

Japanese Buddhist Nuns Dislocated by Quake/Tsunami

Many Buddhist nuns have been dislocated by the earthquake and tsunami and are in need of assistance. If you'd like to help, please direct donations to the Zen Nihon BukkyoNisoHodan, a national, Tokyo-based, non-sectarian association of Japanese Buddhist nuns. Their website (in Japanese): <http://jibo.sakura.ne.jp/>. We are sending metta and karuna to all of Japan.

“Welcoming New Growth from Established Roots” Two Siladhara Nuns Take Leave of the Ajahn Chah Lineage to Follow the Bhikkhuni Path

Ajahn Anandabodhi and Ajahn Santacitta, of the Aloka Vihara in San Francisco, traveled to Amaravati Buddhist Monastery in Hemel Hempstead, UK in April to formally "take leave" of their community and the Ajahn Chah Lineage.

In November of 2010 they announced their intention to follow the bhikkhuni path, which is not open to them in the Thai Forest lineage. "The ready availability in the US of bhikkhuni ordination, the ordination given by the Buddha, offers us a new platform for the establishment of a training monastery for women," they said in their announcement.

The ceremony was attended by all of the Siladhara nuns and four senior bhikkhus, including Ajahn Amaro who is the abbot of Amaravati Buddhist Monastery.

A celebration to welcome them home and recognize this transition, entitled "Welcoming New Growth from Established Roots" was held at the flower-filled Aloka Vihara, 1632 48th Ave., San Francisco, on May 7, 2011. Over forty attendees offered food for the meal. During the ceremony following the meal, the attendees read poems, presented pictures, sang songs, and made other offerings to the nuns. This was followed by a ceremony to plant seeds in their

backyard garden, symbolizing their new beginnings.

They will ordain as bhikkhunis on October 17 at Spirit Rock Meditation Center. For more information please visit their web site:

www.saranaloka.org/whats_new.html



Ajahn Anandabodhi

Ajahn Anandabodhi was born in Wales in 1968. Coming across the Buddha's teaching at the age of fourteen had a profound effect on her inner life. She has practiced meditation for over twenty years and has lived in Amaravati and Chithurst monasteries in the UK, since the age of twenty-

four; helping in various areas of running the monasteries and enjoying times of longer retreat and "tudong"-walking on faith-and taking the sign of the samana out into the world. Currently, Ajahn Anandabodhi is living at Aloka Vihara in San Francisco where she is helping to establish a nuns' monastery in the Theravada tradition. She shares dhamma from the Vihara and in the Bay Area and occasionally teaches in other parts of the USA.



Ajahn Santacitta

Ajahn Santacitta was born in Austria in 1958 and has been practicing meditation for over 20 years. Her first teacher was Ajahn Buddhadasa, whom she met in 1988. After living in Thailand for several years,

she ordained in 1993 at Amaravati Monastery in England and trained with the nuns of the Ajahn Chah/Ajahn Sumedho lineage for 17 years. Since meeting Shechen Rabjam Rinpoche in 2002, she also integrates the Dzogchen teachings of the Tibetan tradition into her practice. In 2009 Ajahn Santacitta moved to Aloka Vihara in San Francisco; she teaches in the Bay Area and occasionally other parts of the US. It is her intention to support the establishment of training places for women and to share her experience in community, as a means for cultivating the heart and opening the mind.

Donations Help Aranya Bodhi Hermitage Acquire Much Needed Trailer

During the past month, many friends have been working diligently to find a kitchen trailer for the Aranya Bodhi Hermitage, replacing a much older trailer that was damaged by winter storms and affected by dangerous mold and mildew, which had been affecting the health of several of the residents. Through the diligent work of many friends, the hermitage now has a new used trailer, complete with all the kitchen fixtures, shower, and a separate bedroom for a resident or guest. This 1996 trailer was only used a few times by the original owner.

The new trailer will allow indoor cooking and shower facilities for the four monastic women and the lay steward now living on the land. In summer, especially during the Vassa retreat from July to October, up to 12 women will use the new trailer, along with an outside camp-kitchen and shower tents.

The total cost for acquiring the new trailer was \$9,500, including purchase price, licensing, registration, transportation from Stockton to the Hermitage, and road repair required to move the trailer to its new slot. (As a bonus, the gravel driveway will be improved by the road crew for safety and protection of our visitors' vehicles.) Out of the \$9,500 cost of acquiring and installing this trailer, the Alliance for Bhikkhunis offered \$2,000 and Awakening Truth (Ajahn Thana-

santi Bhikkhuni's support organization in Colorado) has kindly pledged another \$3,000. The Hermitage is appreciative of the donations of all these friends.

However, \$4,500 in donations is needed to pay the costs that remain. (The Dhammadharini Board of Directors offered to loan these funds to the Hermitage (from Dhammadharini funds designated for other purposes), as the kitchen trailer had become an environmental health hazard. With 5-7 women in retreat at the Hermitage, it had to be replaced urgently.)

Friends of the Hermitage would like to join the AFB and Awakening Truth in



Ruth Dennison



Alliance for Bhikkhunis:

Anyone who has ever thought about spending quality time with Ruth Denison in this, the twilight of her long life, might think about coming and staying at Dhamma Dena (Joshua Tree, CA) for anywhere from two weeks to several months to serve as her personal assistant and driver. Room and board would be free. If interested, please contact Jill Rayna at 707-632-5589.

offering an invitation to those who would like to participate with Friends of the Hermitage in funding the remaining cost of the new used trailer and getting it in and set up on site. If you wish to donate, see <http://www.aranyabodhi.org/dana>. Be sure to indicate the purpose of your gift, and kindly drop a note to awakeningforest@gmail.com so that we can announce when the goal is met. Sara Sacksteder, on behalf of Friends of the Hermitage, will happily reply to any questions about this project and how you can participate.

New Aranya Bodhi Hermitage Trailer

Alliance for Bhikkhunis:

News from Vietnam, taken from Thailand's Ven. Bhikkhuni Dhammananda's site. 16-18 November 2010 Ven. Bhikkhuni Lieu Phab invited all the five Theravada Bhikkhunis to perform Sima Samutti (boundary consecration) at their temple in Baria, Vung Tao province, Vietnam. Also on the same day, to help them receive Kathina (robes) Theravadin style. Ven. Dhammananda will lead the sangha from Thailand.

Alliance for Bhikkhunis:

We received the following message from Viriya Karuna about the introduction of Theravada Buddhism in Spain: The Spanish Association for Theravada Buddhism (www.aebtheravada.org) is a nonprofit organization founded in March 2008. We started out with only people who were



New Spanish Theravada Sangha

working to spread Theravada Buddhism in Spain. AEBTHERAVADA is growing, not very fast, but steadily, and we already have 50 members. We hope that anyone sincerely interested in Buddhadhamma will join us to share their experience and help promote the Buddha's original teachings in Spain. During the few years of our existence we have been visited by several monks and Mae Chee Bridget from Thailand. Retreats and Dhamma talks have been well attended and we are looking forward now to the renovation of an old house and to offer it as a place for individual retreats. Our short-term goals would be establishing Dhamma-groups (study and meditation) all over Spain. Already there are a few, but mostly in the big cities in central Spain. Originally we thought that in the long term we might be able to have a monastery, but are now happy to announce that there is already the first bhikkhu coming to Spain. For the time being he wants to see if there is enough support for him to stay in this beautiful country. He would be the first ever resident bhikkhu here! So that's what we are working for right now. Our wishes came true—earlier than ever thought!

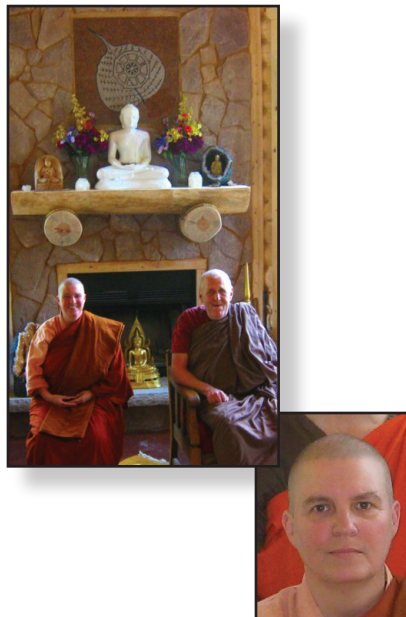
Alliance for Bhikkhunis:

Mark your calendars now to be part of honoring the founder of the Bhikkhuni Sangha Mahapajapati Theri as well as commemorating our first women teachers during the **1st Annual International Bhikkhuni Day** on September 17, 2011. Join our circle of support for bhikkhunis worldwide! (Visit our homepage for information on this awareness raising, fund raising, community-building, educational event: www.bhikkhuni.net.)

Installation of Bhikkhuni Ven. Madika as co-abbot of Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center, in Annapolis, Missouri.

On May 21, 2011, Venerable KC Madika WarEagle Bhikkhuni was installed as co-abbot at Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center (DSMC) in Annapolis, Missouri. Venerable Vimalaramsi is the founder and current abbot of DSMC. Ven. Madika will oversee the women's monastic area, monastic planning, as well as the daily operations of the center.

She is joined by samaneri Sister Kalyana. Please see – <http://www.dhammasukha.com> for more information.



New Co-Abbots, Ven. Madika, Bhikkhuni and Ven. Bhante Vimalaramsi.

Two Noteworthy Articles from the Bangkok Post:

Buddhist Women Honored (March 4, 2011)

March 8 was International Women's Day and this year it coincided with the presentation of the 2011 Outstanding Women in Buddhism Awards, when five women were feted for their contributions to Buddhist spirituality.

The award, now in its 10th year, was presented at a ceremony held at the Association for the Promotion of the Status of Women, in the Don Muang area.

The five winners were:

•Hathairat Suda, social worker and activist. For the past 17 years, Hathairat has been working to promote reproductive health, HIV/AIDS prevention, and sex education amongst youngsters. Once ordained a samaneri, or female novice, in the Theravada tradition, she has found Buddhist teachings and the roles of female monastics helpful in her counseling work with teenagers.

•Sujitra (Sudassa) Onkom, academic, dharma writer, and vipassana meditation teacher. Teaching at the Humanities and Social Sciences Faculty of Rajabhat University's Thon Buri campus, she has penned 18 dharma books in Thai and six in English. Apart from doing TV and radio programmes, she is also a highly respected dharma and meditation teacher.

•Debra Quayle Travis, meditation teacher. With strong foundations in both Theravada and Vajrayana Buddhism, Travis has for the past 15 years been teaching meditation to people from all walks of life, including prisoners. She is a student of spiritualist Lama Tsultrim Allione, whose specialty is Tibetan Buddhist lineage.

•Maechee Daranee Chantrawut, Buddhist nun. The former teacher with several awards to her credit, she now teaches meditation and dharma to women practitioners at her own nunnery, where therapeutic treatment for stroke patients is also offered as part of social services. She is currently executive director of the Thai Maechee Institute.

•Samaneri Dhamma Visudtha, female novice. Ordained a nun at 15, she has spent the past 39 years practising and teaching dharma and meditation. A highly respected teacher, she was ordained a samaneri 14 months ago and her elevation to a bhikkhuni in a few years' time promises to be a significant event.

Gender and religion: Where nuns fear to tread

(Published March 6, 2011.)

A court in India's Bihar state recently ruled in favour of Mae Chi Ahree Pongsai, a nun in her seventies, who lodged a complaint requesting that she be allowed to replace Phra Khru Pariyat Thammawithet as head of the Thai Nalanda temple, 90 km from the state capital of Patna. Mae Chi Ahree reportedly claimed that the former abbot, Phra Maha Tharntong, who died in 2007, had written in his will that if she came into conflict with his successor, she should seek assistance from India's courts to take over.

Thai Mae Chi Ahree Pongsai recently won an appeal in India's Bihar state to replace Phra Khru Pariyat Thammawithet as head of the Thai Nalanda temple outside Patna, India.

The controversy over a Thai Buddhist nun successfully petitioning an Indian court to gain control of a temple has raised broader questions surrounding the administration of temples overseas. It has also highlighted the ambiguous role nuns, or mae chi, face within the structure of Buddhism in Thailand. The official council of ordained clergy in Thailand, the Sangha Supreme Council, does not recognize mae chi as full members. They are not officially allowed to interpret or teach the dhamma (the teachings of the Buddha), or perform religious rituals.

The Interior Ministry, however, does regard them as clergy, meaning they are unable to vote, while the Transport Ministry treats them as lay people, denying them rights accorded to monks, such as free transport services.

In the past, efforts have been made to clarify the status of mae chi, such as in 1991, when the Institute for Thai Nuns pushed parliament to consider a "Nun Act", which would outline basic regulations for nuns.

According to a September, 2002, article from Inter Press Service, the Religious Affairs Department's response was unambiguous: "It is impossible. A nun has never existed in a Thai Buddhist decree."

Sri Lanka, like Thailand, follows Theravada Buddhism; however it permits women to be ordained as monks. A con-

trovery also challenging traditional power structures within Thai Buddhism erupted in 2001 when a Thai female Buddhist scholar, Dr Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, was ordained in Sri Lanka, and shortly thereafter, another Thai woman, Samaneri Dhammarakhita was ordained by a Sri Lankan preceptor on Thai soil, marking the first time a woman had been ordained in the country.

But Mae Chi Ananta Nakboon of the Mae Chi foundation strongly disagreed with Mae Chi Ahree's actions.

"What was she thinking when she went to court to get the rights to manage the temple?" she said. "Mae chi are under the support and teaching of the monks. We have no right to challenge their authority in any case," said Mae Chi Ananta. "In the temple, the teaching of the monks receives the highest respect from the people. The mae chi do not earn the same respect. How can they then manage temples successfully?"

She said Mae chi can establish meditation centres and foundations and administer them, "but definitely not temples".

Further complicating matters in Mae Chi Ahree's case is the way in which Thai temples abroad are administered. They do not fall under the Sangha Supreme Council or the Ecclesiastical Law, as do all the temples in Thailand. There are currently over 300 Thai Buddhist temples around the world, with some 1,200 monks. Thai communities abroad establish the temple, putting administrative power in the hands of laypeople.

"Most overseas temples are established as non-profit organisations or under a foundation with or without Thai Buddhist monks at the beginning," said Amnaj Buasiri, director of the secretariat of the Sangha Supreme Council.

Mr. Amnaj argued that the Thai government should take over Thai Buddhist temples abroad. Mr. Amnaj strongly believed that a concrete way to solve the management problem of Thai Buddhist temples in foreign countries is to transfer the temples to the Thai government. He cited Wat Buddhapadipa in London and Wat Sanghapadipa in Wales as examples of where this model has been effective.

"The temples transferred the land and property rights of the temple compound to the Thai government, and the Thai embassy in the UK works with them to help look after the property as a national asset interest in a foreign country," he said.

In the case of Mae Chi Ahree, who recently returned from India, there had been no progress made in talks with her.

According to Mr. Amnaj, she refused to meet with government representatives, choosing instead to speak through a loudspeaker and insisting she still had the right to manage the temple. Mr. Amnaj said that Phra Khru Pariyat and eight other monks continued their duties at the temple, and that the facility had thrived since Phra Khru Pariyat took over in 2007.

