context is very male-dominated even today. Many women do not consider exploring Buddhism because they think that Buddhism is just another sexist religion. On the other hand, some who explore Buddhism personally find it so intensely liberating that they devote their lives to its study and practice. Paradoxically, both impressions are correct.

Although the Buddha on several occasions pointed out the weaknesses and tendencies of women, he also gave due credit to their capabilities. From the perspective of women's struggle with religion overall, we must grant that the Buddha paved the way for the inclusion of women. In most other religions at that time, women were barred from entering temples and reading scriptures. Sometimes their tongues were cut if they even dared utter holy mantras. In the milieu of such social bigotry, Buddhism was among the least discriminatory towards women in ancient times.

Women's Struggle for Liberation

Joining the order of the nuns as a *bhikkhuni* gave women a sense of self-worth. They began to be recognized for their qualities rather than for their physical attributes. For the first time in their lives, women were not just someone's daughter, wife, mother, or sister. One can gauge this by studying the *Therīgāthā* (Verses of Elder Nuns) in contrast to the *Theragāthā* (Verses of Elder Monks). The experiences of women in that Indian social context were very different from those of men. Their poetry distinctly exhibits the painful repercussions of gender

inequalities. Senior nuns such as Ambapali, Mutta, Dhamma, and Vimala were champions of the feminist cause in olden times, indeed at a time when feminism as we know it was not even conceived.

One critical point to note is that women's motivations for joining the sangha were different from men's. The poems of the *Therīgāthā* lead one to conclude that women were often motivated by a wish to be free from the suffering they experienced in relationships: the death of loved ones, separation from family, hardships, betrayal, and the like. Mutta revels in the freedom of renouncing domestic responsibilities:

Free am I, oh so free am I being freed
By means of the three crooked things: the mortar
Pestle and my crooked husband.
(*Therīgāthā* 11)

By contrast, free from these constraints, men were more often motivated solely by the goal of *nibbāna* rather than escape from the sufferings in their lives. Men became free from these sufferings but were not driven by them. While women emphasized struggle, men stressed escape. That is a subtle yet significant difference.

The sense of liberation these early Buddhist women must have experienced can only be imagined. The credit for allowing them this freedom again goes to the Buddha and his teachings. These teachings were especially transformative for society at a time when religion was dominated by rituals and superstitions.

Women in Early Buddhism

Mahāpajāpatī Gotami, the Buddha's stepmother, was adamant and persistent in her plea to join the *sangha*. But the Buddha declined her request thrice. Not to be defeated, she shaved her head, donned the yellow robe, and traveled a distance of 357 miles in a procession of 500 nuns to Jetavana Grove where the Buddha was residing at the time. Ānanda saw her implacable determination and pleaded with the Buddha on her behalf. Finally, Ānanda asked the Buddha whether women could achieve the bliss of liberation. It was then that the Buddha relented, replying that a woman could attain the goal as well as a man.

From a modern perspective, the decision to allow women into the *sangha* was a pivotal one. It was nothing short of a revolution in that day and age. The first thing the Buddha did after he ordained the first nuns was to lay out a set of eight ground rules (Pāli: *garudhamma*; Sanskrit: *gurudharma*) for the conduct of nuns in the *sangha*. The essence of these rules was clearly to establish that nuns occupied a secondary position compared to monks in the *sangha*. This may have been a psychological ploy to ensure that the *bhikkhus* would remain unruffled by the admission of *bhikkhunīs*.

The nuns accepted the rules set out for them, even though the rules made them subservient to men. The nuns were grateful and relieved to be given an opportunity to tread a spiritual path that enabled them to cultivate their minds. In some versions of the story, Mahāpajāpatī is shown trying to negotiate the first rule that requires elder *bhikkhunīs* to pay respect to newly ordained *bhikkhus* but she eventually acquiesced.

It is said that when Mahāpajāpatī attained *parinirvāna* at the age of 120, the Buddha himself attended her funeral. He had the Lichhavi prince build a *stupa* for her and her relics were enshrined in it. The Buddha then addressed the gathering of monastics and laity and declared that Mahāpajāpatī was foremost in attainments among the great female *arhats* of the noble *sangha*, a rare honor conferred by the Tathāgata himself.

Shortly after the Buddha's death, Ānanda was reprimanded for his intercession on behalf of the women who sought ordination. The fact that Ānanda was reprimanded for advocating women's admission to the *sangha*, despite his recitation of the Buddha's teachings being the foundation for the Buddhist canon, is significant. It implies that, at a very early point in Buddhist history, prominent *bhikkhus* were uncomfortable with the presence of women in the *sangha*. Even so, the elder *bhikkhunīs* proved through their attainments that merit and knowledge are critical in achieving emancipation. Purifying the mind is the goal for all, irrespective of gender.

Changes in Modern Buddhism

Writer and thinkers like Diana Paul have identified the Buddhist period as an essentially misogynistic age in Buddhism, for reasons mentioned earlier. Nevertheless, many women found the practice of meditation gender-free and liberating. For many feminist women of the 1960s and 1970s, Buddhism and feminism seemed to be allies, for good reason. Women experienced sorrow at the lack of female ancestors and role models and searched the Buddhist records for inspirational figures. There were indeed great women practitioners in the history of Buddhism but they were rarely as prominent in Buddhist memory as their male counterparts. Again, the *Therīgāthā* came to their rescue. Some Zen Buddhist communities, such as the San Francisco Zen Center, began the practice of chanting the names of female elders recorded in the *Therīgāthā*, ending with an acknowledgment of "all the forgotten women ancestors."

Fortunately, women teachers are becoming more common among convert Buddhists. It takes many years for a student of Buddhist meditation and philosophy to become qualified to teach. The first students who were authorized by their Asian teachers to teach Dharma were male but gradually women are also being allowed to teach. In 2011, the German nun Kelsang Wangmo achieved the rare distinction of becoming the first female *geshe* in the Tibetan Buddhist traditions. In a recorded interview, she said she initially encountered obstacles in her studies. When it was her turn to teach, she sometimes found herself in front of an empty

classroom because male students could not accept a female teacher. Today, she is a well recognized scholar and teacher.

A Sense Of Perspective

While it is true that Buddhism was quite disadvantageous to women in the past, it has also provided freedom, dignity, and peace to women. Transforming the tradition depends on the initiative, courage, and imagination of women practitioners, especially those pioneers who envision a gender-neutral way of understanding and practicing Buddhism. Following the middle path, these women neither ignore obviously sexist patterns in Buddhism nor do they abandon Buddhism because of the sexism they encounter. We will need to persevere on this middle path for some time to come. Given the veneration the Buddhist patriarchy has received throughout history, it would be naive to assume that gender discrimination can quickly be abolished.

Tenzin Palmo, a well-known Buddhist nun of the Drukpa Kagyu lineage relates, “When I first came to India I lived in a monastery with 100 monks. I was the only nun. I think that is why I eventually went to live by myself in a cave. The monks were kind, and I had no problems of sexual harassment or troubles of that sort, but of course I was unfortunately within a female form. They told me they prayed that in my next life I would have the good fortune to be reborn as a male so that I could join in all the monastery’s activities. They said, in the meantime they didn’t hold it against me that I had this inferior rebirth in the female form. It wasn’t my fault. In the past, the sangha was firmly established, nurtured, and cared for. In the West, that is not happening. There are a few monasteries, mostly in the Theravāda tradition, which are doing well, but for the nuns what is there?”

His Holiness the Dalai Lama sent the following message on the occasion of the Fourth Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women, held in Ladakh in August 1995: “Peaceful living is about trusting those on whom we depend and caring for those who depend on us. Even if only a few individuals try to create mental peace and happiness within themselves and act responsibly and kind-heartedly towards others, they will have a positive influence in their community. As well as being equally capable, women have an equal responsibility to do this. Remembering the kind influence of my mother, I pray that women working for inner peace and, through that, peace in the world may be blessed with success.” Ten years later, in 2005, he remarked, “Regarding the Bhikshuni ordination,... were the Buddha to come to this 21st century world, seeing the actual situation in the world now, he might have changed the rules somewhat.”

With Courage and Beauty

In hindsight, understanding the cultural context, we can appreciate that the women of

the *Therīgāthā* told their stories with heartbreaking honesty and beauty, revealing the deeply human side of extraordinary women. These courageous women are inspiring reminders of our potential to follow in their footsteps. Their achievements serve as powerful curatives to any mistaken notion that the Buddha's teachings are applicable and effective only for men. For over two and a half millennia, the outstanding heroism and nobility of pioneering women have inspired those who endeavor to practice the Buddha's teachings – whether monk, nun, layman, or laywoman. The goal of liberation is open to all who are willing to put forth the effort.

At the time of the Buddha, due to the widespread cultural devaluation of women, female practitioners had to exert tremendous effort to triumph over social and religious restrictions. The poems of the *Therīgāthā* provide ample proof of this. So why not now? Above all, the *bhikkhunīs* expressed the compassionate hope that all those caught in worldly life will eventually obtain a more liberating perspective. This note of optimism serves as a beacon of hope for women across time, inspiring them to pursue the path of liberation with diligence and unwavering effort.

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Teaching the Bhikkhuni Ordination Issue through Contemplative and Ignatian Pedagogies

by Gloria (I-Ling) Chien

This essay will first introduce the tenets of contemplative pedagogy (CP) and the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP). Drawing on my teaching experience in a Jesuit university in the United States, I will present how I integrate both CP and the IPP to teach the issue of bhikkhuni ordination.

Inspired by Asian religious contemplation practices, such as Hindu yoga and Buddhist meditation, CP has been rapidly expanding across disciplines in American higher education. The most discussed CP characteristic is its inclusion of first-, second-, and third-person approaches for teaching. CP's first-person approach emphasizes the students' participation in contemplative practice without asking them to embrace a particular worldview in order for them to examine their cognitive, emotional, and semantic reactions from these experiences. This critical first-person aspect is often paired with the third-person objective approach, which requires educators to contextualize a contemplative practice in terms of its cultural and doctrinal backgrounds. This third-person aspect asks the students to compare their

contemplative experience to their ideas gleaned from the relevant texts and research in neuroscience, psychology, and other disciplines. Maintaining a critical distance, students reflect objectively on their experience. After this combination of first- and third-person aspects, CP incorporates the second-person approach, which features both an interpersonal and a relational dimension. This approach invites students to examine their relationships with their peers, teachers, family, and environment.

Conducting research on the Cognitively-Based Compassion Training® contemplation program developed by Emory University and teaching courses on Asian religions and Buddhism in a Jesuit university made it clear that CP resonates well with the IPP's goal of actualizing the Ignatian-Jesuit distinctive "care for the whole person" (*cura personalis*) style of learning. The whole-person cultivation develops students intellectually, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The IPP can be considered a Jesuit contemplative pedagogy because it is derived from the *Spiritual Exercises*, a contemplation guide composed by the founder of the Society of Jesus, Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556).

The IPP contains five elements: context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation. First, educators need to be acquainted with the students' contexts, which include both students' personal backgrounds and the broader societal and national environment surrounding them. Second, teachers devise learning experiences that involve both cognitive and emotional engagement to enhance students' learning. Third, educators coach students to reflect on their experiences to help them obtain insights into the subject matter, their self-identity, and their relationships with others. Fourth, teachers facilitate students' reflections in a way that will inspire them to act inwardly or outwardly. The inward action refers to an internal choice, such as making a decision or changing a certain perspective. The outward action occurs when that new attitude is externally performed. Fifth and last, educators periodically evaluate how well students follow their experiences, reflections, and actions. This five-element combination creates a distinctive "way of proceeding" that educators can apply to various disciplines, such as to compassionate character formation, Spanish language and literature, accounting ethics, or social justice in teacher education. It can also be paired with feminist teaching strategies.

In spite of their different origins, CP and the IPP both stress experiential learning. CP's first-person approach, which focuses on contemplative experience, parallels the IPP's element of experience. The IPP's aspects of reflection and inner action align with CP's emphasis on the inner investigation of sensations and perspectives. In addition, the IPP's pursuit of students' transformation is ingrained in the Jesuit emblem of whole-person development, which includes students' spiritual growth. While avoiding the possibility of even inadvertent proselytization, CP supporters also advocate for students' character formation and the pursuit of personal meaning and spirituality regardless of religious affiliation. As an educator at a

Jesuit university, I have purposely integrated both CP and the IPP in my Buddhist studies classroom. For example, to explore the issue of bhikkhuni ordination, students watch the 2013 Australian documentary *The Buddha's Forgotten Nuns* and a clip from a popular American TV sitcom. They reflect on these selections in a journal entry based on a reading from the Pali text *Milindapañhā* (*The Questions of King Milinda*).

"The Buddha's Forgotten Nuns," a video directed by Wiriya Sati, tells stories about how women around the world fight for their rights to receive the bhikkhuni ordination. This documentary de-romanticizes Buddhism, as this ordination issue is little-known to American students, who often view Buddhism as a tradition that promotes peace, equality, and compassion. Students realize the complexity of this issue, when it cannot be detangled by even one of the most influential Buddhist leaders, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. This documentary shows a dialogue between him and the American nun Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo concerning this issue during a 2007 conference on Buddhist women's role in the *sangha* at the University of Hamburg. *The Buddha's Forgotten Nuns* focuses on Western women who battle to obtain full ordination. In contrast, Thai women as a group largely do not seek full ordination. One of the few exceptions is the Thai abbess of Songdhammakalyani Monastery, Bhikkhuni Dhammananda, who received a Ph.D. and was a professor of philosophy at Thammasat University in Bangkok.

This dichotomy connects with how cultural context influences a person's religious practice. The class places this issue within a larger cultural context by having students review Title IX, the American federal civil rights law as defined in the Education Amendments of 1972. This law prohibits discrimination based on sex in education programs. While Title IX concerns women's rights in secular settings, the bhikkhuni ordination involves women's rights to monastic education. 2020 marks the centennial anniversary of the culmination of American women's suffrage movement with the passing the 19th Amendment in 1920. Thus, students examine women's voting rights and ordination rights through the lens of social justice. By considering the IPP's aspect of context, which encourages educators to be aware of students' social and cultural surroundings, the class juxtaposes women's struggle for full ordination with Title IX and the women's suffrage movement. In this way, students can better appreciate Buddhist women's leadership and better realize the extent that women's rights issues still exist in Western countries.

The ordination issue is dismissive of women, so I present a critical thinking exercise by analyzing this view using the concept of sati (mindfulness) as presented in *Milindapañhā* (*The Questions of King Milinda*, I. 12). It illustrates an analogy that compares sati with a wheel-turning king's adviser-treasurer who helps the king maintain beneficial elements and remove the detrimental ones. As the treasurer helps the king, *sati* helps one examine the qualities of mental states, keeping the beneficial and removing the detrimental. Students study how this

analytical dimension of meditation works in terms of gender by watching a video clip of “The One With Ross’s Teeth,” from the American sitcom *Friends* (season 6, episode 8) and writing a contemplation journal entry. In this episode, Joey decides to remove all his roommate Janine’s feminine possessions, such as a painting of a baby, in the living room because Chandler criticized Joey’s enjoyment of Janine’s “feminine” hobbies, like knitting potholders and arranging flowers. These activities conflict with both Chandler’s and Joey’s attachment to a masculine identity. To prevent himself from being publicly judged as feminine, Joey hides his “feminine” identity by moving and decorating his bedroom with all Janine’s things. Students learned that this episode indicates dualist thoughts that polarize acceptable and unacceptable characteristics of women and men. I further point out that an attachment to such dualism partly causes a negative impact on women’s right to receive the *bhikkhuni* ordination. In a follow-up journal entry, students are asked to investigate their dualist ideas related to gender issues and why their ideas exist. They are encouraged to see the similarity between their contemplation and “the adviser-treasurer of a wheel-turning king,” who reminds the king (students) of the detrimental things (the judgmental mentality toward gender in their context) and the helpful mentality (curiosity about their discrimination).

This contemplative writing turns students’ attention to gender inequality in Buddhism inward. This activity actualizes the IPP elements of experience (from watching an American sitcom and reading from a Pāli Buddhist text) and reflection (through contemplative writing). It offers students an opportunity to trace the background of their biases, further help them gain a new perspective about themselves, and increase their awareness of self-critical tendencies influenced by their views of gender. The insights of self-knowledge will assist them in recognizing their old perspectives (judgmental thoughts resulting from their attachment to dualist ideas of gender), taking a contemplative pause, and suspending negative projection. This contemplative writing assignment encourages students to analyze how their attitudes are informed by their contexts. Such self-investigation strengthens students’ introspective ability. CP advocate Andrew Fort mentions that the introspective ability will enable students to “gain insight into how their perspective has been shaped and see new possibilities, both noticing and going beyond prior thought patterns.” If students see new ways to detach their biases concerning gender from their mentality, they are fulfilling a goal of the IPP’s aspect of inner action. Furthermore, as this contemplative writing invites students to examine their attitude toward others, it invokes CP’s second-person approach, which promotes students’ concerns toward others. This approach aligns with a main Jesuit educational goal that aims to foster students’ ethical concerns toward the vulnerable.

My Buddhist studies classroom views cultivation of ethics as a way to grow spiritually without embracing any religious doctrines or worldview. While this contemplative writing activity is derived from reading a Pali text related to sati and discussion on the issue of *bhikkhuni* ordination, it is not equal to practicing Buddhism. It is an analogous activity that

also demonstrates that feeling relaxed is not a main purpose of Buddhist mindfulness, as many students assume. The goal of this exercise is not to train my students in Buddhist method; such “secret” attempts are major criticism of employing CP. Rather, students have the option of applying their own religious or spiritual affiliations to this task.

In conclusion, this essay details how I integrate CP and the IPP to teach the issue of bhikkhuni ordination. This combination creates a more reflective and rigorous learning environment. It also increases the depth of students’ understanding of gender inequality in Buddhism by situating it within students’ Western cultural background. Moreover, this combination has inspired me to adopt multiple activities (watching an American sitcom, reflecting on a Pāli text, and writing a journal) to foster students’ whole person learning in a way that includes inner inquiry and self-development.

Gloria (I-Ling) Chien is an assistant professor at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, U.S. Inspired by her research on the Tibetan Buddhist lojong (mind training) tradition, she became a certified Cognitively-Based Compassion Training instructor.

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Love in the Time of COVID

by Lily Pu

Today is day 316 of my COVID-19 quarantine. Being a healthy 68 year-old, I am not high risk, but I live with two people who are: my cancer-survivor husband and 105 year old father. For their sake, I've given up human interactions: hugging my grandkids, visiting with friends, outrigger canoeing, prison volunteering, beach taichi, and temple meditation.

My friends either pity me—“*Oh, you poor thing! You must be dreadfully bored and depressed.*”— or they admire me—“*What a saint! Giving up your life for your loved ones!*” I smile and say nothing, because neither is true.

I'm incredibly privileged: I have a roof over my head, the company of two men I love, groceries delivered to my doorstep, social security income, and digital access to friends and

family. And while I grieve the deaths of more than 400,000 Americans and 2,000,000 people worldwide, and am anxious for coherent federal action to end the financial, physical, and psychological suffering COVID-19 has caused, my forced seclusion has had unexpected positive consequences.

With more alone time, I indulge in the dharma day and night. Without distractions, I concentrate more easily and meditate more diligently. Pre-COVID I received one annual teaching a year from my guru; during COVID I've received ten online. Instead of meditating once a month at the temple with my local sangha, I meditate five times a week on Zoom with sanghas around the world. My personal dharma practice got turbo-charged and the positive changes in me are palpable. I am less angry, and more accepting of things over which I have no control. With greater empathy for the housebound, I am more patient in my caregiving. I have never felt more compassionate. Or more loving. How can one not, when one contemplates the one-ness of the universe?

When COVID-19 is over, will I go back to my old life? Who knows. All I know is that like a lotus flower, love can rise out of darkest depths, resplendent with inconceivable beauty and wonder.





Prayers for the World

by Karma Lekshe Tsomo

In the world's Buddhist traditions, there are many prayers for the welfare of the world. Everyday, both monastics and laypeople make sincere aspirations that all living beings be well and happy. These prayers are generated from a heart of compassion to all beings equally, whether they are friends, enemies, or strangers. For example, Shantideva, a Buddhist monk, scholar, and poet who lived in the eighth century, wrote this prayer in his book, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*. It is the favorite prayer of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

May there be timely rains
And bountiful harvests.
May all medicines be effective
And wholesome prayers bear fruit.

May all who are sick or ill
Quickly be freed from their ailments.
Whatever diseases there are in the world
May they never occur again.

May the frightened cease to be afraid
And those bound be freed.
May the powerless find power
And may people think of benefitting each other.

For as long as space remains,
For as long as sentient beings remain,
Until then may I too remain
To dispel the miseries of the world.

In this critical time, human beings face great uncertainty. It is not certain whether we and our loved ones will survive from one day to the next. Rather than live in fear, however, we can use this critical moment as a spur to spiritual practice. Death is a great teacher. As we face the very real possibility of death, we can feel very grateful for this opportunity to fearlessly move forward in our practice. This is no time to procrastinate. Now is the time to purify our minds of greed, hatred, self-centeredness, and all petty thoughts. A Tibetan prayer says:

Should I stay in good health,
I will use my strength to dedicate myself
to spiritual practice.

Should I fall ill,
I will use my troubles to increase the compassion
I feel for those who are suffering.

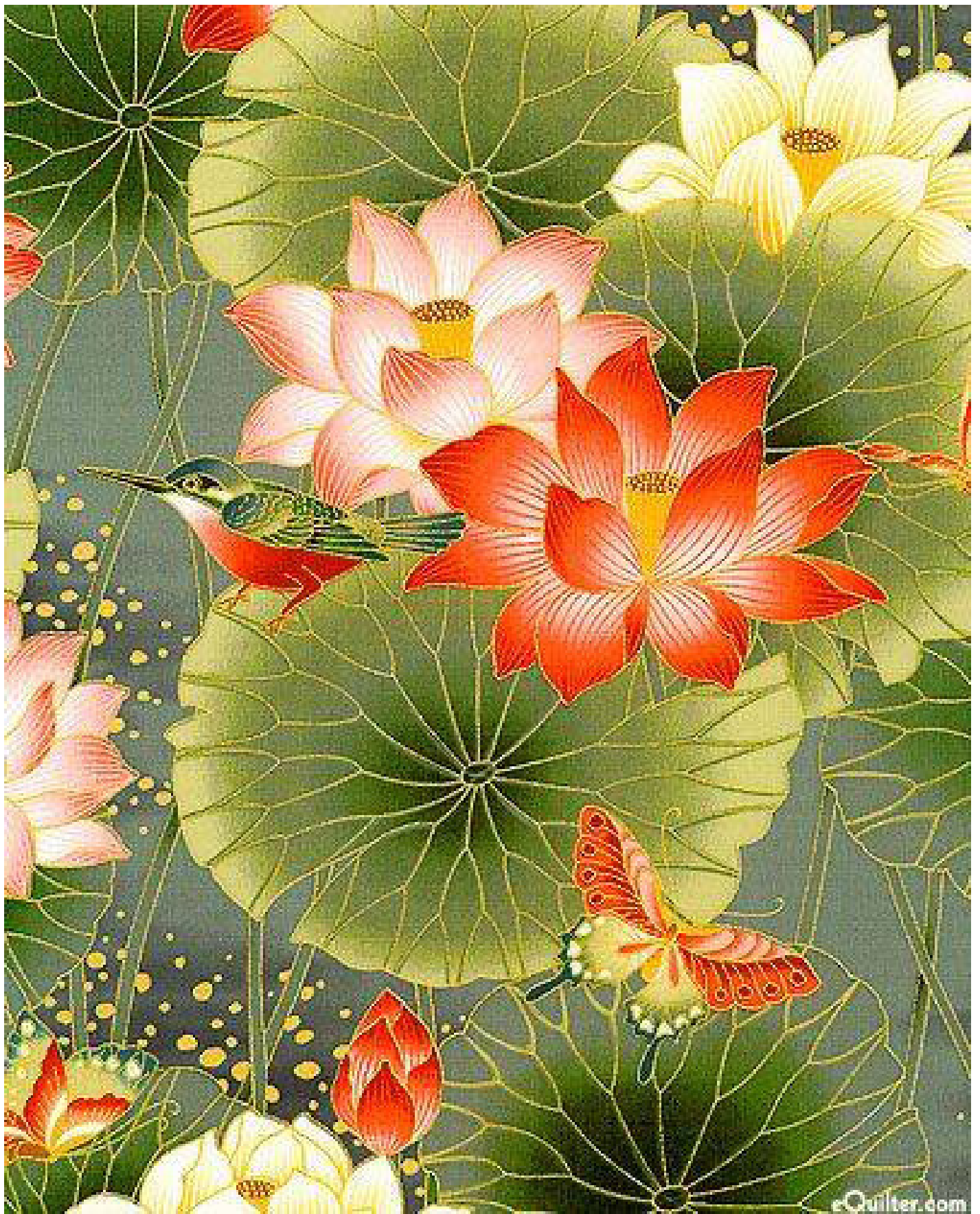
Should I live long,
I will use each moment to accomplish
my own and others' benefit.

Should my life come to its end,
I will make the best use of the moment of death
to obtain the right rebirth for pursuing enlightenment.

As we generate loving kindness to all living beings, our heart become gentle. As we generate compassion for the sufferings of others, we forget our own misery. As we reflect on the qualities and good fortune of others, all our jealousy disappears. As we recall that all phenomena are impermanent, our anxiety and stress wash away. These four blessed states of mind are divine: loving kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. May we cultivate them wholeheartedly!

May I be free from enmity.
May I be free from danger.
May I be free from disease.
May I be happy.
May I be free from suffering.





Newly Elected Sakyadhita Officers

Election Committee

The election of new Sakyadhita officers is momentous. Our officers guide the future of the largest Buddhist women's organization in the world, virtually representing, guiding, and helping build alliances among as many as 600 million Buddhist women around the globe. This new slate of officers brings fresh perspectives to our work. We welcome this talented new team!

President

Sharon A. Suh is a professor of Buddhism in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Seattle University. She received her Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies from Harvard University and is the author of several articles and book chapters on Buddhism, gender, and race. She has published three books: *Being Buddhist in a Christian World: Gender and Community* (University of Washington Press, 2004); *Silver Screen Buddha: Buddhism in Asian and Western Film* (Bloomsbury Press, 2015); and *Occupy This Body: A Buddhist Memoir* (Sumeru Press, 2019). She was the keynote speaker at the 9th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Dr. Suh's academic work explores the intersections of Buddhism, gender, race, and film. She is particularly interested in exploring trauma from the perspectives of Buddhism and neuroscience, and focuses particularly on the experiences of women of color. She emphasizes the importance of trauma-informed embodiment practices such as meditation and yoga that can increase the capacity for resilience. She serves on the board of directors of The Center for Mindful Eating and most recently served on the board of directors of Yoga Behind Bars. She is a certified Mindful Eating-Conscious Living teacher through the UCSD Center for Mindfulness. She received her 200-hour Registered Yoga Teacher training and trained extensively in trauma-informed yoga with Yoga Behind Bars and Y4T (Yoga for Trauma). She currently resides in Seattle, Washington.

Vice President

Hsiao-Lan Hu (pronouns ze/hir) is a native of Taiwan. After obtaining double B.A. degrees in English and Philosophy from National Taiwan University, ze went to study in the United States and obtained hir Ph.D., with distinction, from the Department of Religion at Temple University. Hir doctoral dissertation was published as *This-Worldly Nibbāna: A Buddhist-Feminist Social Ethic for Peacemaking in the Global Community*. Ze is now an associate

professor of Religious Studies and the director of the Women's and Gender Studies Program at the University of Detroit Mercy.

Hsiao-Lan has been an active participant in Sakyadhita since the 11th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women in Vietnam, serving regularly as translator, oral interpreter, and organizer. Ze served as the chair of the Review and Program Committee for the 14th Sakyadhita Conference in Indonesia and the 15th Sakyadhita Conference in Hong Kong, and has presented papers and workshops at several past conferences.

Treasurer

Kaytee Sumida was born and raised in Los Angeles, California. She became interested in Asian religions by reading folk tales in Chinese literature and culture classes. She has been a member of the Buddhist Temple San Diego (Jodo Shinshu) since 1990 and is currently on the board of directors, serving as liaison with the Interreligious Council of San Diego. She also serves on the Buddhist Education Committee, Activities Committee, Ecosangha, and Dana Club. She is the secretary of the Interreligious Council of San Diego. She is married, with two adult sons, two dogs, two chickens, and lots of plants.

Kaytee received a B.S. in Medical Technology at California State University, Los Angeles, and an M.A. from San Francisco State University. She received further education and training in Medical Technology while serving in the United States Navy, including a specialty internship at Irwin Memorial Blood Bank. While living in Okinawa, she volunteered on research projects at the Blood Donor Center and taught conversational English. She is a lifetime member of Sakyadhita and has served as acting secretary since 2015. She also assists in the activities of the Buddhist Women's Association (Bukkyo Fujinkai) of Jodo Shinshu.

Corresponding Secretary

Thich Nu Tien Lien was born in Saigon, Vietnam, in 1966. She enjoyed learning about Buddhism from a young age. From the age of thirteen, she went to chant sutras every night and attended Dharma teachings every week. She began living as a Buddhist nun in 1980, received novice ordination in 1983, and became fully ordained as a bhiksuni in 1985.

In 1991, Thich Nu Tien Lien and her family settled in San Jose, California. There, she lived and studied with the nuns of Duc Vien Temple. In 1994, she moved to San Diego and, in 1996, founded Tinh Xa Ngoc Minh Temple. In 2008, she founded Tinh Xa Ngoc Hoa Temple and, in 2011, the Buddhist Center for World Peace and the International Bhiksuni Buddhist Congregation, all in San Jose. Over the years, she assisted senior monastics in establishing

temples throughout the United States. She earned a B.A. and a Master's in Social Work at San Diego State University and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Religious Studies at the University of the West. She is a lifetime member of Sakyadhita and has been active in the organization since 2004.

Recording Secretary

Buphyun Sunim was born in Korea. She graduated from college in 1994 and was ordained as a novice nun in 2005. She received full ordination as a bhiksuni in 2012 and has completed 12 traditional Korean meditation retreats. Since 2019, she has been studying at the Graduate School for International Buddhist English at Dongguk University at Gyeongju.

Buphyun Sunim attended her first Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women in Australia in 2019. She was greatly inspired by what Sakyadhita offers – an opportunity for monastics and laywomen to meet and discuss issues to bring about change for a better future. She would like to participate actively in Sakyadhita and contribute to the process of making a positive impact.





Circles of Practice: Sakyadhita Spain

by Montse Castellà

Just as Sakyadhita Spain was about to begin its Circles of Practice program in Barcelona, the pandemic restricted in-person gatherings. So we decided to go online. To our surprise, this allowed us to reach out not only to local Buddhist women but also to women from other Spanish speaking countries! Since then, we have been holding a Circle of Practice on the 28th of each month.

Mindful of the inclusive and transversal approach of Sakyadhita, we invite female Buddhist teachers from all Buddhist traditions to guide meditations in each Circle. It is wonderful to see women from different countries and different Buddhist traditions sitting together in meditation. Really inspiring!

After each meditation, we discuss a specific topic related to women and Buddhism. Does patriarchy manifest in our Buddhist communities? Have we experienced gender discrimination in a Buddhist context? Does our gender affect our reading of Buddhist texts?

As we discuss our experiences, we heighten our awareness of gender issues and connect more deeply with the women in our communities.

In the Circles of Practice, participants also share their projects to promote gender equity within Buddhism. This is another opportunity for networking.

Like most religions, Buddhism is imbued with patriarchal conditioning. However, these ancient cultural influences have penetrated us so deeply that women – and men – often do not recognize them. If we want Buddhism to flourish, we must identify outdated conditioning and transform it in accordance with the times. In this sense, Buddhist women's contributions are essential.

Montse Castellà Olivé has been a practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism since the late 1970s. She is an editor and translator of Buddhist texts and the author of numerous articles on women and Buddhism and on interreligious dialogue. She is the cofounder and vice-president of the Catalan Buddhist Union (CCEB), the founding president of Sakyadhita Spain, and chair of the Association for Interreligious Dialogue (AUDIR).





New Year, New Website

by Rachel and Tracy

Greetings! We're design students at the University of California San Diego and we're redesigning the Sakyadhita website. We're ecstatic to be working with an amazing organization like Sakyadhita that connects women across the globe. As young women, it's reassuring and empowering to know that Sakyadhita provides valuable resources and support for young women like ourselves.

With Sakyadhita's mission in mind, we've been working hard to make your new site modern, well-organized, and user-friendly so that we can increase engagement and make your valuable resources and readings accessible to everyone.

It has been an honor to support this incredible organization, and to learn about the community of Buddhist women around the world. We want to thank you all for allowing us to be part of this inspiring project and hope it will help Sakyadhita grow and reach more women. Last, we want to give a special thank you to Lekshe for taking the time to work so closely with us. You welcomed us with open arms and have been a guiding light. As we continue to work on this project, we hope everyone is staying safe and looking forward to Sakyadhita's new website!

16th Sakyadhita Conference Team, Australia 2019



Many thanks to the 16th Sakyadhita Conference, Australia, June 2019, International organizing team: (l to r) Prof. Eun-su Cho, Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, Christie Yuling Chang, Lynn Bain. Other committee members not shown are May-Ling Yeo and Venerable Aileen.

In addition, not enough can be said about the efforts of the SakyadhitaOz branch, led by president Suzanne Franzway, and members of the Australian branch, to produce this extremely successful conference in the Blue Mountains of Australia. After the Hong Kong conference, the SakyadhitaOz Executive Committee mobilized extraordinary enthusiasm and energy to investigate venues, raise funds, develop panels, call for papers and workshops, and review submissions. The great and creative work of the Australian team led to the more than 4,000 registrations for the conference.

We can learn about or revisit the 16th Conference by viewing Olivier Adam's stunning photos on the [Sarawak Conference](#) page and by viewing video recaps in multiple languages on a linked page [16th Sakyadhita Conference Recap in Your Own Language](#).

Sakyadhita: A Beacon of Inspiration

by Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo

In 2014, I was elected as the president of Sakyadhita. Since I had been associated with Sakyadhita for many years and had already attended several Sakyadhita conferences, I was honored to be chosen to represent this unique and esteemed international association of Buddhist women.

Initially, apart from writing invitation letters and welcoming the delegates to the conference, my role as president was undefined. That changed in June 2017, at the end of the Sakyadhita conference in Hong Kong, when we unexpectedly found ourselves without any bid for the next gathering. Previously at the end of one conference Sakyadhita members from Asia would generously offer to host the next one in their country. Then, with the help and guidance of Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, they would organize the next conference after two years, with the help of their local Buddhist groups.

In Hong Kong, however, Ven. Lekshe Tsomo announced her decision to step down from organizing further conferences. She had devoted 30 years to organizing 15 international Sakyadhita conferences throughout Asia – an extraordinary achievement! We all felt that she certainly deserved to retire from that demanding role and decided to organize the next conference amongst ourselves. But the question was, where?

Several Asian groups suggested the possibility of holding a conference in a non-Buddhist country to see what the Dharma looked like in the West. So we considered Australia an option and Sakyadhita Australia kindly agreed to help us host the event. We quickly assembled a small team with our vice president, Eun-su Cho from Korea, former president Christie Chang from Taiwan, Yeo May Ling from Singapore as treasurer, and Ven. Aileen Barry from India as secretary, plus myself as president. Later we also engaged Lynn Bain in Sydney, who had already organized a number of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's visits to Australia.

For the first time, I was closely involved in setting up a Sakyadhita conference with all the endless decisions that had to be made. Thank heaven for Zoom! Although the organizers lived in various countries, we managed to put together a conference in the Blue Mountains that was highly successful and enjoyed by over 800 Buddhist women, both monastic and lay, from all traditions. That is the wonder that is Sakyadhita!

Now, it is time to pass on this position as president – with the hope that our future Sakyadhita presidents will bring a clear vision and direction to the role. With their dedication, Sakyadhita will continue to be a beacon of inspiration for countless Buddhist women around the world.



Looking Forward: The Next Stage for Sakyadhita

by Eun-su Cho

In December 2103, while attending the First International Buddhists Nuns' Conference in Bhutan, I was approached about serving as the vice-president of Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women. I felt humbled because Sakyadhita is an organization that I cherish and admire. As a Korean Buddhist laywoman, I felt honored at the prospect of taking a leading role. At the same time, I was apprehensive as to whether I was capable of the responsibilities the position carries. Now that I have completed two terms as vice-president, I would like to share my experience.

The 16th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women in Australia will long remain in my mind. Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo retired from conference planning in Hong Kong after successfully organizing 15 international conferences over 30 years, and a new Conference Core Committee was formed. Academic sessions were reorganized to include plenary sessions and a roundtable discussion. These featured distinguished speakers helped diversify the program. The roundtable discussion on “Resolving Conflicts: Buddhist Approaches to Peace and Reconciliation,” led by Ven. Lekshe was a huge success, discussing pertinent issues that prevail in Buddhist societies.

I served as chair of the Academic Committee, working with an excellent team. We received paper proposals and reviewed them, selecting papers to meet deadlines and making last-minute changes when presenters were not able to attend the conference. Using desktop publishing, we compiled the conference proceedings in the same format as past conferences – a challenging task to meet the high standard set by Ven Lekshe.

Our Sakyadhita president, Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, assumed the role of conference chairperson and led weekly zoom planning meetings. It was my deepest honor to have a chance to work with her. I sometimes wonder what good merit I must have accumulated in a past life to have a chance to serve and assist her.

Time passes very quickly. Three conferences were held during my term – in Indonesia, Hong Kong, and Australia – and now the time has come to hand over the torch. It has been my honor and joy to serve Sakyadhita. I will cherish the many good friendships and wonderful memories for years to come. Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to be of service.





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