

# SAKYADHITA NEWSLETTER

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A Summer in China:

A Famous 325-year-old Nunnery Rebuilt, Its Extraordinary Abbess, and the Ordination of 783 Bhikshunis

by Bhikshuni Ngawang Chodron

In October 1993, I went to Hong Kong as translator and guide for 11 Bhutanese nuns receiving bhikshuni ordination. A bhikshuni myself, I had never since my own ordination in 1987 had a "bhikshuni upadhyaya" to follow, as the precepts instruct. So it was quite wonderful to meet there the Ven. Shi Kuan Jing Fa-shi who was leading a group of candidates from Mainland China.

Though I knew not a word of Chinese and she not a word of English, we met companionably as fellow instructors. I was instantly impressed with her demeanor and actions: a great presence combined with humility, who did whatever she saw needed doing. Through a Taiwanese nun translator, as we hung up our laundry, I asked to be her disciple. She replied that she had never learned anything from anybody, I said I didn't care, and that was that. She invited me to come to her nunnery, Wu Jo An, in Guangjou to spend at least 3 months to see how they did things. Wu Jo An has the reputation of keeping the precepts most strictly, so I returned to Kathmandu, and at the age of 65, threw myself into trying to learn Chinese. Somehow, on June 24, 1994, I turned up at Wu Jo An.

My pitiful Chinese had melted away and I could only reply that I was not tired and was happy. That evening, on a full moon day, I was taken into the temple and the Abbess administered the vows for the 3-month summer retreat (Chn: anju). One month had already passed, with two months to go, but I did not know at the time that I would be expected to stay an extra month to complete the 90 days. Everything was in Chinese; no one spoke a word of English. All I had were dictionaries and the kindness of the nuns. I badgered them into writing down the Chinese characters, so I could try to look the words up in a dictionary. It was a grinding task, especially since most of the nuns spoke regional dialects totally different from the Mandarin of the Manchurian-born Abbess and sounds in the dictionary. It was incredibly hot and humid in Guangjou and, unlike the others, I poured with sweat. The Abbess compassionately bought an air conditioner for my room and, so as not to be partial, for two others and the sweltering classroom upstairs.

Wu Jo An, the "Non-Abiding Nunnery," was founded in 1667 by the meditation master Bhikshuni Lai Chi, the 35th generation in the Tsao Dong (Soto Zen) sect from Hua Shou Tai, Lo Fu Mountain. It took 11 years to complete the nunnery in what was then countryside outside the south gate of Guangjou City. Now it is hidden in the heart of a city block, approached from one of the paved footpaths which crisscross Guangjou between the avenues and are the focus of neighborhood life.

From its founding, Wu Jo An became a famous center of learning open to all. After the death of the founder, it became a nunnery passed down in succession from master to disciple. It has gone through various vicissitudes with the changes of government in the country. By 1949 there were only 12 nuns. In 1966, at the onset of the Cultural Revolution, there were only 4. At the end, there was only one, who passed away in 1990 at the age of 94.

After 1979, when the famous directive was passed allowing religion again in China, Buddhist Associations were formed and through their efforts the site of Wu Jo An was returned to the nunnery. The temple had been torn down and the site was covered with inhabited buildings, including a factory employing 200 people. The Buddhist Association, with government approval, asked Ven. Shi Kuan Jing Fa-shi to come and reestablish the nunnery. She had been a disciple of the great Ch'an (Zen) Master Xu Yun ("Empty Cloud") who passed away in 1959 at the age of 120. So in 1986, with 12 young nuns, she came and stayed in the one old existing building to begin the task of rebuilding and financing the nunnery. She was 66 years old at the time.

Eight years and enormous effort later, Wu Jo An is a beautiful two-story temple with a three-story residential building for the nuns. The paved courtyard is filled with potted trees and plants. Outside a temporary brick wall, work has started on a matching residential building on the opposite side, a gate and Guardian Temple in front. This phase of the reconstruction will take two years; another chapel, dining hall, and guest accommodations will take two more. When the work is completed, the nunnery will be officially open again and Ven. Kuan Jing can, perhaps, rest. Or, after the nunnery is running smoothly, she may go on to rebuild another one.

Tiny, indomitable, and with a compassionate smile that would melt Mt. Meru, at 74 the master is a dynamo of activity. As she glides into the temple to officiate at the 3:30 AM service, she checks the wheelbarrows on a scale to see whether construction workers have put the proper amount of sand in the concrete mix. There were 40 nuns participating in the summer retreat. Most were Wu Jo An nuns, but some had come from elsewhere to pass the summer retreat which Bhikshunis traditionally must do in a nunnery situation. On special days the service was longer and began at 3 AM. The timekeeper clacked a wooden board as first, second, and third notice to get up. Following this, a big bell on the roof was rung by a novice chanting melodiously. Later, standing on a stool in the temple, the timekeeper thunderously beat the big drum as the nuns entered to prostrate themselves in prayer, then stand in their appointed rows.

On the last stroke the Abbess entered and the chanting of the long mantra of the Surangama Sutra began. The service normally lasted exactly an hour, after which everyone filed out to wait for the first light of dawn and the signal for breakfast. After breakfast, there was a reading aloud of the Lotus Sutra, then a break before a class at 8 AM. After class, another clacking of wood announced the work period: cleaning the temple, changing the offerings, sweeping the courtyard, watering the garden, or moving bricks. Often a snack was distributed, precisely apportioned for each nun, including the Abbess: an ear of boiled corn, a bowl of coffee, or cold, sweet congee.

Lunch was at 11, preceded by an offering to the Buddhas in the temple. Then came the hallowed after-lunch nap. From 2:30 to 3:30, a chapter of the Avatamsaka Sutra was chanted, then came a break, a class on the precepts, and the late afternoon service in the temple. In the evenings, small study groups were held, and at 8 the Amitabha Sutra was chanted. This was the only Dharma assembly of the day which could be attended in "off-duty" clothes. The big rooftop bell announced lights out at 9:30, accompanied by beautiful chanting. The precept of not eating after 12 noon was kept strictly; nothing but water was allowed, except Coca-Cola occasionally, on a particularly hot day, before which a special formula had to be recited by two nuns.

Having been a bhikshuni for seven years, I was particularly happy to participate at last in the twice-monthly ritual assembly (Chin: songjie, Tib: sojong) of confession, purification, and reading the Bhikshuni Pratimoksha. On the 8th and 23rd of the lunar month, there was the bodhisattva songjie, when the bodhisattva precepts of the Brahmajala Sutra were read aloud.

Daily during the last week of the summer retreat, the nuns, led by the Abbess, conducted a special ceremony with reading the Kshitigarbha Sutra to open the gates of hell for their dead ancestors and liberate them to the pure land of Amitabha. Putting up a piece of paper with the names of my American Jewish parents, I thought how surprised they would be to wake up in Sukhavati amidst all these Chinese fellow-ancestors!

On the last day of the retreat, the temple was beautified with huge piles of the offerings of fruit, flowers, candy, biscuits, and all the accumulated offerings that had been sent to the nunnery for distribution to the nuns. The Abbess brought out long necklaces of semiprecious stones to be draped over the Buddhas, and we conducted a long ceremony of offering to the Buddhas. On the closing day of the retreat, a beautiful ritual gathering of the Bhikshunis in the Temple took most of the day. The three novices - two sramanerikas and one siksamani - also participated at the end. The gifts were distributed evenly among the 40 participants: biscuits, fruit, candy, pencils, picnic cups, soft drinks, towels, cloth, soap, big yellow plastic pails, and washbasins. After this, we relaxed for three days, watching Chinese and Korean Buddhist videos on a borrowed VCR in the classroom.

Then it was time for the Abbess to leave to officiate at the first of two ordinations. It was to be held at Jiu Hua Shan, the Nine-Flower Mountain in Anhui Province which is sacred to the Kshitigarbha, the bodhisattva who compassionately vowed to liberate the denizens of hell. I was fortunate to spend a most inspiring and wonderful month accompanying Ven. Kuan Fa-shi, as her attendant and disciple. The ordination of over 1600 bhikshus and 783 bhikshunis at Jiu Hua Shan could never have taken place without her. Increasingly I came to know and admire the talents, energy, and qualities of this extraordinary woman who has been a bhikshuni for 40 years and since 1982 has officiated at 22 ordinations all over China. Under her tutelage, I learned much about Chinese ways - especially, sometimes painfully, what was meant by "It doesn't look good!"

We reached Jiu Hua Shan after a flight to Nanjing and a seven-hour bus ride. We were accompanied by one of the officiating abbots, Seng Yat Fa-shi, a greatly respected Ch'an Master from Hong Kong and several of his disciples. Among them were three

new nuns from Malaysia, Taiwan and Canada who had come to take the ordination. Happily, the Chinese-Canadian nun spoke English.

The Abbot of the main temple of Jiu Hua Shan greeted the party at the entrance to the very comfortable guesthouse, which served as the "command post" for this great event. In addition to over a thousand prospective bhikshus, there were already more than 200 nuns waiting to take the bhikshuni ordination. By the time the mandala closed, there would be over 1600 monks and precisely 783 nuns.

The few days were spent visting the temples high above, reached by climbing steep steps through the pine forests to the surrounding peaks. The main pilgrimage was to the stupa of the Bodhisattva Kshitigarbha, where we prayed and did prostrations. Pious laypeople circled around and around the temple-enclosed stupa on their knees. Increasing numbers of nuns, hearing the master had arrived, began coming to pay their respects. Many begged her to give the dual ordination for bhikshunis, administered by both monks and nuns, but she refused. She explained to them that it had to be done properly or not at all, with at least five qualified bhikshunis, or an absolute minimum of three. With only herself, and so many candidates, there simply was not time. It would be an ordination by monks only.

In the company of two local bhikshunis, the master swung into action, looking for a place big enough to accomodate the coming ceremonies with the swelling number of candidates. We visited the Kuan Yin temple where prospective bhikshunis were lodged, crowded into every nook, hall, and corner. Next to it, with an unassuming air, a parish priest was building a new temple. The priest agreed to holding the ceremonies in a large empty lot in front, now cluttered with building debris.held there. The master announced that I would be alone for a week. There was much work to be done, and she would be moving to the Kuan Yin Temple. I would move there later with the nun disciples of Seng Yat Fa-shi.

Bhikshunis are not supposed to go out alone, and I had been repeatedly admonished for doing so, but after a day at the guesthouse, I could resist no longer. In the company of a laywoman, I arrived at the Kuan Yin temple just in time to see the master atop the rubble-strewn steps of the new temple, addressing the prospective bhikshunis: "Do you want to be bhikshunis?" "Yes!" they chorused. "Do you want to be boddhisattavas?"

"Yes!" "Then take off your robes and let's get to work! Pick up a hoe, clear this place, and make it level!"

For five days, the prospective bhikshunis, old and young, from all over China, cleared and leveled the ground, carrying loads of bricks and paving the area with them, so that the nuns and monks would have a place to stand and kneel during the coming ceremonies. The work was all done by the nuns, with a few monks looking on. On the last day, encouraged by the master who praised them as bodhisattvas, three monks helped to dig and remove a pile of earth and rubbish from the very last corner.

The master was everywhere. One evening she told the tired nuns a story about the Buddha to encourage them. One nun had to be hospitalized and since she had no money, the master gave her money from her own pocket. Nine other bhikshuni instructors were appointed. Hundreds of strips of yellow cloth were cut and the mass of nuns were organized into groups of three (tan), then into the lines of nine, or three tan. Each nun was given a yellow tag to wear, with name and position in her tan. A central of all 783 nuns was written on white strips of paper and stapled into booklets.

With so many people crammed together medical emergencies, including the flu, were inevitable. The master sent word to the head Abbot of the big temple, and a monk was sent to act as a dispenser of medicines. A dispensary and sick bay were set up in a tent raised over a courtyard and beds were found to accommodate more comfortably the ever-increasing number of women.

For a week Seng Yat Fa-shi had been lecturing a packed audience of monks and nuns the bodhisattva precepts of the Brahmajala Sutra at the big temple. Now the ceremonies were about to begin. Happily I moved to the guesthouse of the Kuan Yin Temple, to be with the master, who was besieged night and day with knocks on the door. Nuns came with problems and to pay their respects so often she literally had no time to eat or sleep. By being there to answer the door and do other small tasks, I could at least see to it that she got a rest after lunch rest. Walking with her, I could protect her from being crushed by the crowds of nuns who gather wherever she went.

It was not only nuns who sought her out. One morning after breakfast she decided to go outside to look around. Two or three novice monks recognized her northeastern accent, and asked her to explain the instructions given by a monk from another region. As she spoke to them there on the street, explaining why, as monks, they should now obey the injunction not eat after noon, more and more monks crowded around. "We didn't know!" they said.

Another time, on a visit to a bhikshu seminary just outside Jiu Hua Shan, she was asked to speak after several other monk masters. Tiny, dignified, she rose, turned and bowed to the invisibly present Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Unlike the preceding speakers, who had spoken standing up (several at considerable length), she sat down to address 40 young monk seminarians. As she spoke the short verses, the monks were riveted. Afterwards, when I remarked to her that no one fidgeted, she said she had spoken briefly so that they would remember.

Whenever we passed young newly-ordained bhikshus on the street, she would courteously fold her hands and greet them pleasantly with "Amitofo!" They were often amazed and always pleased. An old friend of hers told me she had once asked why the Abbess showed such respect to these young men, some of whom were hardly monk-like. "I show them respect because I want them to respect themselves," she replied.

While the bhikshus received their precepts over a five-day period at the big Temple down the road, the bhikshunis rehearsed the ceremonies, assembling in lines on the ground they had prepared. Nightly sessions of confession and prostrations were held out in the chilly dark. The confession was sung in a tune unique to the tradition of Jiu Hua Shan. The two halves of the assembly took turns, one side kneeling and bowing while the other side sang.

One evening when the master was supposed to be resting and other instructors were in charge of the session, she suddenly jumped up, put on her grey robe and dark knitted hat, and said she was going out just to "have a look." Mounting the top step of the unfinished temple, she took one of the loud-speakers and addressed the tired nuns: "New nuns, you are very good! You must be tired!" Beckoning them to gather around, she proceeded to teach them verse by verse how to sing the confession of the Jiu Hua Shan tradition, keeping time by slapping the table, and getting the nuns to do the same.

The tired faces in the crowd of the young nuns shone with pleasure as they sang the lines over and over again, along with the Abbess's surprisingly beautiful contralto voice. It reminded me of a girl scout marshmallow-roast songfest. At the end, the nuns and the master returned happily refreshed.

The master's qualities inspired unceasing admiration. The Abbott of the Kuan Yin Temple wrote her a poem of appreciation for creating the drill ground. In accordance with Chinese tradition, he brought a pair of scrolls with his calligraphy, with one of her names at the beginning of each verse. They pondered the calligraphy again and again, with the master giving suggestions for improving the brush work. As he prepared two more sets of scrolls, the master was consulted on both the brushwork and the poems.

Although she always told me I should walk slowly, and not rush around in an undignified way, she herself was impossible to keep up with. She would dart away, leaping down the steps, though never, of course, in an undignified way. One day when the nuns and monks had to stand for hours in the sun, she went through the lines with a bottle of Chinese oil for dabbing on temples or throats, giving special attention to the elderly ones at the back. From the top of the stairs, I strained to see where she had disappeared.

The master gave everything away. One day she almost gave away her only assembly-robe by mistake. We fought over who would eat the worst apple or the most bruised pear. (I finally solved this by cutting the pear in half, so we each got part of the bruise.) She would use any money she received to offer a ceremony or give it away, keeping only a few small bills for herself. As we strolled by the stalls selling religious souvenirs, she delighted in finding something inexpensive but well-made. Then she would bargain and the stallkeeper would goodhumoredly give it to her for less. This was her relaxation, a change from the strain of planning every aspect of the ordination.

Toward the end, nuns who did not have the fare to go home came to her in tears. She gave them the fare, then questioned other poor ones to make sure they had enough. Older nuns would come to thank her, and offer her farewell prostrations, though she sharply told them not to, and turned away. To avoid this, the thoughtful method is to offer prostrations at right angles to the person being respected. Bright new young bhikshunis came asking to be her disciple or asked advice on what to do next. Many

decided to join the famous Bhikshuni Precepts College at Wu Tai Shan and three or four wanted to join Wu Jo An. They were advised to come for a year before making a commitment, to see whether they were happy there and whether the difficult Guangjou climate suited them.

Despite my pleading, the master would not allow me to accompany her to the second ordination. She said that the conditions were too rough, there no comfortable guest-house, it was too cold, and so forth. Nothing would change her mind. One of the bright new bhikshunis, a student from the Wu Tai Shan seminary, to her utter delight was allowed to go as her attendant, to see whether they were suited to be master and disciple. We finally found the ideal solution: leaving with different groups of nuns at the same time, in different directions. Though sad to leave her, I was happy she had someone to look after her.

The last evening our bags were finally all packed. As one after another person came in to see her, including the kind abbot of the Kuan Yin Temple, I mentally rehearsed my "goodbye." Finally I prostrated quickly, at right angles to her, and offered a "red packet." She threw it back onto my bed, saying "Not from you!" All night the red packet remained on my bed. In the morning I tucked my card into it and asked her to offer it in my name to the next monastery she reached. We recited the formula of purification for money received and she took it. Nuns came into the room and bustled about with the packed luggage trolleys. Over the intervening shoulder of the nun carrying the bags, I looked at the master and could only say, "Take care!" She looked at me and said, "You take care!" And that was it.

As I walked along with the young bhikshuni going to the next ordination, I asked her to please take good care of the master. Crying, I asked her to tell the master that I wanted to take the dual ordination whenever she gave it, and only from her. Despite my hopeless Chinese, the young nun seemed to understand. We pledged to take the ordination together.

The public bus was later and overbook, so I travelled comfortably from Jiu Hua Shan to Nanjing in a minibus with a group of bhikshunis. In Nanjing, we stayed two nights at Chi Lin Nunnery, a beautiful old temple on a wooded hilltop. The autumn season and the smell of the tall trees were reminiscent of Paris. With the help of one of the kind nuns of

Chi Lin, we walked around Nanjing, negotiating for train tickets for the nuns going to Wu Tai Shan and, for me, a plane seat back to Guangzhou. We crossed a huge lake in a speedboat and visited the Vajrayana temple, where I happily prostrated to Guru Rinpoche and other familiar figures. The painter working on the murals was from Amdo, so we conversed in a mixture of Chinese and Tibetan.

The next day, with a huge bundle of incense sticks sent by the master, I was back at Wu Jo An in Guangzhou, recounting my adventures at Jiu Hua Shan. The nuns would not let me leave until my visa expired, so I stayed for a week working in the garden.

On the last day I attended the early morning service and prostrated three times on the folded mat that is part of the full ceremonial attire of a bhikshu or bhikshuni. Paying a formal farewell to the Temple, I prayed to return soon, with prayers for the flourishing of Wu Jo An, the success of its nuns, and the long life of Master Shi Kuan Jing.

Yes, the bhikshuni vow is alive and well in China.

The address of the Wu Jo An nunnery is : Wu Jo An, Dezhen Chung Lu, Li Shui Fong 350 Guangzhou 510110. Telephone and Fax: 86-20-3806350. Nuns passing through Guangzhou are welcome to stay. Well-wishing laypersons are welcome to visit. (Phone first in Cantonese or Mandarin). Guangzhou is a 3 1/2 hour train ride from Hong Kong.

Photographs for "A Summer in China" by Bhikshuni Ngawang Chodron:

1. Shi Kuan Jing Fa-shi with the 783 Bhikshunis ordained at Jiu Hua Shan standing on the brick paved drill ground the nuns had made.
2. The rebuilt temple at Wu Jo An Nunnery, Guangzhou.
3. Timekeeper beating the big drum to announce the morning service at Wu Jo An Nunnery, Guangzhou.
4. Invited for lunch by the owner of a vegetarian restaurant, the Abbess and nuns of Wu Jo An hold up their begging bowls and recite the appropriate verse from the Vinaya.

5. At the end of the big ordination at Jiu Hua Shan, Ven. Shi Kuan Jing Fa-shi sits for a photograph with the three ordaining Abbots. Next to her is Seng Yat Fa-shi. The laywoman at the left had received Bodhisattva precepts.

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## Report from Chenresig Nuns' Community

by Margaret McAndrew

After a slow start, the nuns' community at Chenresig Institute in Australia is flourishing. There seem to be two options for ordained Western Sangha: to develop as a separate entity, like Nalanda Monastery for monks in France, or to develop as part of a center. Being part of a center has certain drawbacks, but also many advantages. Indeed, it is hard to imagine how we ever could have got established on our own. For one thing, Chenresig Institute provided the land for us to build on. Since we had use of existing facilities, we were able to function as a community long before we had put up any buildings. We share the teacher (a Tibetan geshe), assembly hall (gompa), telephone, and the organizational structure that has already been developed here. The lay people, of course, have been tremendously helpful with skilled and unskilled labor.

Actually, there has been no real division between nuns and laypeople in our development. In the past, there have always been Sangha members at the Institute, and the nuns especially have played a major part in its development. Only in the last few years have the nuns functioned as an independent group. This has been an important development. Life in a center with lay people is certainly much preferable to battling it out on one's own, but it is still difficult for a monk or nun.

Now that the nuns live as a community, we see the value of community life. The attitudes of the lay people have also changed. A few years ago only a few really cared

much about having Sangha nearby, but now people see the strong energy that comes from the nuns' community. The work of Chenresig Institute has expanded tremendously in the last couple of years and really depends on the efforts of well-trained, reliable women. The laypeople are terrific, but they often have family emergencies at the crucial moment.

The nuns are generally well-respected by the laypeople, both at the center and in the district. The situation has really changed since the early days. Now when we go into town in robes, people know who we are and never blink an eye. This also means we have to behave with decorum! In the early days some inexperienced monks and nuns wore lay clothes to town and felt free to play a bit, but now we would be recognized and attract gossip. So gradually our style of living and interacting with others has developed until now it nicely suits our situation here in Australia.

As for finances, we get a lot of help from the center in the form of concessions: free teachings and half off of the facilities fee. Since we have our own accommodations, we pay no rent, but we are responsible for maintenance costs. Each nun is individually responsible for her own expenses, which certainly deters some from joining us. Employment outside is not a practical option for most. There are eight nuns at present. One is employed by the institute, one is doing a long retreat. One is supported by Wisdom Publications, another is partially supported by the Institute and also does drafting work. One supports herself fully by doing drafting work, though that involves quite a few car trips. One, who has a 10-year-old daughter, gets support from her parents. One works full-time as a nurse an hour and a half away and can only spend her off-days with us, though she hopes to cut back to part-time. Since working outside interferes with study and practice, work at the institute has many advantages, though it doesn't pay much and is time consuming.

I worked as a housekeeper before, but now I am able to live from the money my father left me and will be able to build a small house for retreat. I have much more peace of mind without having to worry about funds for medical treatment and the rest. Some of the nuns are still living in tiny A-frames about the size of a double bed. The Institute will soon be constructing four new cabins, paid for by individual nuns. The nuns can sell the cabins back to the Nuns' Community or to an individual nun, and will leave them to the community in their wills. This way their personal benefit will also contribute to community development.

There is a big difference between conditions for ordained women in Asian countries like Taiwan and countries in the West. Interestingly, although historically Chinese culture was very oppressive towards women, Chinese bhiksunis are highly respected and influential in Chinese society. The existence of full ordination may be an important factor in explaining this.

Nuns in Taiwan are assured of material support so they can devote their time to practice and studies. They join functioning communities with strong ties to their ordaining abbot. Nuns' communities generally form around a strong woman who makes major decisions, solves the disputes, and so on. It is not that we lack strong women in the West, but we don't see many women in our organization in positions of indisputable leadership and spiritual authority. As we practice and work together, we evolve ways of group decision making.

It would be highly desirable for new nuns to have a source of material support for at least two years while they get established in their practice. If support were available, would it attract emotionally dependent, immature women seeking an escape? Is it preferable to admit those with a strong commitment to Dharma and the ordained life despite the difficulties? Providing shelter for the emotionally fragile may be a valid aspect of community life, but at present Western Sangha communities are not solidly enough established to absorb many of these. Somewhat unfairly, at present people expect all monks and nuns to be brilliant scholars, gifted teachers, and exemplary practitioners. We are under intense public scrutiny.

At Chenresig, the Nuns' Community has developed a good community spirit and gained hard-earned respect and appreciation from the lay community. We are still working towards a really good situation for educating nuns. I think it is very important to support those nuns who are capable of higher scholarship and have potential as teachers. Funds are being accumulated for this purpose the International Mahayana Institute, the FMPT Sangha organization.

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## Women and the Power of Compassion: Survival in the 21st Century

Fourth International Conference on Buddhist Women - Leh, Ladakh, August 1 to 7, 1995

Be sure to send in your registration right away for the International Conference on Buddhist Women in Ladakh. Despite winter temperatures of -76F in Ladakh, preparations for the Conference are going forward. But don't worry, the weather in August will be beautiful!

We are pleased to announce that Helena Norberg-Hodge has agreed to Sulak Sivaraksa in presenting a workshop on Buddhism and Development during the Conference. Helena is author of *Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh* (San Francisco: Sierra Book Club, 1991) and founder of the International Society for Ecology and Culture. Sulak Sivaraksa is founder of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) is well-known as an author, lecturer, Buddhist social analyst, and democracy advocate.

The Conference is generating an enthusiastic response. Speakers include: Dr. Janice Willis (Wesleyan University), Dr. Paula Arai (Vanderbilt University), Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh (Thammasat University, Bangkok), Ven. Karuna Dharma (International Meditation Center, Los Angeles), Ven. Jen Hua Shih (Hua Fan University, Taiwan), Dharmacarini Punyamegha (Friends of the Western Buddhist Order), Kim Gutschow (Harvard University), Kusuma Devendra (Institute of Buddhist and Pali Studies, Colombo), Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo (University of Hawai'i), Cait Collins, and other special guests.

Meditations and pujas of the different Buddhist traditions will be offered daily, with two pilgrimage tours from August 8 to 10. Please make your air reservations early and allow plenty of time before and after the Conference to experience the cultural riches of Ladakh.

A workshop on Buddhism and Women's Health will look at ways to improve health care for women in developing countries. Women from Burma, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and other parts of India are anxious to attend the Conference and learn all they can. Help women develop their vital resources for peaceful change in the world.

Anna Grimshaw's moving book, *Servants of the Buddha: Winter in a Himalayan Convent* (London: Open Letters, 1992) is highly recommended for participants and armchair travellers as well. Send in your \$50 registration to Sakyadhita today or send a donation to help others attend.

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## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

### Bhiksuni Ordination in France

by Thich Nu Tri Anh (Tenzin Galden)

On July 2 and 3, during the 1994 rains retreat, an ordination for bhiksus and bhiksunis was held in the presence of 16 bhiksu and bhiksuni masters at Tung Lam Linh Son in France. There were four candidates from the Tibetan tradition: one Australian, one Dutch, one French and one Spanish. Having received sramanerika (novice) ordination in the Tibetan tradition, they had been nuns for 12, 6, 5 and 2 years, respectively. Two Vietnamese siksamanas (probationary nuns) were also ordained. We Westerners received siksamana ordination first, and received bhiksuni ordination with our two Vietnamese sisters the next day. The uphadyayas (precepts masters) for this occasion were Ven. Dr. Thich Hyen-Vi and Ven. Geshe Lobsang Tengye. Bhiksu Pasadika translated the bhiksuni precepts into English, with explanations and instructions, while Bhiksu Thich Tri Sieu and Bhiksuni Thich Nu Tri Toan acted as the Masters of Ceremonies.

Master Thich Huyen-Vi did everything possible to make our ordinations and our stay at Dhammaville meaningful. The generosity of the Vietnamese Sangha and laypeople were wonderful. We homeless, self-supporting nuns were delighted to be told by the Master that Tung Lam was now our monastery. We made many friends during our stay whom we hope to meet again. Our aim now is to continue to spread the Dharma according to our abilities, while continuing our studies and practices.

For further information contact: Tung Lam Linh Son, Dhammaville, Rancon, via Limoges, France.

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Germany: Retreat with Ven. Ayya Khema

Buddha-Haus is pleased to announce a 1995 meditation retreat with Ven. Ayya Khema especially for her English speaking students. The retreat will be held at Monastery Niederaltaich in Southern Bavaria, Germany, from June 30 to July 9, 1995. A week's self-retreat is possible at Buddha-Haus immediately following: from July 10th to July 16th 1995.

Monastery Niederaltaich is a Benedictine monastery. It's abbot, Pater Emanuel OSB, has himself practiced meditation and is keenly interested in ecumenical dialogue. The Monastery is beautifully situated, well-equipped and has a lovely church, build in the 12th century. It has recently been restored and is a typical example of the baroque influence prevalent in Bavaria.

For further information contact: Buddha-Haus, Uttenbuhl 5,

87466 Oy-Mittelberg, Germany, Tel: 8376/502, Fax: 8376/592.

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## One Woman's Practice in Japan

by Mitra Bishop

It was late when I arrived at Sogenji the first time. My plane was late leaving Seattle, then delayed due to fog in San Francisco, so I missed my flight to Osaka and was routed through Tokyo. Even the express "bullet train" from Osaka to Okayama couldn't make up the time. At the darkened temple, the taxi driver went to and fro before deciding that, despite the obvious lack of habitation, the main gate was the place to let me out. Not knowing that nearly everyone sends their baggage directly home by a very efficient package express system, I lifted my bags onto aching shoulders and stepped through the gate into the velvet night.

At once, I stopped, breathless. Profound silence - that deep rich quiet created by centuries of spiritual practice - embraced me, even through the chirping of the crickets and the occasional deep burp of a bullfrog in the pond. I was home!

That first time, two years ago now, I had come on a short pilgrimage. I stayed three months altogether - two and a half at Sogenji, some time exploring Buddhist temples in Kyoto, and a week of sesshin at a Soto temple to the north. Before leaving Sogenji, I knew I had to come back, and almost exactly a year later, I did. Eighteen years earlier, good karma had taken me to the Rochester Zen Center; later good karma brought me to Sogenji.

I had heard about Japan before coming here, about the position of women - especially ordained women - in Japanese Zen, about the difficulty of practice in temples - especially Rinzai temples. As for the position of women, good karma brought me to a temple where women and men have equal standing, working and practicing side by side. Harada Shodo Roshi, the abbot, grew up in a temple, along with a brother and four sisters. Like their father before them, both he and his brother became Buddhist priests. Because of the low standing of ordained Japanese women, his sisters were not allowed to. Seeing his sisters' pain at being unable to pursue a spiritual life with the level of attention and commitment ordination allows, the roshi determined to provide training for women in his temple.

The first winter was very difficult, but it is said that one winter in a Japanese temple makes subsequent winters easier, since the body adjusts. "Easier" is a relative concept, however, with temperatures below freezing and no hat, gloves, or socks allowed, except under extenuating circumstances. In January, a space heater is moved into the zendo to take the edge off the icy air, which by then is down to about 18 degrees F. By December peoples' ears are red, swollen, and bleeding; by mid-January, hands are, too. Chopsticks fall from freezing hands trying to eat, and many mistakes are made at the computer keyboard. Feet crack from the cold and we all look like pumpkins because of the extra layers of long underwear and wool sweaters under our clothes. Laypeople live and train here the same as ordained people, but wear hakama, long skirts, rather than robes.

Summer is the reverse side of the coin. Temperatures hover near 100 degrees F for weeks and the high humidity causes rivers of perspiration to run down our bodies in rivers, dripping off noses, making puddles on the meditation mats. The rain breeds mosquitoes, seemingly by the millions. Mosquito coils in the zendo every night and slathering all manner of repellent only keep some of them at bay; the tougher ones bite anyway. After summer and winter, spring and fall are magnificent! And, perhaps because of previous difficulties endured, zazen is deep.

Sogenji is 300 years old next year. The 300 years are palpable in the buildings and gardens. Sitting in the anteroom each morning, waiting to go to sanzen, one is pulled deep within. Walking back to the zendo afterwards, with the moon setting and the temple roofs silhouetted against the dawn sky, one is breathless with wonder at being able to walk this Path.

May all beings attain Buddhahood!

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## How to Win an Argument with a Meat Eater

### The Hunger Argument:

- Number of people worldwide who will die as a result of malnutrition this year: 20 million.
- Number of people who could be adequately fed using the land freed if Americans reduced their intake of meat by 10 percent: 100 million.
- Percentage of corn grown in the United States eaten by people: 20.
- Percentage of corn grown in the U.S. eaten by livestock: 80.
- Percentage of oats grown in the U.S. eaten by livestock: 95.
- Percentage of protein wasted by cycling grain through livestock: 90.
- How frequently a child dies as a result of malnutrition: every 2.3 seconds.
- Pounds of potatoes that can be grown on an acre: 40,000.
- Pounds of beef produced on an acre: 250.
- Percentage of U.S. farmland devoted to beef production: 56.
- Pounds of grain and soybeans needed to produce a pound of edible flesh from feedlot beef: 16.

### The Environmental Argument

- Cause of global warming: greenhouse effect.

- Primary cause of greenhouse effect: carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels.
- Fossil fuels needed to produce a meat-centered diet vs. a meat-free diet: 3 times more.
- Percentage of U.S. topsoil lost to date: 75.
- Percentage of U.S. topsoil loss directly related to livestock raising: 85.
- Number of acres of U.S. forest cleared for cropland to produce meat-centered diet: 260 million.
- Amount of meat imported to U.S. annually from Central and South America: 300,000,000 pounds.
- Percentage of Central America children under the age of five who are undernourished: 75.
- Area of tropical rainforest consumed in every quarter-pound of rainforest beef: 55 square feet.
- Current rate of species extinction due to destruction of tropical rainforests for meat grazing and other uses: 1,000 per year.

### The Cancer Argument

- Increased risk of breast cancer for women who eat meat daily compared to less than once a week: 3.8 times.
- For women who eat eggs daily compared to once a week: 2.8 times.
- For women who eat butter and cheese 2-4 times a week: 3.25 times.
- Increased risk of fatal ovarian cancer for women who eat eggs 3 or more times a week vs. less than once a week: 3 times.
- Increased risk of fatal prostate cancer for men who consume meat, cheese, eggs. and milk daily vs. sparingly or not at all: 3.6 times.

### The Cholesterol Argument

- Number of U.S. medical schools: 125.
- Number requiring a course in nutrition: 30.

- Nutrition training received by average U.S. physician during four years in medical school: 2.5 hours.
- Most common cause of death in the U.S.: heart attack.
- How frequently a heart attack kills in the U.S.: every 45 seconds.
- Average U.S. man's risk of death from heart attack: 50 percent.
- Risk of average U.S. man who eats no meat: 15 percent.
- Risk of average U.S. man who eats no meat, dairy or eggs: 4 percent.
- Amount you reduce risk if you reduce consumption by 50 percent: 45 percent.
- Amount you reduce risk if you eliminate meat, dairy and eggs from your diet: 90 percent.
- Average cholesterol level of people eating a meat-centered diet: 210 mg/dl.
- Chance of dying from heart disease if you are male and your blood cholesterol is 210 mg/dl: greater than 50 percent.

#### The Natural Resources Argument

- User of more than half of all water used for all purposes in the U.S.: livestock production.
- Amount of water used in production of average cow: sufficient to float a destroyer.
- Gallons of water needed to produce a pound of wheat : 25.
- Gallons of water needed to produce a pound of California beef: 5,000.
- Years the world's known oil reserves would last if every human ate a meat-centered diet: 13.
- Years they would last if human beings no longer ate meat: 260.
- Calories of fossil fuel expended to get 1 calorie of protein from beef: 78.
- To get 1 calorie of protein from soybeans: 2.
- Percentage of all raw materials (base products of farming, forestry and mining including fossil fuels) consumed by the U.S. that is devoted to the production of livestock: 33.

- Percentage of all raw materials consumed by the U.S. needed to produce a complete vegetarian diet: 2.

### The Antibiotic Argument

- Percentage of U.S. antibiotics fed to livestock: 55.
- Percentage of staphylococci infections resistant to penicillin in 1960: 13.
- Percentage resistant in 1988: 91.
- Response of European Economic Community to routine feeding of antibiotics to livestock: ban.
- Response of U.S. meat and pharmaceutical industries to routine feeding of antibiotics to livestock: full and complete support.

### The Pesticide Argument

- Common belief: U.S. Department of Agriculture protects our health through meat inspection.
- Reality: Fewer than 1 out of every 250,000 slaughtered animals is tested for toxic chemical residues.
- Percentage of U.S. mother's milk containing significant levels of DDT: 99.
- Percentage of U.S. vegetarian mother's milk containing significant levels of DDT: 8.
- Contamination of breast milk, due to chlorinated hydrocarbon pesticides in animal products, found in meat-eating mothers vs. non-meat eating mothers: 35 times higher.
- Amount of Dieldrin ingested by the average breast-fed American infant: 9 times the permissible level.

### The Ethical Argument

- Number of animals killed for meat per hour in U.S.: 660,000.
- Occupation with highest turnover rate in U.S.: slaughterhouse worker.
- Occupation with highest rate of on-the-job injury in U.S.: slaughterhouse worker.

## The Survival Argument

- Athlete to win Ironman Triathlon more than twice: Dave Scott (6 time winner).
- Food choices of Dave Scott: Vegetarian.
- Largest meat eater that ever lived: Tyrannosaurus Rex.

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## United Nations International Day of Peace:

### One Minute of Silence, One Moment of Goodwill Activity of Peace

You are invited to join with delegates of the United Nations and citizens throughout the world for One Minute of Silence to focus on peace, followed by a Moment of Goodwill Activity ON Tuesday, September 19, 1995. This is a Worldwide Peace Initiative wherein individuals, organizations and nations act in concert on this International Day of Peace.

Wherever you are, you will be linked with others around the planet in this co-operative action of peace. The third Tuesday of every September was proclaimed by the United Nations as the International Day of Peace. The moment the General Assembly convenes in New York will be a minute of silence for prayer and meditation to begin building lasting peace and security for all.

The International Day of Peace serves as a reminder of our permanent commitment to peace, above all interests and differences of any kind. The principle of co-operation is the basis for peaceful relations among people and all circles of life, for children of this and future generations.

Individuals and nations, acting in concert, do make a difference in the quality of our lives, our institutions, our environment and our planetary future. Commit at least one day per year of service to your community: service to elders, refugees, the homeless, environmental clean-up, a community vegetable garden, planting a Peace Pole, or a project of your choice. Support a peace activities in your community.

Be kind and compassionate in all relationships. Cultivate a spirit of generosity and an environment of abundance by giving whole-heartedly of your time, expertise, and resources to create peace. Light a candle at dusk for peace and send forth a wave of light and peace around the world.

For further information contact Pathways to Peace, P.O. Box 1057, Larkspur, CA 94977 USA. Tel: (415)461-0500, Fax: (415) 925-0330.