

Present

The Voices and Activities of Theravada Buddhist Women | Winter 2011

September 17, 2011

The 1st Annual International Bhikkhuni Day

If You Honor Me, Honor My Mother Gotami ■ The 1st Annual International
Bhikkhuni Day ■ Honoring and Celebrating Bhikkhunis and Laywomen
New Turns Toward Ancient Paths: The Ordinations in California
Bhikkhuni Education Today: Seeing Challenges as Opportunities
Venerable Kusuma and the Power of Literacy Education
Turning Back Towards Freedom
Wearing White in the West ■ Bhikkhunīsaṃyutta



Present

The Voices and Activities of Theravada Buddhist Women

Current Issue
Winter 2011 | Volume 4 | Issue 1

ISSN 2156-0099. Present is published two times per year by Alliance for Bhikkhunis, a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. PO Box 1058, Santa Barbara, California, USA 93102-1058
www.bhikkhuni.net

Editor-in-Chief

Susan Pembroke

Executive Editor

Jacqueline Kramer

Assistant Editor

Sarah Conover

Editorial Board

Sarah Conover
Roseanne Freese
Randy Graves
Jacqueline Kramer
Donna McCarthy
Susan Penbroke

Design & Layout

Sandi Hampton

THANKS TO

Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi, Venerable Bhikkhuni Sobhana, Ron Browning, Carudhamma Jo Ferris, Kathy Jean Schultz, Joan Sutherland, Janice Tolman

Present is an independent publication and does not represent any particular lineage, monastic, or teacher. The journal is produced for and supported by the Theravada fourfold sangha, and as such reflects the interests of that community. Present publishes essays, non-fiction, scholarly articles, news, and reviews about—and relevant to—bhikkhunis and the fourfold sangha. We welcome unsolicited articles, essays, scholarly investigations, photographs, artwork and illustrations. We do not accept unsolicited book reviews.

Copyright © 2011 Present/Alliance for Bhikkhunis. All rights reserved. Contents copyright reserved worldwide on behalf of Present/Alliance for Bhikkhunis and the respective authors and photographers.

Noteworthy

Ordination News

Two Significant Ordination Events in California

August 29, 2010 Four novice women became bhikkhunis during historic dual sangha ordinations at Aranya Bodhi Hermitage in Sonoma County, California on August 29, 2010. Ven. Thanasanti Bhikkhuni (United States), Ven. Adhimutta Bhikkhuni (New Zealand), Ven. Suvijjana Bhikkhuni (United States), and Ven. Phalanyani Bhikkhuni (Germany) were ordained as bhikkhunis (fully ordained nuns) in the Theravada Buddhist tradition.

October 10, 2010 Five bhikkhunis, two samaneris, and one anagarika were ordained at Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara in Los Angeles. Three ceremonies were held on the same day. The first was for a Canadian-born woman, Brenda Batke-Hirschmann, who became Anagarika Aloka by taking Eight Precepts; the second was for two American-born Anagarikas who received ordination as Samaneris; and the third was for five Samaneris who took full Upasampada, or higher ordination, as Bhikkhunis. The new Samaneris are Santussika and Dhammapali; the new Bhikkhunis are Lakshapathiye Samadhi (born in Sri Lanka), Cariyapanna, Susila, Sammasati (all three born in Vietnam), and Uttamanyana (born in Myanmar).

Please see detailed accounts of these two events by Ayya Sobhana, Prioress of Aranya Bodhi Hermitage, elsewhere in this issue.



Two Former AfB Board Members Take Robes

On Independence Day - the 4th of July Marcia Pimentel, whom we have known as the Editor of the Alliance for Bhikkhunis' Present magazine, had her hair cut by friends and shaved by Buddhist monastics. She then donned the white robes of an anagarika - one who has gone forth from the home life into homelessness - and formally undertook the Eight Precepts. She was surrounded by friends, DharmaCreek land sisters, and her fellow Buddhist monastic women.

She received the Pali Dhamma name of "Marajina" - "She Who Achieves Victory Over Mara" - which was specially offered for her by Ajahn Maha Prasert Kavissaro, with Ayya Tathaaloka's blessing and hearty approval. Anagarika Marajina plans to spend the 2010 Vassa Retreat together with women monastics and aspirants from around North America at Aranya Bodhi Hermitage.

As mentioned above in the story about the L.A. ordinations at Dharm Vijaya, Canadian-born Brenda Batke-Hirschman became an anagarika by taking Eight Precepts under Ayya Gunasari. Aloka, as she is now called, had been the

Vice-President of Alliance for Bhikkhunis as well as the Executive Editor of AfB's online magazine Present. She also managed AfB's website.

Dallas Becker's Ordination at Sravasti Abbey

At another ordination, in a beautiful ceremony at Sravasti Abbey in New-man Washington, Dallas Becker, one of Sravasti Abbey's full time residents and a long time student of Ven. Chodron, took Samaneri (novice) vows on August 26, 2010, becoming Ven. Thubten Samten, the Abbey's seventh resident monastic. Special visitor Ven. Jampa Tsedroen Bhikshuni was in attendance along with Ven. Thubten Chodron Bhikshuni. (And two new anagarikas were ordained on September 8!). With fifty friends and supporters in attendance, including all the participants in this year's Exploring Monastic Life program, it was a truly auspicious day.

More details are at <http://www.sravastiabbey.org/gallery/2010/sept10ordination.html>

Sept. 2, 2010 – Sangha Entering First Vassa at Aranya Bodhi

For the first year in North American history, the Theravada Buddhist women's monastic community gathered together to observe the Vassa retreat together. It is a beginning that is the culmination of many years of dedicated effort and slow nurturing of the causes and conditions for women's Sangha to come together.



Pictured are Ayya Tathaaloka Bhikkhuni Theri (center), Ayya Sudhamma Bhikkhuni (right front), Adhimutta Samaneri (mid-rt.), Phanyani Samaneri (back-rt.), Ayya Sobhana Bhikkhuni (left front), Suvijjana Samaneri (mid-left) and Anagarika Marajina (back-left) in the hermitage's Dhammasala yurt.

Many worked hard to prepare the beautiful space where an aspiration came true when, quietly that morning, in their yurt Dhamma-sala surrounded by mist-shrouded redwoods, seven women dedicated to monastic life entered into the traditional Buddhist Vassa retreat period.

Aloka Vihara Nuns Express Intention for Bhikkhuni Ordination

From the nuns of the Aloka Vihara (excerpted from Saranaloka Website; full letter at http://www.saranaloka.org/letter_jill-nuns-11-2010.html)

November 8, 2010

Dear Friends in Dhamma,

We are living in an historic period where the unfolding of full participation and ordination for women is happening in most world religions. Our community is no exception: When we came here for the first time in January 2008, our intention was to look into establishing a training monastery for siladhara. As three sisters who have trained in the UK monasteries for about 18 years, we each felt ready to enter a space of new growth, inwardly and outwardly. Meanwhile, in our own communities in the UK, the response to the international attention on the position of women and the feminine in Buddhism, was to reaffirm a conservative stance. In October of 2009, just shortly before our move to the Bay Area, we, as a community of siladhara in the UK, agreed to the 'Five Points' in order for siladhara ordination to continue.

Saranaloka Foundation is the first trust that has been established with the specific

intention of supporting nuns of the Thai Forest Tradition of Ajahn Chah and Ajahn Sumedho. Our heartfelt wish in coming here was to establish a training monastery for nuns within our lineage; an aspiration that was complicated by the imposition of the 'Five Points' in August 2009.

Since our arrival here last December, we recognize more and more the impact on our hearts of those 'Five Points' and the vulnerability of the siladhara ordination, which is valid only in the Ajahn Chah / Ajahn Sumedho lineage. The training itself has been of immense value to us on our Path and we are deeply grateful to have had the opportunity to train with the siladhara for so many years. Now, living outside of our larger communities in England, we feel unable to pass on the 'Five Points' to other women wishing to live the renunciant life. Our own process is a movement of the heart; responding to the 'Five Points' and the conditions which gave rise to them.

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. Taking all these things into consideration, we have come to the decision to move towards taking bhikkhuni ordination to provide a stronger container to pass on to other women. In keeping with the 'Five Points' we will take leave of the Ajahn Chah / Ajahn Sumedho lineage in order to later receive full ordination. We have already informed the elders of our community of this intention and will formally ask forgiveness and take leave of our community in April 2011, when all the nuns and other elders will be gathered at Amaravati. We recognize that this is a huge step and truly want to honor all that we have received over the years.

Having considered this very deeply, we feel the loss and turbulence that such a big step inevitably brings...

We feel a strong heart connection with the siladhara community in the UK, wishing that they flourish in their practice. The aspiration towards liberation and providing a sustainable form of training for women samanās is a goal we all share.

We continue to be committed to our

vision of establishing a training monastery for Theravadan nuns, practicing in the Forest Tradition; a style which is found in all Buddhist schools. The Forest style of practice emphasizes renunciation, simplicity and meditation as a path of awakening. When the time is ripe, we intend to relocate to a rural setting, more suitable to the Forest style of practice. In the meantime, we are very happy to stay at Aloka Vihara with its peaceful presence and close accessibility for our community, the wild ocean and beautiful Golden Gate Park.

With much gratitude to you all for your support of Aloka Vihara in so many ways.

Many blessings in Dhamma,

*Sister Anandabodhi and
Sister Santacitta*



Bhikkhu Bodhi' walking

Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi's 10,000 STEPS Raises Money for Buddhist Global Relief

October 16, 2010 Bhikkhu Bodhi and many others walked to raise money for Buddhist Global Relief at the first "10,000 Steps to Help Feed the Hungry". Although the distance covered depends on the length of one's stride, walking 10,000 steps is the approximate equivalent of walking 8km/5mi. He and the walkers asked people to sponsor them on the walk.



Aloka nuns walking for Bhodi

Ajahn Santacitta and Ajahn Anandabodhi, nuns from Aloka Vihara in San Francisco, and friends participate in the 10,000 Steps walk for Buddhist Global Relief.

The event itself was held on October 16 in South Orange, New Jersey at the scenic South Mountain Reservation. Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi led the majority of the walk participants on an 8K walk through the beautiful, wooded trails of the Reservation. BGR members, volunteers, fundraisers, and over sixteen monastics comprised the group of over fifty people who joined the walk in support of the cause.

In addition to the event in South Orange, out-of-town supporters were encouraged to participate by “walking where they were.” Several mini-walks took place on October 16 in conjunction with the South Orange walk, across the United States in places like San Francisco; Bath, Maine; and Denver; and as far away as the United Kingdom. Some of their Facebook fans also showed their support by joining them for a “virtual walk” on their Facebook Fan Page.

With the hard work and dedication of BGR’s supporters, the event raised over \$22,000 to go toward our current hunger relief projects, such as critical rice support to girl students and their families in Cambodia, first-time water supply to a poor village in Sri Lanka, emergency food relief to families in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa — just to name a few.

This was a great example of people turning their compassion into action while enjoying a peaceful walk with a

great group of people. Bhikkhu Bodhi and BGR extend their special thanks to all of the volunteers and fundraisers who participated in the first ever walk event. They look forward to making the 2011 “10,000 Steps to Help Feed the Hungry” event as successful as the first. For more information contact Deena Scherer, info@buddhistglobalrelief.org

A Western Buddhist Tradition at Dhamma Dena...

November, 2010 Having been invited by Ruth Denison, Ven. Madika is contributing a monastic component



Ruth Madika

to the community at Dhamma Dena. Ruth’s pioneering work in Mindfulness that opened the door to the Dhamma for so many Americans is complemented by Ven. Madika teaching Awakening Stillness QiGong and Disturbing Emotions Workshops, which she has developed based on the Buddha-Dhamma and her own experience.

The monastics have a schedule of work, study and meditation and are involved with the various retreats scheduled throughout the year. Visits by fellow monastics and laity are welcome, and a commitment of temporary vows is possible for those wishing a longer or deeper stay.

Some updating of the monastic dwelling is in process. The residents are giving some attention to westernizing the attire, chants, artwork and other aspects of monastic Buddhist life. The Laity Sangha of Dhamma Dena has a Google List that will spread the word of needs, discussions and announcements.

Great Determination is in the careful

hands of the Monastic Steward. The position is described on the Great Determination Website. It is available as a hermitage for retreat in solitude when the steward vacates the position. Ven. Madika and Samaneri Kalyana will return there when the opportunity arises. When there is another lay or ordained resident to stay at Dhamma Dena they may travel to Ohio for varying lengths of time themselves to spend in retreat and continue the development there.



Great Determination kuti

High Desert Vipassana Retreats with Ruth Denison

With Ruth’s unique approach, individual and group activities become vehicles for Vipassana practice which is solely based upon the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. The teacher’s caring presence brings ease and inspiration to this rather difficult and sensitive practice of growing into the awakened mind. See <http://www.dhammadena.com/page3retreats.html>

News from Our Asian Sisters

News: **June 16, 2010** The struggle for recognition and gender equity for Buddhist ordained women continues in Sri Lanka. A leading Buddhist monk in Sri Lanka, Ven. Sumangala Thero,



Ruth Dennison Retreat

has lodged a complaint against the state Commissioner of Buddhist Affairs regarding the non-safeguarding quality of female Buddhist monks (bhikkhunis). Ven. Sumangala Thero lodged a complaint with the Human Rights Commission after the Sri Lankan Commissioner of Buddhist Affairs rejected a request to legally register the monasteries of female monks (bhikkhunis). “There are 147 bhikkhuni monasteries in which 500 senior and 2000 novice monks reside,” stated Ven. Sumangala Thero, and “the Buddhist term ‘Sangha’ includes both male and female monks”, he added. Details

News: **June 4, 2010** The Navugala Bhikkhuni Aramaya in Galigamuwa, Sri Lanka is seeking help with repairs and maintenance. If you are able to assist in any way, either with materials for repairs, labor, or dana donations, we encourage you to lend a helping hand. Working together, in alignment with Dhamma, we can contribute to continued growth of the Sri Lankan Bhikkhuni Sangha. Thank you for your interest in helping to support Navugala Bhikkhuni Aramaya (just add a note to our fast, secure online support form indicating that your donation is for Navugala). Click here to learn more about Navugala Bhikkhuni Aramaya, and to read details about what’s needed now.

News: **April 16, 2010** The first phase of the new residential building at Songdhammakalyani Bhikkhuni Aramaya in Thailand is scheduled to begin construction soon. Venerable Dhammananda Bhikkhuni, the first Thai bhikkhuni to ordain in the Theravada tradition, initially believed that ordination should be meant

Upcoming Dhamma Dena Desert Retreat

Holiday Retreat for Women and Men

Dec 17th through January 3rd

Beginners welcome. While this is a retreat for Buddhist Laity, two Theravada nuns will be in residence and may offer descriptions of their monastic practice.

only for those who intended to ordain for life. However, in 2009, she expanded the opportunity for women to ordain temporarily (Temporary Samaneri Ordination or TSO) in order to help establish the Bhikkhuni Sangha in Thailand. TSO was launched on April 6, 2009, and was very well received: between April and December that year, 82 women ordained and received intensive training. As a result of ordination, the women found that their understanding of the teachings of the Buddha and their depth of knowledge in Buddhism were strengthened significantly. The temple now offers TSO twice per year, on April 6 and December 5. The immediate concern is for a proper residence for the nuns during their training period. Please consider becoming part of Thai her-story by making a donation towards the construction of the residence.

Upcoming Events:

April 30 to May 7, 2011 Sakyadhita Canada (www.sakyadhita.org/canada) is offering its first residential meditation retreat from April 30 to May 7, 2011 - “The Joy of Meditation”. This silent retreat, led by Shirley Jayanta Johannesen, will focus on moment-to-moment awareness (vipassana) in a beautiful meditation centre on Salt Spring Island, BC. The daily schedule will include instruction on various meditation techniques, a daily yoga class, individual interviews, group discussions, question/answer periods, and Dhamma teachings. All dana from this retreat will be donated to support Sakyadhita Canada (International Association of Buddhist women). For information and registration: sakyadhitacanada@gmail.com

Save the Date:

The Alliance for Bhikkhunis is pleased to announce **September 17, 2011**, as the first annual International Bhikkhuni Day and Pledge-A-Thon!

The day will be an opportunity for meditation and for telling stories about the largely unknown yet immensely influential female figures who have helped nourish and shape us. The Alliance for Bhikkhunis is inviting monasteries, lay meditation organizations, and sitting groups around the world to set this day aside to practice together with us in celebration of women teachers. We’ll be requesting that each participant asks for pledges as a way to raise funds in support of the Alliance for Bhikkhunis, as well as the participating centers or groups. We’re encouraging a festive atmosphere with food, arts and craft sales, bake sales, auctions, music and more.

For additional details about the first annual International Bhikkhuni Day and Pledge-A-Thon, go to the Alliance for Bhikkhunis website <http://www.bhikkhuni.net/>, and click on the link for more information on the event.

Internet Study Course

From Ayya Tathaaloka:

Dear friends who delight in studying and investigating Dhamma,

This coming year, the highly esteemed monastic scholar, Ven. Analayo, will be offering an internet study course on the Madhyama Agama. He has asked me to pass on the invitation to join in this study to those friends who may be interested.

Please see <http://www.buddhismuskunde.uni-hamburg.de/index.php?id=121&L=0> to learn more.

The Madhyama Agama is the Buddhist Sanskrit and Chinese language parallel to the Majjhima Nikaya — The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha.

Ven. Bhikkhu Analayo, a Theravada Buddhist monk originally trained in Pali-text scholarship by the Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, has achieved renown in his own right through his excellent analytical text critical and comparative scholarship of Theravada Buddhist teachings, particularly of the Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan renditions of the Agama Sutras as compared with their Pali-text renditions in the Nikayas. He is currently one of the leading scholars in the world in this field, with very many published works on various meditation and Dhamma themes.

His most recent publication, a monologue on the genesis of the bodhisattva idea, may be read online here.

Wishing you joy in insight,

Ayya Tathaaloka Bhikkhuni

Present

Post Office Box 1058
Santa Barbara
California, USA
93102-1058

Help celebrate and support Present/Alliance for Bhikkhunis!

This copy has been made available to you through the generous donations of our readers. If you enjoyed this issue, then please consider a tax-deductable donation to help support Present/Alliance for Bhikkhunis. 90% of donations are allocated for bhikkhuni ordination and training costs; bhikkhuni medical, dental and health insurance expenses; and providing requisites, including books and computers, to bhikkhuni viharas. Donations can be made quickly, easily, and securely [online here](#).