Present

The Voices and Activities of Theravada Buddhist Women

Volume 6 | Number 1 | 2012 Annual Compilation

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Front Cover
Feminine Buddha Image
Wat Thepthidaram, Thailand
Photo: Anandajoti Bhikkhu
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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, nonfiction, scholarly articles, news, and book and movie reviews relevant to bhikkhunis and the Fourfold Sangha. We welcome submissions.

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Features

Mother of Pearl Flower
Wat Pho, Thailand
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Special Section

International Bhikkhuni Day 2012:

Dedicated to the Legacy of Saṅghamittā Therī

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Reviews

From the Editor

2012 has been a year of transition for *Present* as we watched founder Susan Pembroke retire from her role as editor in chief. How Susan was able to publish such a beautiful, substantial magazine *and* serve as head of the Alliance for Bhikkhunis is something of a miracle.

Despite the challenges of this transition, we are especially pleased that in 2012 the magazine served as a venue for a number of substantive articles on bhikkhuni history: Venerable Tathaaloka's canonical study "Lasting Inspiration"; Anandajoti Bhikkhu's new translation from the *Extended Mahavamsa*; Bhikkhu Analayo's examination of feminist readings about Subha Theri in the *Ekottarika Agama* (featured as part of our International Bhikkhuni Day celebration of Sanghamitta Theri); Susan Pembroke's look at recent bhikkhuni developments in Sri Lanka; and Bhikkhu Bodhi's argument for the reestablishment of the Sri Lankan Bhikkhuni Order, an essay he crafted in response to a statement against it from the Concise Tripitaka Editorial Board.

We found that our most popular articles were the personal narratives: the paths to ordination by both Venerable Sudhamma and Venerable Munissara; an interview with, and Dhamma teaching from, Venerable Tathaaloka; the challenges of life as a modern-day bhikkhuni by Amma Thanasanti; and Tenzin Kiyosaki's experience in the dual roles of monastic and hospice chaplain.

You will find these articles, along with various others, gathered here into an annual compilation issue composed of our complete August 2012 and December 2012 installments together with our 2012 International Bhikkhuni Day articles.

To deepen *Present*'s niche, bringing you "the voices and activities of Theravada Buddhist women," we need your help as scouts around the world. We warmly welcome your ideas, suggestions, feedback, and articles—features and reviews, academic and otherwise. Please drop us a line at presenteditor@bhikkhuni.net.

—Sarah Conover, Editor in Chief

"I'm pretty clear that at this time I teach and study in Theravada Buddhism. It is, to my mind, the heart or the essence of the Buddha's teachings. There are all kinds of things in Theravada Buddhism—many cultural aspects and developed traditions and commentaries and ethnic traditions. I'm not trying to do all of that, and I don't think there is any way someone could do all of that. I'm interested in the essential practices of what the Buddha taught."

-Venerable Ayya Tathaaloka

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The Great Inquiry

An Interview with the Venerable Ayya Tathaaloka

by Jacqueline Kramer

I first met Ayya Tathaaloka when she was in Northern California looking over the land near Jenner that was to become the Aranya Bodhi Forest Hermitage. I had an immediate feeling of sisterhood with Ayya. It turns out that both of us were deeply influenced by her bhikkhuni mentor, the Venerable Myeong Seong of South Korea. The venerable was dedicated to helping rebuild the Bhikkhuni Sangha, and that intention was transmitted to both of us at different times in different ways. Ayya Tathaaloka has bravely and intelligently gone about supporting the growth of the Bhikkhuni Sangha by helping establish the first bhikkhuni forest hermitage in the West, by acting as a preceptor for many Western bhikkhunis, and in many other large and small ways. She has taken great pains to insure recognition of the Bhikkhuni Sangha by careful scholarship and adherence to established procedures.

We spoke again on a sunny May afternoon in 2012, exploring how her early life brought her to the gates of the Bhikkhuni Sangha. The question of how our Western Buddhist pioneers came to the path is an intriguing one. What makes a child from a Judeo-Christian culture seek out Buddhism? What sorts of influences and personality traits draw a child to the East? It's no surprise that an adventuresome, independent spirit and a questioning mind are necessary for the journey. A certain amount of doubt and discomfort are also important catalysts. In this interview we get a glimpse of Ayya Tathaaloka's adventuresome, independent spirit; her early doubt; and the kind influences that guided her East to Buddhism.

Jacqueline Kramer: What was your first glimmer of Buddhism?

Ayya Tathaaloka: This is a question that other people are able to answer, but I find for myself that I can't. I don't remember my first encounter with Buddhism. Growing up, there were books that had things about Buddhism around me. There was also Buddhism in the movies and on TV and magazines like *National Geographic.* I remember seeing robed Buddhist monks in jungle environments. There are some things I remember from my teenage times that particularly impressed me. Whether you'd say they are connected to Buddhism or not, I'm not sure. I watched the show *Kung Fu.* David Carradine was playing a man who was a Buddhist novice training with a master and was wandering from place to place in the old Wild West learning various life lessons.

That series became a kind of paradigm for me. I understood the pattern that you pick up wisdom from teachers or teachings and then in life circumstances, you

"I was discouraged when I asked whether women could ordain and was told that this was a possibility open only for men. To my young teenager's sense, not knowing much, that seemed very strange to me."

reflect on that wisdom and apply that to the circumstances that you're meeting in life. Then the circumstances themselves have the opportunity for growth or catharsis or reflection. They may become part of your ongoing awakening experience. Those teachings then become relevant, come to life, and become manifest. That's something that I got from watching that show.

Of course, that's not the only place I saw that paradigm; it was all around. There was encouragement from my parents to learn and apply what has been learned to life circumstances. So that's not a new thing, but that show illustrated these lessons and their wisdom in a classical Buddhist context.

The Lord of the Rings and *Star Wars* also contained deliberate use of archetypical images of Christian and Buddhist monastics, paradigms of forces of good and evil, wise mentors, and the development and cultivation of the acolyte. The disciples were tried and tested, and triumphing over the forces inside themselves was the big issue. The small person who is from nowhere is the one who then triumphs and saves the world. They were archetypes of spiritual seekers.

Also, there were a couple of other things. I remember one friend of the family had gone to Thailand with the Peace Corps. He ordained for three months as a Buddhist monk during the *vassa* after finishing his assignment. I remember hearing about that experience and finding it very interesting—hearing about what it was like and learning that it was possible for a Western person to go and do that. This friend was male and I was interested in whether this would be a possibility for myself or not. It sounded like a really great learning experience. I was looking at my possibilities for higher education at that time. To have that kind of training in *sila* (virtue) and meditation and wisdom seemed interesting and excellent as compared to university options.

But I was discouraged when I asked whether women could do that too and was told that this was a possibility open only for men. I remember thinking that I had seen some old Buddhist texts and had the idea that women had been ordained in Buddhism in the Buddha's lifetime. I felt that if the Buddha was truly enlightened, this possibility should be open for women as well. I felt it should be there and that it *had been* there. It seemed really strange to me that this would not be so in a place where Buddhism was thriving, in an affirmatively Buddhist country. To my young teenager's sense, not knowing much, that seemed very strange to me.

Not so long after that another family friend who came by to visit had been at Shasta Abbey. I hadn't heard of Shasta Abbey before. I was living in Washington State and at that time we didn't have any Buddhist temples or monasteries around that part of the country. But Mt. Shasta was just south of us, not so very far. That friend mentioned that there were both male and female Buddhist monks there. When I heard that, I thought, "Right! That's how it should be." I felt this kind of awakening interest then. And I learned there were these differing dynamics about ordination and women being able to ordain or not.

I would say another memorable thing would be a little bit later, still as a teenager, encountering two books that were quite important. One was Master Sheng Yen's *Faith in Mind*.

It is an English translation of an enlightenment poem by the Third Zen Patriarch in China. I ended up studying and practicing the *hua tou* with him later.

JK: Where was he?

AT: He was in Taiwan. He also founded the Dharma Drum Buddhist Association Center on the East Coast here in the U.S., and it has a West Coast branch as well. That poem by this old Buddhist master touched me.

Then there was the *Blue Cliff Records,* the koans. Someone introduced that book to me as a book of Buddhist wisdom because I seemed to be interested in such. I opened it up and began to look at it, and it brought up tremendous doubt in me right away—the underlying doubt about the many things in life and in our world that were always simmering below the surface. We're skimming on top of that in ordinary life.

"Doubt can become a hindrance and cause a lot of suffering in our minds. For me, this accumulated doubt was an abiding, underlying pit of suffering."

JK: Was this like the great doubt that Zen teachers speak of, or was this doubt as in a hindrance

AT: I think this would be the great doubt that the Zen teachers talk about—deep and fundamental doubt. Touching into and penetrating this is the clearing of a hindrance.

JK: Like what are we doing here.

AT: Yes. Of course, before one has a breakthrough to the great inquiry—*what are we doing here?*—that and the kind of doubt that is a hindrance in people's ordinary lives dance intertwined, intermingled with each other. This is because of not applying that doubt to inquiry in wise ways. When that's so, doubt can become a hindrance and cause a lot of suffering in our minds. For me, this accumulated doubt was an abiding, underlying pit of suffering. Reading even a few of the koan cases drew it all together into a great mass—like I was a cat that needed to vomit up a fur ball as big as the whole world. This was a great mental energetic mass of everything I had been unable to digest in the whole world because of not having right understanding. At that time, I didn't know how to see it correctly and penetrate that great mass.

Thinking back I would say those were impressive things, but I don't remember what the first thing was early on. I know both my mother and my father seemed to have respect for the Buddha.

JK: What religion did you grow up with?

AT: I didn't grow up with one particular religion. My father was an atheist scientist and his family was not religious. They were a family of engineers, with a lawyer or two. They were into the material world and big into cause-and-effect forensic science, which is an investigative science. I got a kind of religion of science and investigation from them. My mom had a partly Episcopalian background with a large dose of naturalism—love for the natural world. She had studied botany, worked as a naturalist, and ended up doing her Ph.D. in phenomenology, which originated with that name under the German philosopher Heidegger, who studied Yogacara Buddhism, which is also known as Vijñanavada, Cittamatra, or the Mind-Only School of Buddhism. From her I got a great appreciation for the natural world—the human interrelationship with the natural world being, in itself, her sphere of spiritual communion. Then both my parents remarried. My father remarried a Jewish woman and my mom remarried a Muslim man. So that increased the religious diversity in our family quite radically.

JK: Was your stepmom practicing Judaism and your stepdad practicing Islam?

AT: Just a little. I wouldn't want to say that they were not practicing. They were gently practicing. My stepmom, who was very much a second mom for me, not only did she have a Jewish background but she had a brother who was a "Jew-Bu." He officially became a Buddhist. So that was also part of my stepfamily.

JK: What form of Buddhism did he study?

AT: I'm not sure. Either Zen or . . . I'm pretty sure it wasn't Tibetan or Chinese.

JK: It sounds like you grew up in a rich atmosphere that invited questioning.

AT: Yes. I think this was also part of the doubt. There were all these religious traditions, and I had lots of friends who

invited me to various churches. I went now and then to different churches, although my parents were cautious about people's attempts to convert their children. Going to Sunday school a few times with friends, I had questions. I was interested in asking them and in what was being taught. My home environment was one of free inquiry and open discussion in which questions were welcomed and encouraged.

The churches I visited with friends did not seem to be ones of free inquiry for children. That quite put me off. It seemed that there was more of an expectation to just believe what we were being told but not to think about it—even that it was wrong to think about it. Free inquiry was not encouraged. That seemed really strange to me, coming from my home environment. I learned to be leery of any circumstance where my own intelligence or inquiry was not respected. I was taught that this could be dangerous or harmful for people. My parents tried to inculcate in me a respectfulness with regards differing ways of doing things. They gave me the idea that most everyone will most likely think that they are right because they are doing the best they can, but that applying this as a judgment to others—that one way, my way, is right and another wrong—is also something to look out for.

"My home environment was one of free inquiry and open discussion in which questions were welcomed and encouraged. I learned to be leery of any circumstance where my own intelligence or inquiry was not respected."

JK: You were taught to not traffic in views from early on.

AT: Maybe not 100 percent, but some part of it. My father had an interest in Taoism and Zen Buddhism, and later on in life, after my going forth into monastic life, he became much more active in pursuing that. Science seems to have been disappointing in some ways in terms of what he loved in scientific principle, like free inquiry into truthfulness and that kind of honesty. He started to look into Taoism and Zen Buddhism particularly in regards to those principles. For a while he self-identified as a Taoist.

JK: How do your parents feel about their daughter having become so fully involved in the Buddhist world?

AT: I think they, being compassionate people, felt quite a lot of sympathy for the painfulness of my own doubt and inquiry and my need to seek and search more deeply. I think they may have had appreciation and hope for me in what the Buddhist path might be able to offer. I think they may have had an interest in what could come out of that. Certainly a good number of my family members, in the times that I had to visit with them after my first five years away in Europe and Asia, really expressed quite a lot of interest, because for my family this was the stuff of movies and books and magazines. To have a family member go and do that was interesting to them.

JK: You're living the adventure!

AT: Living the adventure! Yes. I certainly had a very strong adventuresome spirit, which I think was nurtured in my family environment, particularly by my father. The things he's done in the form of social welfare, in that spirit of adventure, are quite an amazing example. And my mom mentioned to me, about ten years after I had entered monastic life, that she herself had also thought about becoming a nun when she was a younger person, a teenager. But she didn't want to become a Catholic nun as things were, and she didn't know what else she could do. She mentioned that at the time that she was pregnant with me she thought about that again. And then she realized that, being pregnant, "now my path is to be a mom." She mentioned that while she was pregnant she was thinking about that. In a way, vicariously through her eldest daughter's experience, she has shared together in parts of the experience of the monastic life.

JK: It's so beautiful how the mother's vision flowers in a world where there are more possibilities for her daughter.

AT: Yes. I wonder sometimes about karma and rebirth. Like the story of the Buddha's own mom and how she changed, according to the story, in the time of her pregnancy and how important she was in terms of the Buddha's choice for a mother. Now, through modern science, we see how the mother's genetics can be modified by the baby. In a way, the baby influences the mother profoundly while the mother also influences the baby profoundly.

JK: I experienced that when I was pregnant. My daughter, Nicole, who has a very serene nature, influenced my feeling of serenity when I was pregnant with her and on meditation retreat.

AT: Yes, this is something I've wondered about. How much was that thinking of my mom's coming from me, inside her, or how much did I get that from her? Because it can certainly go both ways. As you both change by the modification that's happening between the two of you, it's synergetic.

I've also learned from listening to my parents' discussions about what it is to be a free person. They were in the universities in the 1960s. Questioning one's parents, the ways of the parents, and going one's own way was really an enormous culture and movement in those times. They talked a lot about these things when I was a young person. Over and over again they looked at the patterns they picked up from their parents and how difficult patterns are passed down from generation to generation. That's something that they tried to bring a lot of mindfulness and awareness to and were trying to work with really, really strongly.

Because of hearing that so much as a young person, I developed a heightened awareness for this subject. I think that's one of the things that made me not want to have children right off myself. There was a concern about passing on convoluted programs, or issues, from generation to generation. I wanted to have time to try and work those things out as best I could before passing them on to others.

You know, the idea that my aspiration to ordain may have come from my mom, from what I've learned in Buddhism, I feel so happy and amiable about that. What I learned from being a child born in the 1960s, that sets off these alarm bells. Those alarm bells are not outside the scope of the Buddha's teachings. Really, at the heart of what's there is the question: Are we going to be perpetuating difficult and dysfunctional patterns, or are we going to get out of the loop with those things and become free and happy people?

JK: What an interesting correlation—the Buddhist interest in freedom from patterns and the new psychological view of not wanting to pass negative patterns along to the next generation. I never put that together with the arahant path.

AT: To me that is right out front, very big!

JK: Who was your first Buddhist teacher?

AT: As a younger person, when entering monastic life, I encountered a number of people who served as teachers. I think there wasn't any one teacher, even when becoming an anagarika up through my first novice ordination. I never really thought that someone was truly my teacher until I met my venerable bhikkhuni mentor, the Venerable Myeong Seong, Bright Star. But she is not often called by her name but rather by her role.

JK: What was her position?

Venerable Myeong Seong
Photo: http://www.myspace.com/ayyatathaalokabhikkhuni/photos/albums/my-photos/92023/

AT: She was the abbess and the main teacher of one of South Korea's foremost bhikkhuni training monasteries. Later on she retired from being abbess and became the head of that monastery's bhikkhuni council of elders, as well as the rector of its college of Buddhist studies. After that she was elected as the national head of the Korean Bhikkhuni Sangha, the female equivalent of what is called the supreme patriarch, like the supreme matriarch for the Bhikkhuni Sangha. But they don't use those titles there. She may still have that position today.

JK: How did you come to her?

AT: I had heard about her through the Dharma bum circuit. At that time we weren't using email or the web, and I was out and about internationally finding places of practice and teachers, going here and there. I heard that the situation for ordained women in Buddhism was best in Korea in terms of education, training, and support. The situation for bhikkhus and bhikkhunis was really quite equal in terms of these factors.

I remember traveling on a ferry and meeting with a fellow

Dharma bum. He was just coming from South Korea, and he saw something there that he hadn't seen in his experience of Buddhism anywhere. He was told there was a great Dharma master giving a talk at the main monastery of the Chogye Order in Seoul and that someone would be translating. He was invited to go, so he went. There were lots of bhikkhus and bhikkhunis, and up on the high seat in that head monastery there was a bhikkhuni preaching, teaching them. In his travels he had never seen such a thing, a woman teacher at a main bhikkhu monastery being a primary, featured speaker. He was really impressed by that. He was raving about that when we were on that ferry together. I thought, "Oh, that's interesting."

When I went to South Korea later, I ended up going up to a hermitage in the Eight Peaks Mountains called Seong Jeon Am (Noble Sages Hermitage) and studying and practicing with a master who had been secluded there for about twenty-five years at that time. After being there for some time, I thought I would like to try to enter into the Bhikkhuni Sangha in South Korea.

JK: Were you inclined towards Theravada but studied in Mahayana because this was what was available?

AT: I had been in India, and the situation for women in monastic Theravada Buddhism at that time was largely nonexistent. For those who were lucky enough to receive samaneri ordination and encouraged to live and practice like a bhikkhuni, especially for Westerners, as was the case also with Tibetan Buddhism, we were expected to take care of and support ourselves. As a young person in my early twenties, I had given up everything, left everything behind when I became an anagarika. To support myself was not so easy, as was also the case with others. What was often expected from Westerners was to be giving support. There is the thought that the U.S. and Europe are rich countries and the Asian countries are poorer and in need of support in many places.

This was not always the case with men. I heard someone say—it's kind of a crass comment—"If you were a man, you could just plug into the system in Thailand and you'd be fully supported. There are lots of great teachers there. It's like Buddhist heaven." I thought, "You're right, that would be good." But, being a woman, if I were to go, I would have to think about arranging for my own support. You pay and go for some time on retreat. When the money runs out, then you leave, go to work, make some money, then go back on retreat again. This is what a lot of women have done, and what a lot of women are still doing.

For someone who has left everything and doesn't want to go back—in my heart I didn't even feel able to go back—it seemed like where I wanted to go was much deeper into this path, not coming out for awhile and then back in. I was really looking for how I could do that. What was asked of me as a very young and newly robed person in terms of supporting myself seemed pretty difficult. It seemed like the act of trying to support myself and trying to seek some gainful employment didn't serve what my heart's desire was. Hearing that there were places where women could go and really be received into the Sangha and fully trained and supported seemed like the direction I needed to go. I started looking for where that might be possible. What I heard was, "Go north," which meant Taiwan and South Korea. At that time Buddhism had not come back big in China.

So I went north. When I went to Taiwan, I found monastics practicing a lot of repentance. A lot of recitation of the names of buddhas and bodhisattvas, a strong emphasis on vegetarianism, on childhood education, and on education in general. The main practices of recollection of the Buddha's name and repentance did not appeal to me deeply as my way of practice. In South Korea I found something that was really important to me, and that was the San Lim Seon Jeong, the Mountain Forest Meditation Tradition. It was completely and fully open to women. The stark, rugged simplicity of this tradition and the time in meditative inquiry—these things really struck a chord with me. I resonated with the part of learning from nature and the part about inquiry, working with radical inquiry. From young in life, as you heard, these had been things that really struck a strong chord in me.

JK: What sort of inquiry practice did you work with?

AT: My venerable bhikkhuni mentor did not actually practice inquiry meditation. She was very strong in Dhamma teaching. She did excellent work in terms of the Bhikkhuni Sangha and developing a training monastery and assistance for a training monastery. Her love and her heart is in Dhamma study and Dhamma teaching. So my own venerable bhikkhuni mentor did not teach me direct meditative inquiry, although I felt very intuitively connected to her when first meeting her. I bowed down to her nine times, not knowing why I did it. She recognized nine bows, from some teachings, as my asking her to be my teacher. She asked, "Do you want me to be your teacher?" I thought about it and from a deep intuition answered yes, almost as a surprise to myself. Despite this deep connection, due to my love for meditative inquiry, she sent me to study and train with another bhikkhuni who is kind of a Dhamma relative of hers who had studied a type of inquiry meditation that in Korean is called *hwadu* meditation and in Chinese Chan Buddhism is called the *hua tou*.

JK: Who was this teacher?

AT: The teacher is the Elder Kyeong Hi Sunim. I was sent by my teacher to serve as personal attendant to her and thus be able to learn from her closely. That was a normal thing in the Bhikkhuni Sangha, to send a student to an associated

bhikkhuni teacher whom she might be able to learn from. It's the same in the Thai Bhikkhu Sangha. You may have heard stories about Ajahn Chah sending his students to a related teacher whom he thought they would learn something of benefit from. So I had the opportunity to study with her as well as a number of the other teachers of the *hwadu* meditation practice. I was learning about practices and teachings, trying to seek out the heart of the Buddhist path via meditation and Dharma understanding.

JK: What was the *hwadu* practice? Is that an inquiry practice like koans?

AT: It's not working with koans but with the heart or essence of the koan. The koan would be the story or the case of an awakening, and the *hwadu* literally means the "head of the word," like the fountainhead of this streaming Dhamma, it is the source.

I know that there hasn't been so much written or so much taught about the *hwadu* practice in the West. In fact, for those who do this practice, to find anyone else to talk with about the practice is rare. I think the late Father Thomas Hand, a partner in monastic interreligious dialogue, was the only one I ever met. He was a Jesuit priest and had learned the *hua tou* practice in Japan and had practiced with it deeply as a Christian. He didn't find it at variance in any way with the essential heart of his Jesuit practice. I learned from him about this in a monastic interreligious dialogue gathering called "Bodhisattva Path/Christ Path." But he was the first and only person in the United States whom I talked to who really worked deeply with that practice (at least as I had learned it) and could speak about it fluently in English. I haven't ever seen anything published about it that seemed accessible or mainstream. It's not well known.

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JK: Is it done in conjunction with deep meditation practice?

AT: Yes.

JK: Is it a practice that you bring into retreat?

AT: Yes, and it's a whole life practice. In working with it, you are encouraged to start with the first moment of consciousness upon waking in the morning, then develop working with the practice with every activity of daily life. It doesn't exclude deep retreat practice. It is a kind of essential practice that is, by nature, before words and hard to put into words, but known within one's heart when it's touched upon.

JK: So you did this practice in Korea. Practicing in this Mahayana country, did you have more of an inclination toward the bodhisattva or arahant path, or did the question even come up?

AT: It wasn't something that mattered so much to me. I knew that there was a lot of concern about that. I developed an appreciation for whoever has the interest and willingness out of compassion to be available, to be born. It's kind of amazing to think of one who is willing to be born again and again for the welfare of others. There's all this talk about bodhisattvas and arahants and making distinctions between Theravada and Mahayana. I felt a bit of angst about the way some people approached that subject. I heard a saying by Ajahn Chah that I liked very much. When he was asked about being a bodhisattva or being an arahant he said, "Don't try to be anything at all." I appreciated that.

I have a strong appreciation for the core of these matters. To me, that gets down to what's important and what I feel is deeply important on the path.

JK: What would you say is the tradition you teach? Is it a universalist Buddhism, or is there a lineage that you feel is your lineage?

AT: I'm pretty clear that at this time I teach and study in Theravada Buddhism. That is, to my mind, the heart or the essence of the Buddha's teachings. There are all kinds of things in Theravada Buddhism—many cultural aspects and developed traditions and commentaries and ethnic traditions. I'm not trying to do all of that, and I don't think there is any way someone could do all of that. I'm interested in the essential practices of what the Buddha taught.

JK: What is it about Buddhism that speaks directly to your heart?

AT: It's what I find in the Four Noble Truths—about suffering and the end of suffering. Also, about there being

a practical path, a way to end suffering. I'm interested in the Ovada Patimokkha, the Buddha's first teaching, which is first about reducing and ending suffering, both my own personal difficulty and that of others as well. The Buddha's teachings may match any circumstances, that is, be appropriately applied to any given situation in which there is suffering or "dis-ease" for their alleviation and cure. Second is what makes us happy, the things that not only make for our short-term well-being but that lead to deepening, expanding, and establishing real long-term happiness, peace, and freedom.

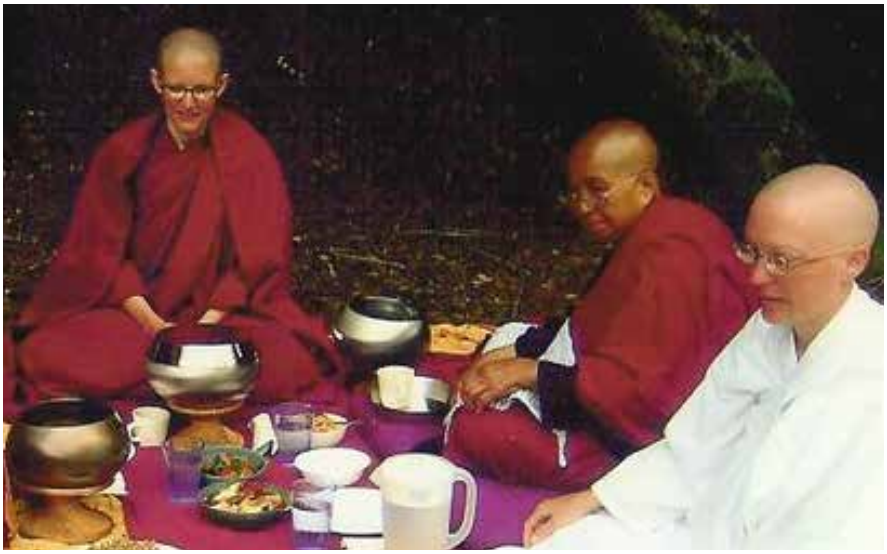


Photo: http://www.myspace.com/ayyatathaalokabhikkhuni/photos/albums/my-photos/92023/

The third point of the Ovada Patimokkha goes back to path again, the path of purifying one's mind and heart. Being able to do that is essential for understanding what does work and what doesn't work—and also for strengthening the mind and creating the context in which the work can be done. Once you see what needs to be done, you still need to have the strength, the resource, the container for doing that. The purification, the clarification of the heart, is that.

In Zen the last point of these three is different, but in Theravada the last point is purifying the mind. Not to say the people in Zen aren't doing that, not at all. If they are practicing rightly, they are. In a way it's a technical distinction, for if we do that, it naturally benefits all living beings.

JK: That is so beautiful, Ayya. Before we close I wanted to say that I met your bhikkhuni mentor when I was in Thailand for the Outstanding Women in Buddhism awards and spent some time with her. The thrust of the conversation was about how can we support the Thai Bhikkhuni Sangha. Your teacher was strong on wanting to support Thai women.

AT: She's done so much for them. She very much encouraged me and blessed me to go forth and do what I could.

JK: And look what you've done! That's exactly what you've done.

AT: She had been trying and trying in years past and hadn't made much headway. She thought that perhaps someone not quite so high up might able to do more. She gave me her blessing and encouragement to do that.

JK: Having seen her and met her, and knowing the skills and practices you were given . . .

AT: She was aware of this and very much wanted me to have those skills. She was aware that I was already in another tradition before coming to her but wanted me to go through the Korean Buddhist training from the beginning to get the entirety of it, all of the benefit and experience out of that. She said that explicitly. She really wanted that because she thought that it was important to have that experience, not only for myself, my own strengthening and fullness of my own monastic life, but to be able to rightly pass that on to others. She mentioned that explicitly. That's one of the things that is great about her. With regards to community, she has big view in terms of causality and causation. Her Dhamma about these kinds of things is very right. Not only is it big, but it comes down to individual circumstances and timeliness.

JK: This is amazing. She sent her beloved daughter out to widen the circle. I have a deep feeling for that because I've seen her and know her character. She is like a mountain. We spent five days in a funky bus together with her, Dr. Lee, and some others. Dr. Lee took us around to different sites in Thailand. I really appreciate her strength.

AT: She was deliberately trained in that. The monastery I trained at, my home monastery, which she was abbess of, is in the Leaping Tiger Mountain Wilderness of Korea's Kyeong Sang Buk Do province. There were no more tigers in the mountains, but it was said that in the monastery one tigress remains, and she is it. Being a tigress in the mountains is her realm and her domain.

JK: What a great gift she gave us. Thank you for sharing the early years of your path with me. I hope we can talk soon about your journey back to the West.

Jacqueline Kramer is former executive editor and a regular contributor to Present. *She is the director of the Hearth Foundation, where she teaches Buddhism to mothers online.*

Earth Day Earth Witness

By Ayya Tathaaloka Bhikkhuni

Warm Earth Day greetings, my human friends, and to all forms of life. I share with you a little story—a story within a story. But first, a poem from the Ratana Sutta:

Like woodland groves in blossom
in the first heat of the summer
Is the sublime Dhamma that he taught
leading to Nibbana, the highest good.
In the Buddha is this precious jewel.
By this truth may there be well-being.

And now the story:

Earlier on in my life, as a younger person, I despaired of the sufferings in our world: personal sufferings, interpersonal sufferings, global systemic sufferings, illness, disease, poverty, death, conflict, war, the desecration of the forests, pollution of our waters and air, landfills, consuming and turning once pristine natural resources of land, water, and earth into garbage . . . and I sought the spiritual way out. Practicing yoga and forms of meditation to raise the mind out of and above all such crude phenomena, I loved the lightness and clarity that was above and beyond.

Then one day I met a Zen (Seon) meditation master who touched and changed all that. He stopped me in my tracks and called me to attention. He mentioned that the way I was practicing might lead to heaven, but that is not the Buddha's way. The Buddha also taught this, yes, but it was not his path. Rather his path was the touchdown. He asked me to look.

To look at the statuary image of the Buddha. He pointed out the posture. One hand in meditation posture, but the other with hand reaching out, touching the ground. And he told me that I needed to do this to. To touch the ground.

He said that in order to awaken in this world, one must first become truly human. And to become truly human, we need to know not only the sky (heaven), but the Earth. To stop, to touch ground, to know our origin, our root.

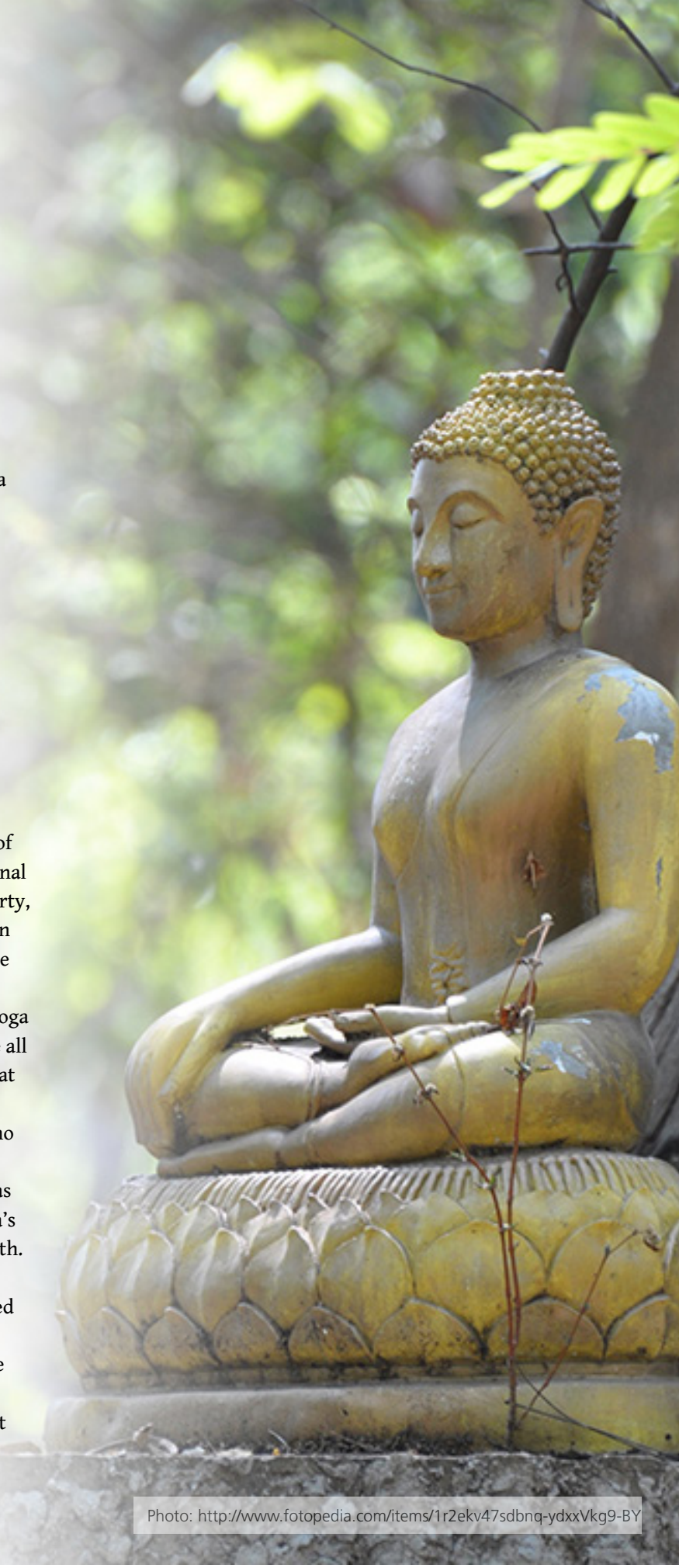


Photo: http://www.fotopedia.com/items/1r2ekv47sdbnq-ydxxVkg9-BY

Earth Witness Buddha, San Francisco International Airport.
Photo: http://www.flickr.com/photos/wonderlane/2698841837/sizes/z/in/photostream/

He asked me to go stand on a little landing on the mountainside, and just stand, feeling into the Earth. Feeling and knowing the Earth, and my connectedness with all forms of life on this Earth. Feeling into and sensing into them all, and knowing my co-being with them. Even all the humans.

In the clear air of the mountainside, I could look down and out and see far in the distance like the city in the Wizard of Oz, the peaks of a city under shimmering haze. I had come up from them. This part was hardest.

I felt I could not blame nature. But humanity, endowed with morality, conscience, and higher mind seemed culpable. It took a long time of working with developing kind and compassionate understanding to begin to really enter or reenter the human world. At his advice, I looked at the Buddha image daily. Awake, with one hand in meditation posture, and one hand touching the Earth.

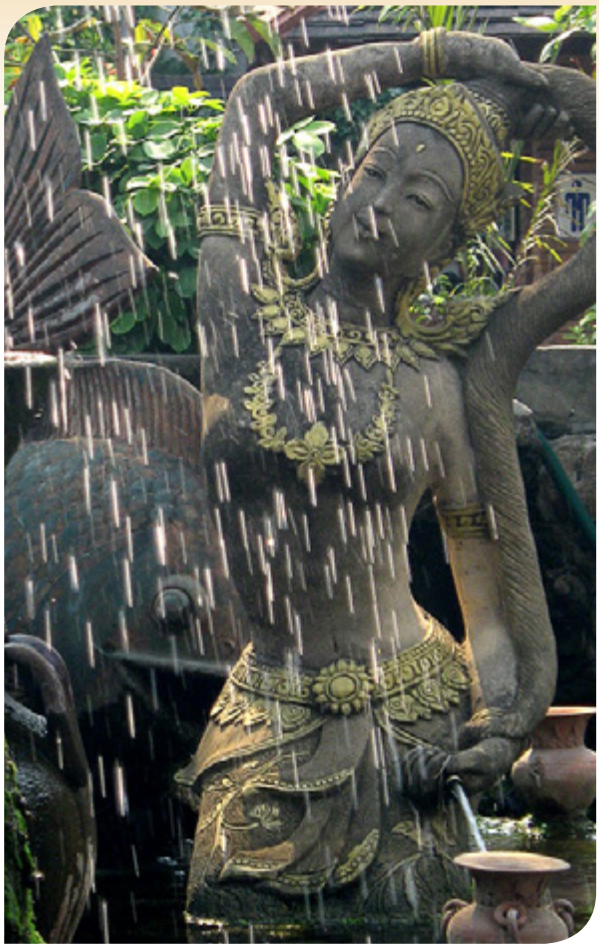
It is called the *Bhumasparsa* (Pali: *Bhumapassa*) image, which means Touching Earth, or the Earth Witness—the most popular of the statuary and painted forms of the Buddha, more popular than with both hands in meditation. But one could ask, is it the Buddha's witness of the Earth or the Earth's witness of the Buddha?

According to the old Buddhist legends told in Thailand, it is the Earth's witness of the Buddha's awakening, the goddess of the Earth, the great goddess of land and waters, who emerges in witness to the bodhisattva's right to awakening, washing away the armies of Mara—Death himself—with her waters. The story says that if you are replete in generosity (together with the other *paramis*), and if you awaken, the Earth Mother herself will rise to support you. And as you have watered her soils through your benevolence, she will wash away all destruction wrought by the power of the *kilesas*—the defilements in the human heart. It is a powerful story.

A story not of dominion of the Earth, or of coming to safety and security through conquering her. But a story of a man's coming to ultimate safety, security, and peace through conquering himself. Whence, Earth to him becomes a benevolent protector. She is powerful beneficent protectoress.

But in this story, she truly has no supernatural power other than the power of our own kamma, the power of our own moral actions, our moral choices, and their accumulated virtue. She does not need to be propitiated. But rather, we ourselves have the power and the call to clean up our own acts.

We need to turn and look at what we have done, what we have made. We need to develop the openheartedness, and great-heartedness—like the great expanses of the sky, the vastness of the ocean, the great breadth of the Earth—to be able to see the suffering of our world for what it is, truly. The external world and the internal world. The elemental nature of the body. The momentary energetic nature of all phenomena. To see and know all of this as it is. Knowing the senses and the sense bases.



Phra Mae Thorani, Thai Mother Earth Goddess
Photo: http://theworldofstatues.blogspot.com/2010/04/phra-mae-thonaree-chiang-mai.html

Work with mindfulness of the body and the elements can be very helpful for this work of touching in, touching down, and waking up.

The breath that flows through this body, through you and me, is the breath of the world. The breath of the oceans and of the trees. The light in my eyes and your eyes is the light of the sun and moon and all the stars, the light deep within the Earth, the light within each cell—each dancing particle—the life. The bones of this body like rocks, rocking outcroppings on the hillside visible where flesh of green and earth has worn away.

They are all the same elements.

Our lives are all a part of this, and all a part of each other. Touching ground, touching the Earth, in the space of loving kindness, we can have the heart to bear and to be with it all. And witnessing all intimately, awareness grows and awakening can happen.

It has been said masculine and feminine elements are fused in these stories, each becoming complete in themselves. No longer at war with, and no longer needing to dominate one another. But in harmony, full, complete, and replete in themselves.

And still, knowing our interdependency, knowing the truth of our interconnectedness, and that of all life, living with great honor and great care for one another. Loving all forms of life. With love, compassion, joy, and ease with one another. Not heaven, but here together with one another.

The Earth Witness challenge.

There are the times that it is needed to turn away from the world, to walk into the hills, to go within. And the time to turn back, to embrace the world, with clear view and mindfulness, and with right effort, to respond—to whatever the path calls for, whatever needs to be done—to care well and most wisely for ourselves and each dear other.

As a post firmly rooted in the earth
cannot be shaken by the four winds,
So is the superior person, I say,
who definitely sees the Noble Truths.
In the Sangha is this precious jewel.
By this truth may there be well-being.

Ayya Tathaaloka on an Earth Day morning hike up in the hills of the San Francisco Bay Area regional wilderness at Dry Creek. Photo credit: Luisa (Lulu) Garrett

Reprinted from the Dhammadharini website, http://www.dhammadharini.net/dhamma-talks-from-the-bhikkhuni-sangha/aranya-bodhi-hermitage/earth-day-earth-witness

Bhikkhuni ordination, October 2011, Woodacre, California

Photo: © Ed Ritger, www.edritger.com

Can the Theravada Bhikkhuni Order be Re-established?

It Already Has

By Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi

In March 2012, Sri Lanka's national newspaper, the Ceylon Daily News, *printed a statement issued by the Concise Tripitaka Editorial Board, which discusses whether the Dhammavinaya allows the re-establishment of the Bhikkhuni Order. The statement begins:*

> The re-establishment of the Bhikkhuni Order which was the subject of debate a few decades ago has surfaced once again. Agitation and press conferences were held recently by the parties who claim to have established the Bhikkhuni Order, in a bid to pressurize the Government to recognize the Bhikkhuni Order. Already the Most Venerable Maha Nayaka Theras have informed the Commissioner-General of Buddhist Affairs that it is not possible to establish a Bhikkhuni Order according to the 'Dharmavinaya' the doctrine of the Buddha.

American scholar-monk Bhikkhu Bodhi submitted the following response (which was not published in the Ceylon Daily News*).*

I am writing in response to a statement published in the *Daily News* on March 29, 2012, "Can the Theravada Bhikkhuni Order be Re-established?" issued by the Concise Tripitaka Editorial Board. The Board offers a negative answer to this question, but I find its statement to be grounded upon biases and assumptions that are not absolutely convincing. I have already addressed these in detail in a booklet I published titled "The Revival of Bhikkhuni Ordination in the Theravada Tradition" (available online at: http://tinyurl.com/7n49otq). In this short article, with all due respect to the Mahanayaka Theras, I wish to contend not only that the Theravada Bhikkhuni Order *can be re-established*, but that it *has already been re-established* and that by taking a liberal point of view, the ordination should be regarded as legitimate.

The main legal objection the Mahanayaka Theras raise against a revival of the Bhikkhuni Sangha stems from the fact that the Vinaya holds that women are to be ordained by both the Bhikkhuni Sangha and the Bhikkhu Sangha. In their view, to be a purely Theravada ordination, it must also come from an existing Theravada Bhikkhuni Sangha. This leads to a predicament. In the absence of an existing Theravada Bhikkhuni Sangha, a legitimate Theravada Bhikkhuni ordination cannot be granted, and since, in their view, there is no existing Theravada Bhikkhuni Sangha,

they conclude that "setting up a Bhikkhuni Order cannot be done under the Dharmavinaya."

It is just this conclusion that I wish to contest. The first step in doing so is to note that Theravada Vinaya theory often merges stipulations that stem from the canonical Vinaya and Commentaries with interpretations and assumptions that have gained currency through centuries of tradition. I do not want to undervalue tradition, for it represents the accumulated legal expertise of generations of Vinaya specialists. However, we also must remember that tradition should not be placed on a par with the canonical Vinaya or even the secondary authorities, the Vinaya Commentaries.

to apply under all circumstances without exception; (2) the Theravada is the only Buddhist school that preserves an authentic Vinaya lineage stemming from the Buddha. These two assumptions are only traditional beliefs without canonical support. Both can be challenged by making two contrary stipulations.

The first is that under exceptional circumstances the Bhikkhu Sangha alone can ordain women as bhikkhunis, based on the Buddha's statement: "I allow you, bhikkhus, to ordain Bhikkhunis." This allowance was never rescinded by the Buddha. The legitimacy of ordination by bhikkhus alone, when a Theravada Bhikkhuni Sangha does not exist, was

Photo: Courtesy of lightmeister http://www.flickr.com/photos/lightmeister/7164478548/

We can illustrate this point with an analogy from geometry. If we draw a straight line through a point and extend the line, the distance between its two ends increases and it seems logical to hold that the two ends will never meet. But this is so only because we are thinking in the framework of Euclidean geometry. If we adopt the standpoint of spherical geometry, we can see that a continuous line drawn on a sphere eventually winds back on itself. Thus, if I break away from my familiar assumptions, a new range of possibilities suddenly opens up.

The same applies to the Mahanayakas' position regarding the possibility of bhikkhuni ordination: they are based on implicit assumptions. The two assumptions behind their position are: (1) the dual-Sangha ordination was intended

recognized—even advocated—by no less a figure than the original Jetavan Sayadaw of Burma, one of the most learned monks of the twentieth century, the meditation master of the famous Mahasi Sayadaw (I have translated the text from Pali into English in my booklet referred to above).

The second stipulation is intended to preserve the form of a dual-Sangha ordination. It holds that the Theravada Bhikkhu Sangha can collaborate with a Bhikkhuni Sangha from an East Asian country such as Taiwan in conducting a dual-Sangha ordination. The Mahanayaka Theras think that what the Chinese Buddhists confer is a Mahayana ordination, but this is a misunderstanding. While Chinese monks and nuns for the most part follow Mahayana Buddhism, the Vinaya tradition they observe is *not a Mahayana Vinaya* but the Vinaya of the

Dharmaguptakas, an early Buddhist school that prevailed in northwest India. The Dharmaguptakas also originated from the Asokan missions and belonged to the same Vibhajjavada tradition to which the Theravada school belongs.

The Bhikkhuni Sangha that has recently sprung up in Sri Lanka derives from a grand ordination held at Bodhgaya in February 1998, conducted under the auspices of Taiwanese Buddhist elders working in collaboration with Sri Lankan elders. First, the grand ordination ceremony assembled bhikkhus from several countries and traditions—mainly Taiwanese and Sri Lankan—along with Taiwanese and Western bhikkhunis to serve as the Bhikkhuni Sangha. The women who were ordained included Theravada ten-precept nuns from Sri Lanka and Nepal, as well as Western nuns following Tibetan Buddhism. A full dual-ordination was conducted in accordance with the Dharmagupta Vinaya tradition. In Vinaya terms, the women that were ordained became full-fledged bhikkhunis inheriting the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya lineage.

To make them heirs to the Theravada Vinaya lineage, the Sri Lankan bhikkhus took the newly ordained bhikkhunis to Sarnath and conferred on them another ordination based on the Pali Vinaya Pitaka. This ordination did not negate the earlier dual-ordination received from the Chinese Sangha but supplemented it, inducting the bhikkhunis into the Theravada Vinaya lineage. This procedure was very similar to the *dalhikamma* often given in Sri Lanka to allow bhikkhus from one Nikaya to change over to another Nikaya or to join another monastic community.

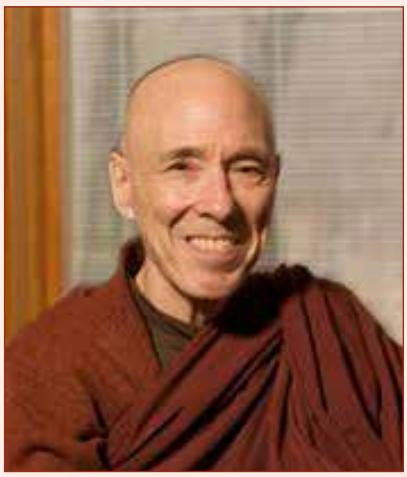
It may be of interest to note that while the Concise Tripitaka Editorial Board ends by quoting Venerable Madihe Paññasiha Mahanayaka Thera to support its repudiation of bhikkhuni ordination, the Ven. Paññasiha's close disciple, the late Ven. Dhammavihari, a Vinaya scholar, came to recognize the validity of bhikkhuni ordination late in his life and defended it at the 2007 conference in Hamburg. Thus, different views are possible even between close colleagues in the Sangha.

As I see it, the Vinaya itself cannot be read in a fixed manner as either unconditionally permitting or forbidding a revival of the Bhikkhuni Sangha. It yields these conclusions only as a result of interpretation, which often reflects the attitudes of the interpreters and their framework of assumptions. In my opinion, in dealing with this issue, the question that should be foremost in our minds is this: "What would the Buddha want his elder bhikkhu-disciples to do in such a situation, *now*, in the twenty-first century?" Would he want us to apply the regulations governing ordination in a way that excludes women from the fully ordained renunciant life so that we present to the world a religion in which men alone can lead the life of full renunciation? Or would he instead want us to apply the Vinaya in a way that is kind, generous, and accommodating, thereby offering the world a religion that truly embodies principles of justice and nondiscrimination?

The answers to these questions are not immediately given by any text or tradition, but I don't think we are left entirely to personal opinion either. We can see in the texts how the Buddha displayed both compassion and rigor in setting up the Vinaya. We can also see how, in laying down rules for the Sangha, he took account of the expectations of lay people in the wider society. In working out a solution to our own problem, therefore, we have these two guidelines to follow. One is to be true to the spirit of the Dhamma. The other is to be responsive to the social, intellectual, and cultural ideals of people in the present period of human history.

Looked at in this light, the revival of a Theravada Bhikkhuni Sangha can be seen as an intrinsic good that conforms to the spirit of the Dhamma, helping to fulfill the Buddha's own mission of opening "the doors to the Deathless" to everyone, women as well as men. At the same time, the existence of a Bhikkhuni Sangha allows women to make a meaningful contribution to Buddhism as preachers, scholars, meditation teachers, and also as counselors and guides to women lay followers. A Bhikkhuni Sangha will also win for Buddhism the respect of people in the world, who regard the absence of gender discrimination as the mark of a truly honorable religion in harmony with the worthy trends of present-day civilization.

The author lived as a monk in Sri Lanka for twenty-three years and was editor of the Buddhist Publication Society for eighteen years. He now lives in the United States. He is translator of the Saṃyutta Nikāya and Aṅguttara Nikāya and other works from Pali into English.



To read the full statement of the Concise Tripitaka Editorial Board, visit http://www.dailynews.lk/2012/03/29/fea40.asp.

Developments in Recent Sri Lankan Bhikkhuni History

- On 8 December 1996, at the Mahabodhi Society temple in Sarnath, India, Sri Lankan bhikkhus, aided by Korean bhikkhus and bhikkhunis, ordained ten Sri Lankan women. This event heralded the revival of the Sri Lankan Bhikkhuni Sangha.
- In February 1998, at Bodhgaya, India, monastics from Taiwan's Fo Guang Shan monastery held a large, dual-platform ordination that included Mahayana as well as Theravada ordinees from twenty-three countries. Of the 132 women who ordained as bhikkhunis, twenty-one were Sri Lankan women who had been dasa sil matas (ten-precept women).
- On 14 March 1998, Inamaluwe Sumangala Thero organized the ordination of women on Sri Lankan soil, the first such event in over a thousand years. At the Rangiri Dambulla Monastery, in the same hall where men ordain, twenty-two former dasa sil matas ordained. Five senior bhikkhus and the newly ordained Sri Lankan bhikkhunis, who had ordained the previous month in Bodhgaya, performed the ordination.
- Since 1998, bhikkhuni ordinations occur annually in Dambulla, Navagula, and at the Dekanduwala Meditation Centre at Horana. Women can also receive training at the Sakyadhita Training and Meditation Centre in Panadura and at the Ayya Khema Mandir in Colombo, with additional training centers in the planning stage.
- It is estimated there are well over a thousand Sri Lankan bhikkhunis and over two thousand samaneris. Since there is no central registry of ordained women, an exact figure cannot be determined. Additionally, dozens of Sri Lankan women ordain yearly.
- Unlike Sri Lankan bhikkhus and dasa sil matas, Sri Lankan bhikkhunis do not receive any funding from the government for their pirivenas (monastic training centers), which prepare bhikkhunis to sit for the nationwide examination. Bhikkhunis must rely entirely on donations to manage these centers.
- Despite lacking any official recognition from the government or the monks' hierarchy, Sri Lankan bhikkhunis are now routinely invited to participate in religious services, serve as Dhamma teachers and counselors, give meditation instruction, and are accepted by the monks and supported by the laity in their communities.

—Susan Pembroke

See also "In the Company of Spiritual Friends: Sri Lanka's Buddhist Nuns" by Susanne Mrozik in the Summer 2011 issue of Present, *and the 2008 article "Contemporary Bhikkuni Ordination in Sri Lanka" by Ayya Sobhana Bhikkhuni.*

Photo: Suta Sila Dham
http://www.fotopedia.com/items/1r2ekv47sdbnq-ZXL2wo29xWo

Lasting Inspiration

Photo: © Anandajoti Bhikkhu, http://www.photodharma.net/Thailand/Wat-Thepthidaram/Wat-Thepthidaram.htm

A Look into the Guiding and Determining Mental and Emotional States of Liberated Arahant Women in Their Path of Practice and its Fulfillment as Expressed in the Sacred Biographies of the *Therī Apadāna*

by Tathālokā Therī

Offered in Dedication to All Our Awakening on the 2,595th Lunar Anniversary of the Foundation of Our Buddhist Bhikkhunī Sangha

Bhavā sabbe parikkhīṇā,
bhavā santi vimocitā;
Sabbāsavā ca no natthi,
ārocema mahāmune.

Let us tell you, Great Sage,
Of how the entirety of all becoming has been cut off in us;
Of how we have become freed from becoming and come to peace,
And in us nothing of all the cankers and taints remains.

—Thousands of Bhikkhunīs Announcing their Awakening to the Buddha,
Yasavatī Pamukha Aṭṭhārasa Bhikkhunī Sahassa Apadāna, v. 1

Abstract

This article looks at the language and words used to express the decisive mental and emotional states of the awakened women disciples of the Buddha whose past life stories are remembered and recorded in the *Therī Apadāna* of the Pali Canon's *Khuddhaka Nikāya*—words which singularly and in sum might be seen as the Pali-text Tipitaka's equivalent to the arising, developing, maturating, and fulfilling of *bodhicitta*.[1] Words expressing the inspiration which led to these women's successful aspirations to awakening, the mental and emotional states supporting their aspiration and resolve, and the character of their intention itself are looked at in context with an eye to what we can learn from them.

Introduction

The *Therī Apadāna (Sacred Biographies of the Therīs),* companion to its male counterpart the *Thera Apadāna*, forms one book, or more properly a part of one of the major genres of the Pali Canon's *Khuddhaka Nikāya*. The *Apadānas*[2] are Theravada Buddhist texts considered to originate from the post-Ashokan second to first century B.C.E.,[3] up to the beginnings of the Okkāka (Skt: Ikshvāku) dynasty. They are companion to and younger sibling or daughter of the related and earlier *Therīgāthā (Verses of the Women Elders),* also known as the "Psalms of the Sisters," with its male counterpart the *Theragāthā.*[4] Together, the *Therī Apadāna* and the *Therīgāthā*, the Epic Biographies and Enlightenment Verses of the Women Elders, are amongst our world's earliest known and preserved forms of women's religious poetry and biography. We will focus here on the *Therī Apadāna* for what it may reveal about women's inspiration, aspiration, resolution, and fulfillment of the spiritual Path.

The *Apadāna* genre is well known in Greek performance art as epic hero's biography, and the *Sacred Biographies of the Therīs* gather lore of the ancient Buddhist *arahatīs*' lives into an epic poetic style composed for inspiring and edifying performance at *maha*s, ancient religious festivals that in Buddhism became popularly associated with Buddhist religious shrines, whether a stupa or Bodhi tree.[5] The mental and emotional states expressed within are meant to be instructive to their audience, to stimulate, support, and guide the aspiration of their audience along the Path in the years following the Buddha (Gotama)'s *Parinibbāna* (Skt: *Parinirvana*) in the span between one *Sammā-sambuddha* and the next. They place the cultivation of the Path, from first inspiration, to aspiration, to final fulfillment in the context of many lives occurring over vast time and space.

Their setting is one in which the practice of veneration of the Buddha's stupas and relics together with the Bodhi tree as representative of the Buddha are actively practiced, while statuary images of the Buddha have not yet entered the culture. Related inscriptions do not yet name Buddhist sects. Buddhist monasteries for both bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs appear large and hopeful to remain well endowed and supported by Kṣatriya rulers, Brahmins, and strong Vaishya and growing Seṭṭhi merchant and trader classes, while remaining open and affirmative to the Sudra and Dāsī laboring and serving classes as well. Although the *Therī Apadāna* relates biographical legends of women monastic disciples of the Buddha who became arahants, due to the stories spanning many lives, the roles of both lay practitioner and monastic are supported and valued, the mental and emotional qualities highlighted, advocated, and appreciated being generally equally relevant, advocated, and appreciated for both man and woman, lay disciple and monastic.

It is known that during this time period, both within mainstream orthodox Brahmanism and the co-contemporary Jain religions, there arose serious negating challenges to the social and religious possibilities for women's practice and fulfillment of the spiritual Path—what could be considered a major heresy with regards to early fundamental Buddhist teachings.[6] The *Therī Apadāna* illustrates the Buddha, in partnership with and via the ancient awakened therīs, repeatedly demonstrating the falsity of such claims.

The leading therīs are regularly compared favorably to then contemporary symbols of royal and natural power and awe: great trees bearing heartwood, she-elephants that have burst their bonds and now roam freely, and lionesses, with the Buddha asking them to roar their lion's roar by demonstrating their abilities and powers accrued in the fulfillment of their Path.

> *Mahato sāravantassa, yathā rukkhassa tiṭṭhato . . .*
>
> Like a great tree standing, bearing heartwood . . .
>
> —The Buddha, regarding his foster mother, Mahā Gotamī (*Gotamī Therī Apadāna*, v. 278)

> *Thīna dhammābhisamaye,*
> *ye bālā vimatiṃ gatā;*
> *tesaṃ diṭṭhippahānatthaṃ,*
> *iddhiṃ dassehi gotamī.*
>
> There are these fools who doubt
> That women too can grasp the truth;
> Gotamī, show your spiritual power
> That they might give up their false views.
>
> —The Buddha's direction to Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī Therī (*Gotamī Therī Apadāna*, v. 178)

Sīhova pañjaraṃ bhetvā . . .

[She will attain Bodhi] like a lion freed from its cage . . .

—The Buddha Padumuttara, to the future Buddha Gotama re: the future Yasodharā (*Gotamī Therī Apadāna*, v. 376)

Iddhiñcāpi nidassehi,
mama sāsanakārike;
parisānañca sabbāsaṃ,
kaṅkhaṃ chindassu yāvatā.

Demonstrate your spiritual potency
To those enacting my Sāsana;
Within all the Assemblies,
Cut off whatever doubts remain.

—The Buddha Gotama, to his former wife, Yasodharā Therī (*Yasodharā Apadāna*, v. 967)

Like a She-Elephant Having Broken Her Bonds. Tile fresco of the life story of Uppalavaṇṇā Therī, Foremost in Supernormal Powers.

Iddhiñcāpi nidassehi,
mama sāsanakārike;
cattaso parisā ajja,
kaṅkhaṃ chindāhi yāvatā.

Demonstrate your spiritual power
To those enacting my Sāsana;
For the Fourfold Assembly now,
Cut off whatever doubts remain.

—The Buddha, to his spiritual daughter Uppalavaṇṇā Therī (*Uppalavaṇṇā Therī Apadāna*, v. 388)

The *Therī Apadāna* appears to employ skilful means regarding then contemporary social norms and trends,[7] with large long-term impact. It does so by repeatedly placing its chief and leading heroines' freedom and independence within the context of having developed over past lives in the Path of loving service to previous (male) buddhas and the bodhisattva himself. It is noteworthy that such beneficent supportive association with the bodhisattva and former buddhas is not only so in the biographies of the leading therīs, but appears in the theras' (the male elders') biographies as well. However, in the *Apadāna*s, as this genre does not illustrate cross-gender rebirth as some other Buddhist texts do, none of the male elders are ever remembered as having served so intimately as female partners, wives, consorts, or women of the bodhisattva's "inner chambers," as large numbers[8] of the therīs are recorded as having done in both their penultimate and past lives.

Let us now begin to look into what is revealed herein of key mental and emotional qualities in the development of the spiritual Path in these lives.

Fortunate Encounters

The vast majority of the women portrayed in the *Therī Apadāna* remember moments of a first inspiration. For many of these women, this first inspiration arose during a fortunate personal encounter with one of a whole number of previous buddhas, whether the very ancient Dīpaṅkara Buddha or Padumuttara Buddha, or those of this Fortunate Eon, the *Bhadda Kappa* (Skt: *Bhadra Kalpa*).

These encounters suggest to their audience the question of whether we too may have had a fortunate encounter with the Sakyan sage, the Buddha Gotama, and/or with another even more ancient buddha or buddhas immemorable, inviting us to consider this possibility in our part of this ongoing cosmic biography. They also suggest the possibility of our acts now, in appreciative connection with the Buddha's relics and stupas, Bodhi trees, and the monastic sangha, as well as our hearing (and reading) of the Dhamma, as potentially connecting to our coming into contact with the future Buddha Maitreya (Pali: Metteya), if such inspired aspiration arises in our hearts. The types of acts and mental and emotional states which might lead any of us to such are recounted in manifold ways, but all following similar discernible patterns.

As Sumedhā Therī remembers in the opening chapter of the *Therī Apadāna*, reflecting back on her fortunate encounter with the ancient Buddha Koṇāgamana and the gift of a vihara to his sangha, together with her practice of *sīla*, *dāna,* and *vatacariya*[9] under another ancient Buddha Sikhī:

So hetu ca so pabhavo,
tammūlaṃ sāsane khamaṃ;[10]
Paṭhamaṃ taṃ samodhānaṃ,
taṃ dhammaratāya nibbānaṃ.

This was the cause, this was the reason,
My acceptance of[11] the Teaching was rooted in this:
That was my first encounter;
That delight of mine in the Dhamma led to Nibbana.[12]

(Sumedhā Therī Apadāna, v. 16)

Not all of the fortunate encounters are with past buddhas, or past buddhas alone. Such significant meetings are also with leading male monastic disciples, and regularly with reliquary shrines and Bodhi trees representing a buddha.

For most of the women who became foremost leading disciples, or *etadagga sāvikā,* of the Buddha Gotama, it was not only their meeting with a past buddha, but also their seeing the Buddha together with an awakened woman, a leading bhikkhunī disciple of the Buddha, that truly stimulated their inspiration and galvanized their aspiration.

Leading women elders Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, Khemā and Uppalavaṇṇā, Dhammadinnā, Bhadda Kundalakesī, Sakulā, and Kisa Gotamī all witnessed women—bhikkhunīs—being praised by a former buddha as being foremost amongst his leading female monastic disciples in some exemplary quality that was particularly inspiring to them.

Upetvā taṃ mahāvīraṃ,
assosiṃ dhammadesanaṃ;
Tato jātappasādāhaṃ,
upemi saraṇaṃ jinaṃ.

I went before him, that Hero of Great Virtue,
And heard the teaching of the Dhamma;
Then *pasāda* was born in me,
And I went for refuge in the Conqueror.

Atikkante ca sattāhe,
mahāpaññānamuttamaṃ;
Bhikkhunīṃ etadaggamhi,
ṭhapesi narasārathi.

When seven days had passed,[13]
The Leader of Humankind placed
The one supreme of those with great wisdom
In the foremost position of the bhikkhunīs.

(Khemā Therī Apadāna, vv. 291 & 293)

Pasāda

For most all of these women, the outstanding and galvanizing quality first noticed and remembered is of *pasāda* (Vedic: *prasāda*). For many, such as therī Khemā above, *pasāda* arose while listening to the Dhamma being taught. *Pasāda* is a quality, group of qualities, or a mental and emotional state and process of enormous depth and importance. *Pasāda* is defined variously in the Pali Text Society's *Pali-English Dictionary* as "a heart full of grace; to enter into and become established in faith, to be sanctified; to be or become clear, bright and pure; to be or become happy and gladdened; to be reconciled and pleased; to be and become believing and trusting; to be and become pious and virtuous; to be devoted; to be granting or receiving graces and gratification; and to be rendered calm and peaceful." *Pasāda* is a close relative of *pasanna*, in which the qualities of "seeing" and "knowing" that serve as essential aspects of the insight knowledge of *vipassanā* are a fundamental part of the meaning.

There is a major shift that occurs with this seeing: a clearing and brightening of the heart and mind which gives rise to mental purity of a kind in which faith and trust grow and becomes established, together with happiness, joy, devotion, pious and virtuous dedication, calmness, and peacefulness. These are linking qualities between tranquility *(samatha)* and insight *(vipassanā),* a fertile ground for the deepening of both. All of these qualities spring forth in a way that may be religiously characterized as an experience of grace, reconciliation, and even sanctification, that is, a primary first step in entering into the path of holiness.

In the *Bodhi Bojjhaṇgas*, or Factors of Awakening, *pasāda,* or *pasadi,* is one of the primary seven factors, closely linked on the one hand to the *pīti* (joy or rapture) and on the other to the *samādhi* and *upekkha* (equanimity) that balances, steadies, stabilizes, clears, and strengthens the mind. We can also see the connection here to the second awakening factor, *dhamma vicāya*, out of which in this case *pīti* and *pasadi* have arisen. These qualities together make the heart-mind beautiful, positive, and clear as well as balanced and stable, an ideal mind-ground for deep, effective cultivation of the path, and for awakening.

Saṅghe pasādo yassatthi,
ujubhūtañca dassanaṃ;
Adaliddoti taṃ āhu,
amoghaṃ tassa jīvitaṃ.

For whom there is *pasāda* in the Sangha,
And whose vision has been set straight;
They say, "S/he is not impoverished,
And his or her life is not lived in vain."

Tasmā saddhañca sīlañca,
pasādaṃ dhammadassanaṃ;
Anuyuñjetha medhāvī,
saraṃ buddhānusāsanaṃ.[14]

Therefore, bearing in mind the Buddha's instruction,
A wise and sagacious person should apply herself
To faith and virtuous conduct,
To pasāda and seeing the Dhamma.

(*Siṅgālamātu Therī Apadāna,* vv. 88–90)

Saṃvega & Saṃvigga

Together with *pasāda* or independently, *saṃvega* or *saṃvigga* often arise. *Saṃvega* is characterized as the emotion of religious awe or thrill, stimulation, and enthusiasm—a strong energetic movement in the body and mind which comes from seeing oneself and the world differently and gaining new knowledge, perspective, and clarity.

It is often translated as "spiritual urgency," as time and the perception of impermanence and the rarity and preciousness of the opportunity found take on a new and urgent sense of meaning which completely changes the value system, priorities, and life direction of s/he who experiences them.

As therī Bhaddā Kāpilānī remembers occurring at the same time as was also happening independently for her husband, Mahā Kassapa, very shortly before both decided to go forth:

Gharevāhaṃ tile jāte,
Disvānātapatāpane;
Kimi kākehi khajjante,
Saṃvegamalabhiṃ tadā.

While staying at home [I saw], born out of sesame seeds,
Lying drying under the hot sun,
[Live newborn] worms being eaten by crows;
And a sense of spiritual urgency overcame me.

(Bhaddā Kāpilānī Therī Apadāna, v. 303)

Remembering a Fortunate Meeting. Sākulā Therī, later to become Foremost of Those with the Divine Eye.

Abhayā Therī remembers how seeing a former buddha walking down the street with his order of bhikkhus changed her life:

Buddhassa raṃsiṃ disvāna,
haṭṭhā saṃviggamānasā;
Dvāraṃ avāpuritvāna,
buddhaseṭṭhamapūjayiṃ.

Seeing the radiant aura of the Buddha
My mind was elated and deeply stirred with *saṃvigga*,
And opening the door
I honored the Buddha, the Foremost One.

(*[Abhayā] Sattuppaladāyikā [Giver of the Seven Lotuses] Therī Apadāna,* v. 76)

Abhivādana

With the transformative arising of *pasāda* and *saṃvega*, for many of the women profiled, *abhivādana* then follows as the natural responsive unfolding of their hearts, their bodies, and their minds in the Path—they bowed down to the Buddha, his Teaching, and his Sangha with a natural and true heart of deep honor and the highest respect, reverence, and veneration (*abhivādana*), seeing the opportunity. They let go of the past and what they had been, released, opened their hearts, and entered into a state of open and receptive potentiality.

Kisā Gotamī remembers her heart's response:

Kāraṃ katvāna buddhassa,
yathāsati yathābalaṃ.
Nipacca munivaraṃ . . .

Honoring and revering the Buddha
with all of my power[15] and strength.
I bowed down in ready humility and service to the Sage's way . . .

(*Kisā Gotamī Therī Apadāna,* vv. 59–60 [excerpted])

Muttā Therī ("She Who Was a Bridge") expresses her heart's movement of reverence most dramatically, reminiscent of the Buddha himself upon entering the Bodhisattva Path as the rishi Sumedha when meeting Buddha Padumuttara:

Gharato nikkhamitvāna,
avakujjā nipajjahaṃ;
Anukampako lokanātho,
sirasi akkamī mama.

Coming forth from my house,
I lay down prostrate before him;

The Compassionate Lord of the World
stepped on the crown of my head.

(*Saṅkamanatthā [She Who Was a Bridge] Therī Apadāna,* v. 32)

Dāna

In their clean, clear, calm, and brightly reverential heart-minds, the next natural arising was of generosity. Most of them then wished to offer as great a *dāna* as they were able to in supportive appreciation of the Buddha and his Teaching. A full fourteen of the forty sacred biographies are actually named after the important acts of generosity of their heroines, some even when the generosity was so small as a single ladleful of food.[16] Generosity is portrayed over and over again in its natural arising in the process, and in its successful enactment, as one of the main elements which sustained their Path over time and brought it to fulfillment. *Dāna* is one of the three fundamental practices to cultivate for all Buddhists, the first in the triad of *Dāna*, *Sīla* and *Bhavana*. It is also one of the main *Pāramīs* (Skt: *Pāramītas*),[17] if not the foremost or the crowning, culminating pāramī in terms of spiritual maturity in the *Jātaka* tales, which appear historically to have been a genre, in part, contemporary or near-contemporary to the *Apadāna*s and to share substantially in material content.[18] The mind of *dāna* is one of both release and of wholesome opening to possibility. In the *Therī Apadāna*, the *dānacitta* (the heart and mind of generosity), when brought to life in concordant bodily action, is the wholesome ground in which the possibility for future awakening can be received and, like a seed, can germinate.

Tadā muditacittāhaṃ,
taṃ ṭhānamabhikaṅkhinī;
Nimantetvā dasabalaṃ,
sasaṅghaṃ lokanāyakaṃ.

Then, with my heart of *muditā*,
Longing for that attainment,
I made an invitation to the One of Ten Powers,
The Leader of the World together with the Sangha.

Bhojayitvāna sattāhaṃ,
daditvāva ticīvaraṃ;[19]
Nipacca sirasā pāde,
idaṃ vacanamabraviṃ.

I offered food for seven days,
And *dāna* of the triple robes;[20]
Then I bowed down humbly placing my head at his feet in obedient service,
And spoke these words:

Yā tayā vaṇṇitā vīra,
ito aṭṭhamake muni;
Tādisāhaṃ bhavissāmi,
yadi sijjhati nāyaka.

Like she who was praised by you, O Valiant One,
Eight days ago, O Sage;
O, to become such like her—
If my aspiration could come to be fulfilled, O Guide.

(*Patācārā Therī Apadāna,* vv. 472–474)

Muditā

In this mind of clarity and vision, reverence, and generosity, *muditā* is another key associated quality to arise. *Muditā* is widely known as the third of the Four Immeasurables, or the Four Boundless Qualities, which are also known as the Brahma Viharas or Divine Abidings. We have no exact parallel for the wholesome *muditā* in English but know it clearly by its opposites, the envy and jealousy that can also arise in the human heart when seeing someone else attain, achieve, experience, or receive a desirable condition. *Muditā* is a state of blessed and beneficent, empathetically shared happiness, joy, and appreciation in which the heart and mind are positively and fortunately attuned with the benefits and goodness of the state of the other—in this case, the awakened other.

Herein, *muditā* has a powerful galvanizing impact on the karmic processes of the individual involved, which begins to draw them toward and nearer to that state, linking them karmically with it. In the *Therī Apadāna*, desiring for oneself the state of the other for which there are feelings of *muditā* is not considered negative at this stage of the Path. Rather, we find the examples of this desire most often being voiced to the Buddha himself with ardent aspiration and reverence, with undoubtedly positive and affirmative response.

Returning to the *apadāna* of therī Khemā, the Buddha's female disciple Foremost in Wisdom, she here remembers her response after hearing an earlier buddha pronounce one of his leading bhikkhunī disciples foremost in wisdom long ago:

Taṃ sutvā muditā hutvā,
puno tassa mahesino;
Kāraṃ katvāna taṃ ṭhānaṃ,
paṇipacca paṇīdahiṃ.

Having heard this, with having become full of *muditā*,
Having again offered reverential service to that great sage;
And having bowed down before him,
I aspired to and resolved my heart upon that position.

Tato mama jino āha,
'sijjha[22] *taṃ paṇidhī tava;*
Sasaṅghe me kataṃ kāraṃ,
appameyyaphalaṃ tayā.'

Then the Victorious One said to me,
"May your aspiration be achieved;
For the reverential service you have offered to the Sangha and me,
Will be of limitless fruit for you."

(*Khemā Therī Apadāna,* vv. 294–295)

Cetanā Paṇidhāna

All important in the formation of affective karma, *cetana* is formative intention, the volitional direction of the heart-mind. *Paṇidhāna* (Skt: *praṇidhāna*), as we can see above in the last line of verse 294, is the direction of the mind toward that intent, the Goal. In the making of an effective aspiration and the formation of an effective resolution, *cetanā paṇidhi* is a crucially important step; one to be enacted over and over again by the *apadāna*'s heroines as a crucial turning point. As repeatedly affirmed and reaffirmed, it is *kammena sukatena*, a fundamental step in the laying out of the morally virtuous karma, which will underlie and support the rest of the path and everything that follows and results from there, through to its final fruition.

Most of the *apadānas* contain very similar quatrains in this regard, with virtuous deeds leading the heroines to sojourn for some time in the Tāvatiṃsa heaven before coming to their final birth. As therī Patacarā remembers:

Tehi kammehi sukatehi,
cetanāpaṇidhīhi ca.
Jahitvā mānusaṃ dehaṃ,
tāvatiṃsamagacchahaṃ.

This was the result of those virtuous actions,
And due to my aspiration and resolution;
After abandoning my human body,
I went to the Tāvatiṃsa [realm].

(*Patacarā Therī Apadāna,* v. 487)

Patthanā, Abhipatthanā & Ṭhānamabhipatthanā

Not dallying in the heavens, but remaining intent with our heroines now in their stages of critical development, from the volitional direction of the mind, *patthanā* (Skt: *pra* + *ārthana*) had then arisen. *Patthanā* is the prayerful wish, the voiced aspiration, the expressed resolution. What happened in the mind at the level of intention now appears and is expressed. The awakening women of the *Therī Apadāna* repeatedly relate their key moments of *abhipatthanā*, the higher aspiration and resolve awoken and come to active life in them. As in Khemā Therī's verse 295 above, those who were to become the great leading therīs often speak of *ṭhānam-abhipatthanā*—with determination, standing and knowing themselves as having become firmly established in the basis of their resolve.

Saying "No" to Proffer of All the Family Wealth. Dhammadinnā Therī, later to become Foremost in Dhamma Teaching

As Nandā Therī, the Buddha's half sister, relates in her *apadāna,* after hearing the Buddha making known the highest good teaching the ambrosial Dhamma of the Deathless, making known the highest good, with clear and bright mind of *pasāda* she invited the Buddha and his sangha for a *mahā dāna*, and serving them with her own hands (vv. 173–174):

Jhāyinīnaṃ bhikkhunīnaṃ,
Aggaṭṭhānamapatthayiṃ;
Nipacca sirasā dhīraṃ,
Sasaṅghaṃ lokanāyakaṃ.

I aspired to the position of the foremost
Of the bhikkhunīs [skilled] in Jhāna;
Bowing down my head in humble and ready willingness,
Before the Leader of the World with his Sangha.

(*Nandā Therī Apadāna,* v. 175)

And Dhammadinnā Therī, after feeling tremendous joy to see a former Buddha recognize a bhikkhunī as foremost among speakers of the Dhamma, enacted and established her resolve thus:

Nimantayitvā sugataṃ,
sasaṅghaṃ lokanāyakaṃ;
Mahādānaṃ daditvāna,
taṃ ṭhānamabhipatthayiṃ.

I invited the Well Come One,
The Leader of the World, together with his Sangha;
Having offered a great *dāna*,
I aspired to that position.

(*Dhammadinnā Therī Apadāna,* v. 102)

Anumodanā

In many cases[22] their aspiring wish, which has been expressed either publicly or privately, is met and followed by the Buddha himself acknowledging, appreciating, and rejoicing in it. The aspiring recipient becomes beneficiary of the Buddha's personal *anumodanā*. The root word *modana* (or *modati)* is a very close and almost interchangable relative of the empathetic joy above and, joined with the prefix *ānu,* meets and acts as a supportive companion, journeying together.

As Bhaddā Kuṇḍalakesī remembers, after witnessing the ancient Buddha Padumuttara commend a bhikkhunī as foremost in speed to gain awakening, and experiencing the arising *pasāda* and *mudita* in her heart, her offering of *dāna* and *ṭhānamabhipatthana* and offering of herself in humble service prostrate before the Buddha, he rejoiced and blessed her with his *anumodanā:*

Anumodi mahāvīro,
'bhadde yaṃ tebhipatthitaṃ;
Samijjhissati taṃ sabbaṃ,
sukhinī hohi nibbutā.'

The Great & Valiant One expressed his *anumodanā* to me,
saying:
"Good lady, all that you have resolved upon,
Will be successful [in time to come];
Be happy and peaceful."

(*Kuṇḍalakesā Therī Apadāna,* v. 6)

In this relational process, not only is the Buddha seen and known by and awakened within the heart of the person who is now both disciple and aspirant, but they too are seen and known, with joy and welcome receptivity by the Awakened One, who then blesses them with the ultimate encouragement and affirmation: their prediction to awakening, enlightenment.

This blessing and affirmative recognition is a completion in a way of this initial process, for there has been a mutual seeing and knowing, dedication and determination have arisen, and the destiny of the recipient is now sealed.

As is expressed so beautifully in the *apadāna* of Sonā, Foremost in Ardent and Valiant Effort:

Abhivādiya sambuddhaṃ,
ṭhānaṃ taṃ patthayiṃ tadā;
Anumodi mahāvīro,
'sijjhataṃ paṇidhī tava.'

Bowing prostrate before the *Sambuddha*,
I then aspired to that position;
The Great Hero expressed his approval:
"Let your aspiration succeed."

(*Sonā Therī Apadāna,* v. 223)

Pamodati

But there is one more return, one more aspect to this process which then courses through the sealing and activates it, going beyond and moving into the life of the Path, not only the completion of the circle, but the turning of the Dhamma wheel in this woman's life—following upon receiving of the benediction. This is *pamodati* (*pra + modati*), the higher joy, delight, and rejoicing which then arises in the heart of the recipient in response to the Blessed One's recognition and affirmative *anumodanā.* In many of these stories, *pamodati* is linked with *sumana*, the wholesome, well, healthy, and virtuous heart and mind that is both elevated and joyful—what we would also simply and rightly call "the good heart" or "the well-faring heart."

Buddhassa vacanaṃ sutvā . . .

Hearing the [affirmative] words of the Awakened One . . .

Pamoditāhaṃ sumanā,
patthe uttamamānasa;
Anāgatamhi addhāne,
īdisā homi nāyaka.

I rejoiced, jubilant,
And in an exalted state of mind,
(I aspired): "In time to come,
Let me be such a one, O Guide."

(*Uppalavaṇṇā Therī Apadāna,* vv. 420 [excerpt] & 421)

Mettācittā Paricari & Parikari

These women have experienced *upaṭṭhita*: their heart of clarity and faith, reverence, generosity, and appreciative joy have together initiated a new kind of giving, *upaṭṭhita,* the reverential and fully ready and willing gift of themselves and their life to the Buddha's Way, the Path of Awakening. They have both drawn near and become intimately established in the base for awakening, and now stand in it themselves, transformed.

In Yasodharā's case, after lifetimes of offering innumerable physical services, it was only after realizing freedom from fear that she was able to truly and fully give her life.

Nekakoṭisahassāni,
jīvitāni pariccajiṃ;
Bhayamokkhaṃ karissanti,
dadāmi mama jīvitaṃ.

Innumerable thousands of kotis
Of lives have been rendered in your service;
In freedom from fear,
I give you my life.

(*Yasodharā Therī Apadāna,* v. 351)

In other therī's stories as well, although with far less radical dedication recorded beforehand, we find them giving innumerable lifetimes to acts of service on behalf of significant others. Yet it is after these significant turning points involving clearing of the heart that they now express the rest of their life energy, until its end, has truly become one of dedicated *metta paricariyā*, a life of service arising out of and fully imbued with unbounded and altruistic love and kindness.

After a Lifetime of Service to Family, Now Free, Offering the Bhikkhunīs' Water Fast Heated via the Fire Element. Sonā Therī, Foremost in Ardent & Valiant Effort.

Taṃ sutvā muditā hutvā, yāvajīvaṃ tadā jinaṃ;
Mettacittā paricariṃ, paccayehi vināyakaṃ [23]

Joy arose in my heart hearing the Victorious One,
And then, for as long as life endured,
I offered requisite support to the Guide,
Serving with a heart of loving kindness.

(*Sonā Therī Apadāna*, v. 226)

Mettācitta paricari is defined and characterized by a kind of humility and reverential willingness to serve, to *paricari* or *parikari*, to walk the Path on foot (barefoot/in humility and effacement) in each one of its steps. It is the full willingness to lovingly and devotedly give and oneself attend upon whatever it takes to meet and engage with each step and stage of the Path with a mind imbued with mettā, *maitrī* or *agape*—altruistic and unlimited love and kindness, without aversion and without ill-will—a major unbinding and purification of heart.

Atthe dhamme ca nerutte,
paṭibhāne ca vijjati;
Ñāṇaṃ amhaṃ mahāvīra,
uppannaṃ tava santike.

There exists in us knowledge,
Of the meaning, the Dhamma, and language,
As well as of exposition. This has arisen,
O Great Hero, through association with you.

Asmābhi pariciṇṇosi,
mettacittāhi nāyaka;
Anujānāhi sabbāsaṃ,
nibbānāya mahāmune.

We've attended and offered service
With hearts of *mettā*, O Guide;
With your blessing to all of us,
We would attain [Pari]nibbana, Great Sage.

(*Gotamī Therī Apadāna,* vv. 229–230)

Kalyāṇamitta, Kalyāṇasāhāyikā & Uniting of Intention

One of the strongest and most outstanding examples of this type of loving service and generosity in the *Therī Apadāna* is of the Buddha's former wife and consort of many lifetimes, the therī Yasodharā ("Bearer of Glory"), also known in the *Aṇguttara Nikāya* as Bhadda Kaccanā ("Auspicious Golden One") and in the Pali-text Vinaya as Rahulamātā ("Rāhula's Mother"). Both her and therī Bhadda Kapilani's *apadānas* are unique in that their paths and destinies are deeply partnered with the Buddha's and his leading male disciple Mahā Kassapa's destinies, respectively. In Bhadda Kapilani's *apadāna,* she speaks of her and her former husband, Mahā Kassapa's, past and present life relationship of spiritual friendship, greatly extolling the virtue and value of such friendship in the Path over time.

Na cireneva kālena,
arahattamapāpuṇiṃ;
Aho kalyāṇamittattaṃ,
kassapassa sirīmato.

After no long time,
I completely fulfilled the arahanta [path].
O, spiritual friendship!—
With Kassapa the Glorious.

(*Bhaddā Kāpilānī Therī Apadāna,* v. 306)

Her *apadāna* is special in that it is *her* own "*anumodanā*"—her affirmation and rejoicing—two times over with regards to Mahā Kassapa's important gifts of robes that are recorded, rather than a buddha's.

In Yasodharā's *apadāna,* she serves as spiritual friend, partner, and supporter of the Bodhisattva's Path to awakening over eons. In nearly forty of her verses she remembers how "I put forth vast alms for you (the *dāna* I offered for your sake was enormous). . . . Constant was my service." In a full fifteen of her verses, she states her motivation as being *tuyhatthāya*, translated as "on your behalf" or "for your sake," which even more specifically and literally means when one unites one's intention, aspiration, and aim with that of another.

One of the two foremost leading women monastic disciples of the Buddha, Uppalavaṇṇā Therī's path is also so linked to not only the Buddha in his past lives as bodhisattva and to his son, Rāhula, but also very significantly interlinked over many lives with six of her fellow bhikkhunīs: Patacarā, Khemā, Bhaddā Kundalakesī, Kīsagotamī, Dhammadinnā, and Visākhā. The seven of them, together with further *kalyāṇa-sāhāyikā*[24] (virtuous woman friends and companions) such as Sumedhā, supported one another in their development of the Path time and time again, until finally becoming the backbone and the core of the founding Bhikkhunī Sangha of most exemplary *arahatī* leading disciples and teachers as well as preeminent leading *upāsikā-sāvikā* (leading lay woman disciple) Visākhā. In each of their *apadānas* they remember not only their *mudita*-ful support of one another in living the spiritual life at home unmarried, but in the same words, their linking of their destinies with the Buddha's through collective unity in *buddhopatthana-nirata* ("unwearying service to the Buddha").

Komāribrahmacariyaṃ,
rājakaññā sukhedhitā;
Buddhopaṭṭhānaniratā,
muditā satta dhītaro

Practicing the holy life [at home] as maidens,
We royal ladies abounded in happiness and comfort;
Seven daughters joyful with *muditā,*
We delighted in service to the Buddha.

(*Dhammadinnā Therī Apadāna,* v. 306)

Exhorted by a Kālyāṇamitta to Meditate. Nandā Therī, later to become Foremost in Jhāna Meditation.

Clearly, in the *Therī Apadāna* text, one's karma is not only one's own, but is also effectively interlinked and interwoven with those one supports and those one chooses to dedicate oneself to as intimate companions and associates. For as we find in verse 7 of *Muttā Therī*'s *Apadāna*:

For whoever offers service by hand [together],
Be they women or men;
In a future lifetime,
All will come into one another's presence [again].[25]

Both having and being good *kalyāṇamitta* and *kalyāṇasāhāyikā* are deeply important. In fact, the very first *apadāna* of Sumedhā Therī, as well as four whole *apadānas* in the final two chapters of the *Therī Apadāna,* are devoted to the collective stories of women whose paths were deeply interrelated with fellow women as well as the Buddha/bodhisattva as their *kalyāṇamittas* and *sāhāyikās.*

These are in addition to the seven *apadānas* of the seven sisters already mentioned,[26] and Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, whose *apadāna* contains within it the stories of five hundred women[27] who were her companions, developing the Path together over many lifetimes and fulfilling it together in their final life, even so much as entering *parinibbāna* (Skt: *parinirvana*) together.

In the *Therī Apadāna*'s final chapters, we find more than one hundred thousand women who realized awakening through their beneficent and longtime spiritual companionship, many in relationship not only to the Buddha,

but to two former queens who became leading bhikkhunīs, the therīs Yasodharā and Yasavatī.[28]

Thus, it is not only generosity, *muditā,* giving rise to aspiration and dedicated loving service considered of high importance in this Way. Spiritual friendship, well wishes, supportiveness to fellow wayfarers, and beneficent sharing and uniting of intention are highlighted and shine brightly as important sustaining qualities for the long term on the Path.

Bodhatthāya & Sambodhi Abhipattha

In the midst of therī Yasodharā's forty or so verses on her lifetimes of generosity and devoted service to the bodhisattva who was to become the Buddha of our Fortunate Eon, past buddhas, former great disciples, etc., we find three special verses[29] that serve to define the entirety of this service and vast effort. These verses explicitly mention what was made as a conjoined wish, intention, aspiration, or aim for Bodhi—Awakening (Pali: *Bodhi + attha*, Skt: *bodhi + ārtha*). For Yasodharā, then named Sumittā (Skt: Sumitrā, the Good Friend), this aspiration arose when seeing the ancient Buddha Dīpaṅkara together with the rishi Sumedha. Her wish and her fate were sealed by her sharing of the gift of more than half her lotuses that she had brought to offer to the Buddha with the rishi, for his offering. It is her generosity in sharing and dedicating her gift for his awakening that brought on a prediction of her own future awakening as well. She and the bodhisattva Sumedha's destinies and paths then became intimately karmically interlinked, as explicitly stated by the Buddha Dīpaṅkara, for the entirely of his (their) bodhisattva career(s). For, as the ancient Buddha said, they were *samacitta* ("of like mind"), *samakamma* ("of like kamma/action"), and *samakari bhavisati* ("of like conduct and development").[30] And thus, not only he, but she too, was in those moments predicted "full of compassion . . . to fulfill the perfections (*pāramī/tas*) and attain Bodhi."[31] As the Buddha Padumuttara said to rishi Sumedha regarding Sumittā (Yasodharā):

Yathāpi bhaṇḍasāmuggaṃ,
anurakkhati sāmino;
Evaṃ kusaladhammānaṃ,
anurakkhissate ayaṃ.

Just as [a wife] safeguards her husband's
Accumulation of wealth and goods,[32]
So too she will be a protector
Of [your, the bodhisatta's] wholesome *dhamma*s.

Tassa te anukampantī,
pūrayissati pāramī;
Sīhova pañjaraṃ bhetvā,
pāpuṇissati bodhiyaṃ.

Showing compassion for you,
She will fulfill the *pāramī*s;
Like a lion breaking out from a cage,
She will attain bodhi.

(*Yasodharā Therī Apadāna,* vv. 375–6)

But she was not the only one. In the verses representing by far the largest number of women of all, we find them too born into the greater family of the man to become that ancient buddha, coming together with the Haṃsavati populace to offer support, aspiring to *sambodhi*, and receiving the great sage's benediction:

Setuvihāre kāretvā,
nimantetvā vināyakaṃ;
Mahādānaṃ daditvāna,
sambodhiṃ abhipatthayiṃ.

We constructed a vihāra
And invited the Leader;
Offering it together with a great *dāna*,
We made the aspiration for sambodhi.

Satasahassātikkante,
kappo hessati bhaddako;
Bhavābhavenubhotvāna,
pāpuṇissati bodhiyaṃ.

One hundred thousand eons from now,
There will be an age called the Bhadda Kappa;
After your together entering the rounds of becoming
again and again,
Finally then, you will achieve bodhi.

(*Caturāsīti Bhikkhunī Sahassa [84,000 Bhikkhunīs] Apadāna*, vv. 41 & 43)

Warnings

Three warnings of setback emerge in the *Therī Apadāna*'s biographical verses. Amidst all of the tales of heavenly rewards, an earthly good life, and final enlightenment resulting from these excellent qualities mentioned herein above, there are three mental and emotional states which are warned against through example by those who have experienced them as degenerating their Path. All three are types of arrogance. These can be seen as important warnings for all, crossing the lay/monastic boundary.

The first warning is of the manifestation of pride and arrogance that is desire for and attachment to physical beauty. Physical beauty and a good, honored station in life are often portrayed as karmic rewards for certain types of beautiful and generous actions in the past. However, upon attaining these, some of our heroines sank in them and were challenged

to get out again. Some, although having great merit with the Buddha, even avoid seeing him, feeling threatened or unfavorably disposed towards him and his teaching due to his challenging take on ego-attachment to physical beauty.

Tassāhaṃ suppiyā āsiṃ,
rūpake lāyane ratā;
Rūpānaṃ dosavādīti,
na upesiṃ mahādayaṃ.

I was wonderfully dear to him [her husband, King Bimbisāra],
Delighting in attachment to the body and form;
I did not approach the One of Great Benevolence,
As it was said he spoke negatively of physical beauty.

(*Khemā Therī Apadāna,* v. 327)

Still Attached to Beauty. The Life Story of Khemā Therī, later to become Foremost in Wisdom.

However, fortunately for all of those whose stories we have recorded, that is, all those who made it through this trap successfully, both loving enlightened kin and the Buddha himself intervened, removing the veil from their eyes—once again, saved by *kālyāṇamitta.* In these cases, once seeing the vanity and fallacy of this attachment, these meritorious women were completely enlightened very quickly, in the case of the leading therī Khema of Great Wisdom, becoming an arahant even before going forth into monastic life.

The second warning is of a type of arrogance leading to denigrating and disparaging one's accomplished associates and companions in the Holy Life, a type of aversion. This is portrayed as a mistake committed unwittingly by monastics and laity, even those monastics diligently training themselves in *Pāṭimokkha Sīla* and sense restraint—a further warning that one should not have pride in such. As the stories illustrate, such denigration is a karma that leads to dire consequences, especially if it is denigration of arahants, landing the abuser either in hell or troubled human rebirth, often in the role that one mistakenly spoke of the other, i.e., being forced into prostitution after having abusively called another a prostitute.

Tadāruṇapure ramme,
brāhmaññakulasambhavā;
Vimuttacittaṃ kupitā,
bhikkhuniṃ abhisāpayiṃ.

I was born into a Brāhman family in the delightful city of Aruṇa;
[Where,] due to being shaken and enraged,
I reviled a bhikkhuni whose heart-mind was free.
Calling her a whore.

Vesikāva anācārā,
jinasāsanadūsikā;
Evaṃ akkosayitvāna,
tena pāpena kammunā.

I abused the Dispensation of the Conqueror,
Doing what should not be done;
I was cursed in return
Because of that evil kamma.

Dāruṇaṃ nirayaṃ gantvā,
mahādukkhasamappitā;
Tato cutā manussesu,
upapannā tapassinī.

Having gone to a terrible hell,
I experienced great suffering;
Passing from that state and rearising amongst humankind,
I became an ascetic [of another religion] practicing penances.

(*Ambapāli Therī Apadāna,* vv. 207–209)

Fortunately, although having sunk from their bad actions, ultimately all of our heroines, like Ambapāli, make it out of this bad way, often needing to make some form of karmic restitution. They are also supported by their bearing the inevitable good results of their former good actions that, remaining intact, rise again to the forefront as the results of the misdeeds are burnt off or overcome.

The third and last warning is of becoming arrogant due to one's accomplishments, even in wholesome qualities in the monastic life. This most often appears as cause of a fall for those who had gained eminence and fame as Dhamma speakers in previous buddhas' dispensations before becoming arahants, that is, while still subject to pride and delusion. Again, after a fall, the merit of the love for the Dhamma

and the merit of their real generosity in their sharing of the Dhamma prevails, and these great ladies rise once again to break through to *arahanta* in their final lives, become preeminent as Dhamma speakers, now beyond all delusions of pride and attachment.

Puṇṇikā Therī, who had gone forth under the former buddhas Vipassi, Sikhī, Vessabhu, Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana, and Kassapa and with whom she trained consummate in her practice of *sīla* and sense restraint (v. 184), recounts her path and pride in teaching, here in her second to last birth:

Bahussutā dhammadharā,
dhammatthapaṭipucchikā;
Uggahetā ca dhammānaṃ,
sotā payirupāsitā.

A Change of Heart: Emptying an Ancient Buddha's Almsbowl After Having Filled it with Mud. Bhaddā Kāpilānī Therī, later to become Foremost in Memory of Past Lives.

I was widely studied, a "Dhamma holder,"
One who asks questions about the Teaching and its meaning;
I was learned in the Teachings,
And the learned ones were honored and attended to by me.

Desentī janamajjhehaṃ,
ahosiṃ jinasāsane;
Bāhusaccena tenāhaṃ,
pesalā atimaññisaṃ.

I expounded the Conqueror's Dispensation
In the midst of the people of the district;
Due to my manifold expositions of the Truths,
I proudly considered myself pious and virtuous.

Puṇṇikā, having been reborn into a humble water-carrier slave family in the household of Anāthapiṇḍika, gone forth in the Buddha Gotama's dispensation, and at last fully awakened:

Bhāvanāya mahāpaññā,
suteneva sutāvinī;
Mānena nīcakulajā,
na hi kammaṃ vinassati.

I cultivated and developed great wisdom,
And became a learned woman of knowledge through what I had heard;
Due to conceit [I was reborn] to humble family,
As that past kamma [of pride] was not yet destroyed.

Atthadhammaniruttīsu,
paṭibhāne tatheva ca;
Ñāṇaṃ me vimalaṃ suddhaṃ,
buddhaseṭṭhassa vāhasā.

Through and owing to the Buddha, the Foremost One,
My insight knowledge [*nāṇam*] is pure and clear;
The meaning, the Dhamma, language,
And exposition too are thus.[33]

(*Puṇṇikā Therī Apadāna*, vv. 185–187 & 199–200)

Breakthrough

Although some realized complete awakening quickly, for many if not most of the women portrayed in the *apadāna* stories, their last life involved not only the merit of past lives that they brought to it, but large doses of becoming aware of suffering, dukkha (Skt: *duḥkha*). For Punnikā above, her birth in humble family and carrying water in cold weather to fill the

Newborn Carried Away by a Hawk, Young Son Soon to Drowned in the River, Family Home Destroyed by Lightning. Patacārā Therī, later to become Foremost in Vinaya.

many water pots of the great household she was born in was all she needed, as she herself and her own good status were most dear to her. For therī Patacārā below, the scenario was very different.

For others, such as the Buddha's bhikkhunī disciple Foremost in Vinaya, Patacārā, pictured above losing her whole family, the beloved and dearly identified with that was lost to impermanence was not so clearly themselves, but appeared as intimate others. Often the dukkha of seeing the loss of "all that was mine, beloved and pleasing to me," of seeing the attainment of the good life fall apart—followed upon by once again meeting good *kālyāṇamitta*—was the final combination of factors needed to open their eyes to the Noble Truths, gain penetrative insight knowledge, and realize cessation.

Off the Cliff: Bidding Farewell to Her Beloved but Murderous Robber Husband. Bhaddā Kundalakesī Therī, later to become Foremost in Speed to Gain Awakening.

Conclusion

The mental and emotional qualities and states mentioned herein, along with their cultivation and associated practices, will be familiar to many as they are widely and ritually practiced in South and Southeast Asian Theravada Buddhism still today just as they have been for more than two millennia. They originated in a transformative and transitional stage in Buddhism as a whole in which Mahayana thought was beginning to arise. Although *sambodhi abhipattha* (higher aspiration for bodhi), *bodhāttha* (aim for bodhi), and *bodhicitta* (the bodhi-mind) may be different words, a relationship and commonality may easily be perceived. With the patterns of the *Thera Apadāna* and the *Therī Apadāna* not being dissimilar, and the stories of this popular performance/recitation genre widely told, widely known, and widely informative in Theravada Buddhism, it is easy to see how cultures of *dāna* and *anumodanā,* of loving kindness and service, of making dedicatory aspirations together with offerings, and deliberately linking one's mind via the present reliquary stupas, Bodhi trees, and monastic sangha with spiritual friends, the goal of the Path, the future Sangha, and the future Buddha Maitreya (Pali: Metteya), became such widespread and popular practices in the Theravada world.

It may also be seen that the mental and emotional states and practices herein are ones that sustain and mature aspiration and resolve, whether in one life or over many lifetimes up to and until one is ready for the final drilling down into impermanence, into dukkha—its causes and its cessation—and non-self with regards to any and every conditioned phenomena. For all the epic verses of the *Therī Apadāna* but Mahā Gotamī's end gloriously with these verses of freedom and completion:

Kilesā jhāpitā mayhaṃ,
bhavā sabbe samūhatā;
nāgīva bandhanaṃ chetvā,
viharāmi anāsavā.

My defilements (*kilesa*s) are burnt out,
All becoming has been uprooted in me;
Like a she-elephant who has broken her bonds,
I live free from the taints (*āsava*s).

Svāgataṃ vata me āsi,
mama buddhaseṭṭhassa santike;
tisso vijjā anuppattā,
kataṃ buddhassa sāsanaṃ.

Welcome indeed for me,
Was the presence of the Buddha, the Foremost One;
The three knowledges achieved,
The Buddha's teaching has been done.

Paṭisambhidā catasso,
vimokkhāpi ca aṭṭhime;
chaḷabhiññā sacchikatā,
kataṃ buddhassa sāsanaṃ.

The four discriminatory knowledges
And the eight liberations are mine;
The six super powers manifest,
The Buddha's teaching has been done.

Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī's Exhortation

Putte[34]—
Child—

Jarāvasānaṃ yobbaññaṃ,
rūpaṃ asucisammataṃ;
Rogantamapicārogyaṃ,
jīvitaṃ maraṇantikaṃ.

Youth ends with aging,
Beautiful bodies also become unclean;
Good health ends in disease,
Life ends in death.

Idampi te subhaṃ rūpaṃ,
sasīkantaṃ manoharaṃ;
Bhūsanānaṃ alaṅkāraṃ,
sirisaṅghāṭasannibhaṃ.

This pleasing body of yours,
Appears as a fantasmic confabulation of beauty;
With your jewelry and ornaments,
And all lustrous adornments and beautification.

Na cireneva kālena,
jarā samadhisessati
Vihāya gehaṃ kāruññe
cara dhammamanindite.

In no long time,
Aging and decay will overtake all this;
Out of compassion, leave home,
To practice the blameless Dhamma.

—Gotamī Therī to her daughter Nandā (*Nandā Therī Apadāna,* vv. 189–193 [excerpt])

Mahā Gotamī addressing the Fourfold Assembly just before her and her five hundred companions' *Parinibbāna*:

Sace mayi dayā atthi,
yadi catthi kataññutā;
Saddhammaṭṭhitiyā sabbā,
karotha vīriyaṃ daḷhaṃ.

If you all have love or sympathy for me,
And if you have gratitude,
Then, steadfast in the True Dhamma,
Make valiant effort.

(*Gotamī Therī Apadāna,* v. 127)

As the Blessed One, the Buddha, said of her in eulogy just after the cremation of her body:

Ayoghanahatasseva,
jalato jātavedassa;
Anupubbūpasantassa,
yathā na ñāyate gati.

[Like something that sparks or flares]
When stuck by a piece of iron
In a fire that is blazing;
As it gradually becomes calm and cool,
It's destination is not known.[35]

Evaṃ sammā vimuttānaṃ,
kāmabandhoghatārinaṃ;
Paññāpetuṃ gati natthi,
pattānaṃ acalaṃ sukhaṃ.

So too for those who are completely liberated,
Who have crossed the flood and bondage of sense pleasures,
Who have attained unshakeable bliss;
There is no destination to be pointed out.

He then continued, much as he was to later say before his own final passing:

Attadīpā tato hotha,
satipaṭṭhānagocarā;
Bhāvetvā sattabojjhaṅge,
dukkhassantaṃ karissatha.

Therefore, be islands unto yourselves,
With the Foundations of Mindfulness as your domain;
Cultivate the Seven Factors of Awakening,
And you will make an end to suffering.

(*Gotamī Therī Apadāna,* vv. 286–288)

Resources

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All photos herein of are of the tile frescos of the Thirteen Foremost Bhikkhuni Disciples of the Buddha adorning the inside of the outer base of the Noppapolbhumisiri Chedi (aka "the Queen's Chedi"), a stupa/pagoda constructed in honor of the great women in Buddhism at the highest point in Thailand, Doi Inthanon, courtesy of the photographic documentary dāna of Barry Flaming and Lawan Vongchindarak.

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My thanks to the venerable Suvijjānā Bhikkhunī, who asked the question to which this article was written in reply; to the Western Buddhist Monastic Conferences, which have been of great support to my monastic life since first returning to the U.S. as a novice years ago; to my mother and *puñña-sāhāyikā,* Dr. Patricia M. Buske-Zainal, during visiting whose home this article was conceived *and* who offered invaluable editorial suggestions; and to the venerable Ayyā Sobhanā Bhikkhunī and the community of Aranya Bodhi Hermitage together with the friends of the Dhammadharini Support Foundation and the Alliance for Bhikkhunis, who have generously together offered me the opportunity and support which has made this writing possible.

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Ayya Tathaaloka Bhikkhuni *is an American-born member of the Buddhist Monastic Sangha with a background in Zen and Theravadan Buddhism. Venerable Tathaaloka began her journey into monastic life nearly twenty-five years ago and was granted Higher Ordination by a multiethnic gathering of the Bhikkhu & Bhikkhuni Sanghas in Southern California in 1997. In 2005 she co-founded the North American Bhikkhuni Association, the Dhammadharini Support Foundation, and the first Theravadan Buddhist women's monastery in the Western United States. Following in the late Ayya Khema's footsteps, in 2009 Ayya Tathaaloka became the second Western woman to be appointed a Bhikkhuni Preceptor in Theravadan Buddhism, serving since in the going forth, training, and full ordinations of women in Australia, the U.S., and Thailand. Inspired by the Forest traditions in Buddhism, for the past five years she has been involved in developing a rustic, green, off-the-grid women's monastic retreat on California's Sonoma County coast named Aranya Bodhi, Awakening Forest Hermitage.*

Endnotes

[1] Written for the 2012 Western Buddhist Monastic Conference on "How to Develop the Bodhi Resolve—with Joy—in Challenging Times" in response to the question of one of my Theravāda bhikkhunī peers, who asked of me, "Is there anything in the Therāvada equivalent to the *bodhicitta* of the Mahāyāna?"

[2] The related Sanskrit *Avadāna* literature is generally thought to postdate the *Apadāna*s herein. In Sri Lanka the *Avadāna* genre was also later to become known as the *Avatāra*—the "Incarnation" Stories.

[3] See Walters' "Stupa, Story, and Empire: Constructions of the Buddha Biography in Early Post-Asokan India" in *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia*, (pp. 170–171). In *Elder's Verses II* (p. xxxii), K. R. Norman postulates a century earlier and later time frame, the third century B.C.E. to the first century C.E., as the period of the development of the *Apadāna* literature.

[4] The *Therī Apadāna* mentions the *Kathāvathu* and contains material from the *Therīgāthā* as well as the *Cariyāpiṭaka, Buddhavaṃsa* and the *Dhammapāda*, but had developed before the first-century *Divyāvadāna* and *Lalitavistāra*. See Walters' "Stupa, Story, and Empire" (pp. 164–165 & 169–172).

[5] The ancient post-Mauryan Śunga and Sātavāhana Dynasty strata of stupa complexes of Andhra Pradesh including Amarāvatī bear inscriptions in the language of the *Apadānas* epigraphically recording historical enactment of the ideas and practices within. See Walters, *ibid.* (pp. 164-165, 172 & 177).

[6] According to N. Shanta in *The Unknown Pilgrims*, the Digambara Jains declared that a woman cannot be liberated as long as her *atman* resides in the female body (p. 62). The Digambara sect became schismatic from the Svetambaras, in part over the issue of *strimukti* (Pali: *ittimutti*)—the possibility of liberation for women—which was one of the main factors that split the Jaina community between the third century B.C.E. and the first century C.E. (p. 140). For the Jainas, this question was based in large part on the perceived impossibility of women practicing the perfect "sky-clad" (naked) discipline as well as a belief in their not equally being able to practice *jhāna* (Skt: *dhyāna*) meditation, both of which were considered essential for liberation by the Digambaras. In *Elder's Verses II* (p. xxxii), K. R. Norman postulates this same period, that is, the third century B.C.E. to the first century C.E., to be the period of the development of the Buddhist *Apadāna* literature.

[7] In this case, validating and recognizing the efficacy of reverential service to one's husband or master and their religious aim/s, or alternately to a religious teacher or deity (in this case the post-*parinibbāna* Buddha as *Lokanāha*—Lord of the World), as a major part, if not the entirely (as in the *Dharmashastras*), of a women's spiritual path. The concession is limited, in that finally, in all *apadānas,* as an arahant, one becomes truly independent, as therī Yasodharā declares, "one's own refuge." The concession or recognition becomes gender neutral in that religious men can and do also undertake a life of such service.

[8] An amazing one hundred thirty thousand arahant women are recorded as having lived in devoted service to the bodhisattva and in shared dedicated to his goal of *bodhi,* including the ten thousand bhikkhunis of the *Yasodharā Pamukha Dasa Bhikkhunī Sahassa Apadāna,* the eighteen thousand of the *Yasodharā Pamukha Aṭṭhārasa Bhikkhunī Sahassa Apadāna,* the eighteen thousand of the *Yasavatī Pamukha Aṭṭhārasa Bhikkhunī Sahassa Apadāna,* and the eighty-four thousand of the *Caturāsīti Bhikkhunī Sahassa Apadāna.*

[9] In other verses these are spoken of as *komāribrahmacariya*, that is, the leading of a quasi-monastic celibate religious life while still living at home.

[10] Other versions contain here instead *tammūlaṃ sā ca sāsane khanti (sī. pī. ka.).*

[11] Or, rather than "my acceptance of the Sāsana," "my patient endurance in the Sāsana," according to the Pali-text in the footnote directly above.

[12] The Therigāthā-Commentary explains: *Taṃ paṭhamasamodhānanti tadeva satthusāsanadhammena paṭhamaṃ samodhānaṃ paṭhamo samāgamo, tadeva satthusāsanadhamme abhiratāya pariyosāne nibbānanti phalūpacārena kāraṇaṃ vadati.* Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi translates thus: "That first encounter: that very first encounter with the Dhamma of the Master's teaching, the first meeting. Just that, through delight in the Dhamma of the Master's teaching, was in the end nibbāna." He further notes: "She speaks of the cause metaphorically as the fruit" (personal correspondence 24 Nov 2012).

[13] Her verse 272 (not included here) relates how she invited the Buddha and his disciples for *dāna* for these seven days.

[14] I have opted for the Sri Lankan *buddhānusāsanaṃ* here, while the B^{e} and S^{e} have *buddhāna* and *buddhānaṃ sāsanaṃ,* respectively.

[15] Here, as pointed out by the venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi, the Pali *satti* equals the Sanskrit *śakti*, known in contemporary yogic traditions as "feminine spiritual power" or the "power of the divine feminine."

[16] The *Kaṭacchubhikkhādāyikā* (Giver of a Single Ladleful of Food) *Therī Apadāna*, also known as the *apadāna* of *Abhayāmata Therī*.

[17] Per Bhikkhu Bodhi, "Pali also has *pāramitā*. In the Buddhavaṃsa, *pāramitā* occurs quite often. It seems that in Pali *pāramī* came to prevail over *pāramitā* at a later time, perhaps as a counterpoint to the Mahāyāna adoption of *pāramitā*. But the frequency of *boluomi* 波羅蜜 in Chinese translations of Sansrit texts (as against 波羅蜜多 = *boluomiduo*) suggests that *pāramī* might also have occurred in Sanskrit" (per personal correspondence 24 Nov 2012). In the canonical Pali texts, a listing of seven *pāramitās* first occurs in the *Cariyapiṭaka* and a listing of ten *pāramitās* in the *Buddhavaṃsa,* both books of the *Khuddhaka Nikāya* collection.

[18] See Walters, "Stupa, Story, and Empire," pp. 163–165.

[19] In the Thai edition: *daditvā pattacīvaraṃ*

[20] As in the footnote above: "gave *dāna* of bowl and robes."

[21] *Sijjhati* = Skt *sidhyate, saṃ + siddhi.*

[22] There is an exception in the case of Bhaddā Kāpilānī's verses, where in verse 272 it is she who gives *anumodanā* to her intimate, who is later to become the thera Mahā Kassapa.

[23] Other than in gender, Sonā's verse here is virtually identical with thera Mahā Kassapa's as it appears in Bhaddā Kāpilanī's *apadāna* at verse 252: *Taṃ sutvā mudito hutvā, yāvajīvaṃ tadā jinaṃ; mettacitto paricari, paccayehi vināyakaṃ.*

[24] The masculine form of *sāhāyikā* is *sāhāyaka*, and the plural *sāhāyā*. *Sāhāya* (companion) can be associated, as with the noun *mitta* (friend), with the prefixes *kalyāna* (beautiful/spiritual), *piya* (dear/beloved), *dāna* (in generosity), *punna* (in virtue), or other prefixes. The feminine word *sākhī* is also found in the *Nāndā Therī Apadāna* expressing a female friend who can serve as a refuge.

[25] This verse from the Therigāthā Commentary, the entire *Apadāna* of which is missing from our version of the *Therī Apadāna* itself, appears to be identical with verse 44 of the *Apadāna of the 84,000 Bhikkhunīs*: *'Kāci hatthaparikammaṃ, katāvī naranāriyo; anāgatamhi addhāne, sabbā hessanti sammukhā.'*

[26] For more on the seven sisters, see Collett's "Heuristics and History in the Shared Narrative of the Seven Sisters in the *Therī Apadāna.*"

[27] The *Therīgāthā* also contains the *Pancasātā Pātācārā Gāthā,* the verses of the five hundred therīs, as well as the Verses of Thirty Therīs, in gratitude to their teacher and benefactress, the leading Theri Pātācārā, Foremost in Vinaya.

[28] In his forthcoming work "Wives of the Saints," Jonathan Walters writes of these two as the same person, referencing the earlier work of Lilley with the Pali Text Society.

[29] Vv. 369, 370, 376.

[30] Verse 373 of *Yasodharā Therī Apadāna*

[31] The Pali-text Commentaries distinguish various types of bodhi. In the *Madhurātthāvilāsinī*, the commentary on the *Buddhavaṃsa*, two different types of bodhi are mentioned, i.e., *arahant-bodhi* (the awakening of a *sāvaka arahant*) and *sabbābbu-bodhi* (the awakening of a *sammā-sambuddha*). Another name for the bodhi of the *sāvaka arahant* is *sāvaka-bodhi*, which is also found in the *Theragāthā Commentary*. The Pali-text *Udāna Commentary* and *Theragāthā Commentary* also speak of *sāvaka-bodhisattas* (aspirants to the arahant path) and *sāvaka-buddhas* (awakened arahant disciples). See the *Udāna Commentary* translated by Peter Masefield (PTS, 1994, v. 1, p. 94); *Theragāthā Commentary*, (PTS, v. 1, p. 10), cited by Pruitt in *Journal of the Pali Text Society,* v. XXIX.

[32] See the *Sigalovāda Sutta*, where the wife has the duty of protecting the wealth the husband brings home. This is also mentioned in some other suttas, in AN fives and eights.

[33] *Dhamma, attha, nirutti,* and *paṭibhāna* are the four *Paṭisambhidās* (branches of analytic knowledge).

[34] It may be noted here, as on many other occasions in the Pali as well as in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit texts, *putta*, often translated as "son," is being used explicitly with reference to a daughter, and thus may in many cases, in accordance with context, be better rendered as "child."

[35] *Udāna Commentary* and *Dīghanikāya-ṭīkā* comment in almost the same way on the verse. This is from the *Dighanikāya Mahāvagga-Ṭīkā* (VRI 2.50): "This is what is meant: When something made of iron, or a bronze dish, etc., is being struck, hit, by a mass of iron—by an iron hammer or mallet, etc.—when the blazing fire gradually subsides (lit. 'becomes tranquil'), its destination (the fire's) is not discerned anywhere in the ten directions; because it has ceased without connection through the cessation of its conditions" (translation by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi via personal correspondence 24 Nov 2012).

Listening at the End of Life

An Interview with Tenzin Kiyosaki

By Sarah Conover

Barbara Emi Kiyosaki grew up in Hawaii. She earned a B.A. in psychology with an emphasis in gerontology from Antioch University, and she also holds a master's in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan language from Naropa University. In 1985, at age thirty-seven years, she was ordained as a Buddhist nun in the Tibetan tradition by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Known as Venerable Tenzin Kacho, she then served as the Buddhist chaplain at the U.S. Air Force Academy for six years. Since that time, she trained in hospital chaplaincy at UCLA and Long Beach Memorial Medical Center and has worked as a hospice chaplain at Torrance Memorial Medical Center Home Health and Hospice. She leads retreats on the end of life and working with the dying. Sarah Conover interviewed her for Present *in the spring of 2012 at Sravasti Abbey in northeast Washington State. In August 2012, shortly after the interview, she returned her monastic vows and returned to lay life as Tenzin Kiyosaki. While she no longer lives as a bhikshuni, her decades of combined monastic and hospice experience allow her to share insights of value to nuns and laity alike, no matter which Buddhist tradition they may practice in. We will all, inevitably, find ourselves needing to respond with care and attention to friends and family in the dying process.*

Sarah Conover: Can you tell us how you came to hospice work and chaplaincy?

Tenzin Kacho/Kiyosaki: Certainly. A friend who was a Dharma student invited me to look into a post as a hospice chaplain where he was a social worker and bereavement counselor. I had already completed one unit of chaplaincy training at UCLA, so I applied and they accepted me. At that point I had to complete my chaplaincy training, which I did at Long Beach Memorial Medical Center. It's quite a lot of training—it takes a couple years—so I did that while I worked as a chaplain. I am *loving* my work. I find chaplaincy work very suitable for a monastic; it informs my work as a monastic and I can share some of my experience and training.

SC: Were you also a monastic at the time you did your chaplaincy training?

TK: Yes. I've been a nun for twenty-seven years and a hospice chaplain at Torrance Memorial Medical Center for four years now. Before that, I worked as a chaplain at the U.S. Air Force Academy with Air Force cadets. It has provided a nice juxtaposition of the beginning of life and the ending of life.

SC: What do you feel makes the field so different from other realms of human experience and chaplaincy?

TK: It's a time of saying goodbye to our life, and it's the end of our life. It's a *huge* transition where we lose everything that we had worked to build, establish, and

Tenzin Kiyosaki

create—our family, our relationships, our business, our careers—and we have to say goodbye to them. For most Americans, we are also in tremendous denial, so we don't look at it. Even some people in hospice don't want to say the "H-word." Many of the families advise us not to mention hospice because they don't want to let the patient know they're in hospice. Interestingly, some people graduate from hospice. They get better because of the palliative care in their own homes, the relaxation, and comfort care; they get well and we have to discharge them!

SC: What are some core aspects of working with the dying?

TK: I think one of the main things is to be a good listener and have an open heart—to be able to hear what people's needs are and to intuit what they would like to talk about or what their concerns are. So, being a good listener is critical. Another concern is the ability to hold people in a way that helps them develop ease of mind, peace of mind, contentment in having lived their lives, and acceptance of the end of life. Sometimes that's not possible. Some people deny end of life until they are unconscious.

The people who do accept it are at a whole other level to work with. And then there are those who are very open and receptive to the prompts for looking at the stages of dying, letting go, and not grasping. They understand that this is the end, and they appreciate hearing the Loving Kindness (Metta) Sutra and a contemplation that is called "The Four Things" by Dr. Ira Byock (www.dyingwell.org). Both really help them clear and open their hearts. The "Four Things" are: Please forgive me, I forgive you, thank you, and I love you. Sometimes they can say it aloud to their spouse and family, sometimes the person just does it in his or her heart. I've been able to do it with families together, and it really creates an opportunity for conversations that they've sometimes just been assuming, like saying, "I love you." Sometimes the response is, "Well, she knows that, or he knows that," but to be able to *say* it has so much meaning for everyone. So that practice and the Metta Sutra are tremendous tools in hospice.

SC: What if your patients aren't Buddhist? Do you still use the Metta Sutra?

TK: Absolutely! Love is universal. One phrase is: "May I be filled with love." Oh, my gosh, that relaxes people instantly and often fills their eyes with tears.

What the hospice doctors and nurses are looking for are three key things: shortness of breath, pain, and anxiety. The medications can help take care of all three. A lot of time when you take care of the shortness of breath, the pain and anxiety go down, but there's still the emotional anxiety of losing everything. In facing death—this is the end—the Metta Sutra is tremendously powerful, extremely powerful. Saying "May I be filled with love" can instantly help relax muscles, mind, and body. When I do that with family members around, it's very powerful. I have the patients do it for themselves first, and then I have them do it for and with others. I ask everyone in the room to do it for the dying patient. All around him he'll hear "May you be filled with love." Depending on the person, sometimes he may have some conflicts about different things, so I may say *loving kindness* instead of *love,* or I may say *kindness* because of some complexity in the stages of death or in his relationships with others.

SC: Do you explicitly talk about the stages of dying?

TK: It totally depends on the person. I've been able to mention it to a few patients because sometimes, by the time I see a person, it is only days before death. Other times, I get to work with people for a few years. The general measure for someone

who comes on hospice is a life expectancy of six months or less, but because of some chronic illnesses and not knowing when we may die, the person may stay on for years. But what is the quality of her life?

Sometimes we're working with people with dementia that can't even respond to "How are you?" Or people who are in and out—partially there—some of them are delightful. Then there are those that have physical deterioration but their mind is clear and right there with you. So it depends on who they are and what I can bring up. Where I can go with them really depends on them. Also, most of the patients are Judeo-Christian where I work, so I say the Lord's Prayer a lot; I carry a Bible—I'm a Bible-packing Buddhist nun! I read scripture and really try to find the verses that assist the Christian person who is passing. Or for the Jewish patients, I say the Mi Shebarach, which is about sickness and healing. So the opportunity to really speak about the dying stages is variable because people are on a spectrum of what they are open to discuss.

SC: Must a patient request a chaplain for you to show up?

TK: Generally, yes. But we let them know chaplaincy services are available for them. Sometimes patients ask me about what happens, you know, "What do you Buddhists think about dying?" I might say that we believe that the body disintegrates, declines, so it can no longer support consciousness, and that as a person, we are made up of body and mind, and that at the point when the body can no longer support consciousness, at death, subtle consciousness separates. I often speak about the qualities of consciousness being different from the qualities of the body—which are dense. Consciousness is the ability to apprehend things, to know, and clarity; it is different than the physical elements of bone, blood, and organs. I speak about that quite a bit. It gives people a lot to think about.

SC: What works best being with the dying and their families?

TK: What works best is being calm, being receptive to the family members, and really encouraging people to rejoice in the relationships that they've had, in the life they've lived. For a lot of people who have been married for fifty, sixty, seventy years, I encourage them to rejoice in the life that they've had together. On the day that they took their marriage vows, who knew how long it was going to last? I ask them to think about how fifty years or seventy years is something remarkable and to celebrate that and to really develop a sense of joy in what they've had, rather than grief in losing it.

SC: How do you help patients hold their grief?

TK: It's definitely not by denying it! [Laughter] One must empathize with the people and just be really sensitive. You know, one time I was watching a film of a Tibetan lama who had gone into a remote area of the Himalayas. From the top of the peaks he knew he was looking into Tibet, the land he had left in 1959, and he started crying because he was seeing his country even though it was just snowcapped mountains. Someone whom I was talking to later said, "What's he crying for? I thought they were not attached?" So, it's important to be really careful when we work with the dying that we don't have this callous mode of "Get off it!" We're going into families that have been in circumstances of all kinds of joy and chaos, challenges and successes over the decades. There's one physician who says he always thought the term *dysfunctional family* was redundant. [Laughter] No matter what the circumstance, we've got lots to work on, even when it's working well. You know people are putting in a lot of effort, and I rejoice for them *so* much.

Sometimes, when people have had a lot of suffering, grief, and pain, they are looking at dying as some kind of relief. I worked with one woman who is paraplegic, and she'd been in a wheelchair almost all her life and then bedridden for the rest of it. She was so happy when she was told, "This is the end." She was absolutely celebrating. She started calling friends, "Don't come. Just celebrate and say prayers for me!" She was so happy. She thought it was going to be in two weeks, so she made all these phone calls. When she was still around a month later, she was quite upset: "I'm still here! When is this going to end? Why is this taking so long?"

SC: How does one work with persons who are not religiously or spiritually oriented?

TK: It's really all about the heart. And I've worked a lot with agnostics, atheists, radical materialists . . .

SC: They tell you their designations?

TK: Yes. They live it. I worked with one woman, an atheist, who was a real self-made woman. She raised her own son and he became a physician; she had lived a good life. She was a skier and a swimmer—very active. And she said, "When we die, we just become dirt. That's it. There's nothing else." I went to see her, although I don't know how or why she wanted to see me. Personally, I would think in some ways it would be scary to die if you believe we become nothing. But I went in to see her, and every time I'd open my mouth, she'd start screaming and covering her ears. [Laughter] "Why did you want to see me?" I asked. She calmed down, and I actually got to be with her for quite a few months and to work with her, but it's a challenge, you know? She was very, very [knocks on the table]—"Matter is all there is. Show me the proof otherwise."

SC: And how do you hold that paradigm for somebody?

TK: No matter who someone is or what they believe, they have their sensitive spots, their loves and fears. It's important to really see how to work with that and how to approach it so we can journey with them and help them be a little more comfortable and confident about what's going on.

SC: Is fear often the large presence in the room?

TK: Not necessarily. Sometimes it's anger. And denial is another *huge* one. So I talk about the niceties of the day, or lunch, or . . . I just really use my horse sense in a way, to see where there are openings to get to that soft spot. For instance, the dementia patients a lot of times may not be able to carry on a conversation, but they can go straight to the Lord's Prayer and say it with me. Early memories and early training is really lovely because it has a lot of meaning for them. And sometimes the dementia patients surprise you with words of wisdom, remarkable words.

SC: Do you have an example?

TK: I remember this time when the wife had been taking care of her husband for many years. He was so emaciated. If you looked at his ribcage, you could see into the abdominal cavity and almost see his spine—he was that thin. I guess he'd always been like a James Dean kind of tough guy, and here she was, taking care of him in his decline. We were standing over his bed one day and I was trying to lead the Four Things, but I did it backwards for them. He's laying in bed with his big blue eyes and this very emaciated body and face. I said, "You can say to each other (prompting his wife), I love you." And so she says, "I love you." And he says, "I love you," [imitating a rather gruff voice]. Then I said, "Please forgive me." He says nothing, just nothing. And his wife tells me, "Did you know we're both Catholic, but we couldn't get married in the church because he refused to go to confession? He told the priest, 'I'm not going to confession, because everything I did I did with full knowing and full volition. And I'm not going to confess that!'" The wife and I looked at her husband, and he's grinning from ear to ear!

SC: In what ways does your Dharma practice inform your work?

TK: Oh gosh, I am so glad I have that background! It gives me strength in the way of understanding, particularly because of the Four Noble Truths—our life is impermanent, and I'm right there with it every day I go to work because I'm seeing it. I'm seeing the dissolution of the family patriarch, or the daughter

who was pivotal in all the family decisions, the favorite child, or . . . I'm watching that major milepost in our life called death. My Dharma practice is really what helps me be strong, and it also helps me have love.

It's also making me inquire a little bit more, even nonverbally, at what happens in the death state, at the dissolution. In the Tibetan tradition especially, they talk about the bardo, the intermediate state, and rebirth. Physicians will mark something as physical death, but I've been in the room right after people have been pronounced dead, and there's still energy. Even though someone's eyes are fixed, it's almost as though an energy is moving in the body. And so I am becoming more inquisitive, studying more, and learning about it. In most of the situations I encounter, my job is to just help calm the chaos and to prepare for the end. Yet sometimes people are at another level—those looking at acceptance and rejoicing—appreciating what they've had. And then at another level are those who have interest in or a view of an afterlife. So I want to study more. I perk up more when teachers speak about it.

SC: How do you help a family hold the death of a young person or child?

TK: In our hospice, we're not working with children. I think that would be a whole other level to work with. For some people, hospice work is just not for them. We had one young nurse who was fantastic, everybody loved her. She was a long-haired, blond surfer who studied in Costa Rica so she could become fluent in Spanish. She would absolutely collapse after every patient died. She had to take a medical leave of absence. It was too painful. There is some kind of endurance or strength that you need for this work, and I think working with children might be challenging for me.

I have worked with young people in hospice at times. It's hard when people want to get married when they are on hospice, or if they're young or have everything going for them. I went to one patient's home—a beautiful home overlooking the ocean. Her gorgeous grandchildren answered the door, and then her husband led me in and showed me her paintings—she was a wonderful artist. She had her own studio in the back so she could paint; she was a successful gallery artist. I was led into her bedroom and it was gigantic—a living room in the bedroom! She was in the bed and I'm slightly distracted because outside the window I can see the Pacific Ocean rolling in. I said, "How are you doing this (facing death)?" And she calmly said, "I'm on to my next adventure!" And I thought, I have to remember this one because this is from a woman who went for it. She did her art; she raised her family. In some ways I find people more in regret who haven't done what they wanted to do.

SC: It sounds like you ask a lot of questions in your work, and then you listen a lot.

TK: Oh yes. Questions can open up conversation and help me to get to know the person, and also help me to know how I can work with a person. So questions are key, but listening is more key. Listening and *not* offering solutions, but allowing the person to find ways to deal with his or her own condition.

SC: I can see that being a bit of a challenge—not offering advice—because the Dharma is so beautiful.

TK: Yes, but we absolutely can't go in and proselytize, which is what could happen. We had one chaplain in training at the hospital who was so upset at our chaplain supervisor. He said, "Why didn't you let me go in there and convert them and baptize them? What a waste!" But it's absolutely against the code of ethics for chaplains. It's a very interesting balance as a chaplain, because you have to be grounded in your faith tradition, but you are absolutely not supposed to go in there and impose your views on others; you must work in a non-denominational, interfaith way.

It's a very interesting balance as a chaplain, because you have to be grounded in your faith tradition, but you are absolutely not supposed to go in there and impose your views on others; you must work in a non-denominational, interfaith way.

SC: How has this worked changed the way you think about death?

TK: Hmm . . . It's made me a little more accepting. I keep working on it. I'm more aware of death. There's an old Tibetan story about a man coming to his teacher and asking, "Can you please teach me about death so I can be prepared when my time comes?" So the teacher said, "Someone up on the mountain passed away. Someone else in the valley passed away. Someone in town passed away." That was his teaching. At the time of this man's own dying, the teacher came, and the man said, "Why did you never answer my question about death?" And the teacher said, "I did. Someone on the mountain passed away, someone in the valley passed away, and now . . ."

Because I'm in people's homes and in nursing homes (I'm not in the hospital), I'm all over Los Angeles and I drive through town thinking, two people passed away on that street, somebody over there in that mobile home park, someone over there in those swank houses. In our society we cover and distance ourselves from death so much. So in that way of the Tibetan story, I know. I know that from mansions to tenements, death is with us.

SC: Do you have any suggestions for Dharma practitioners for books you found very useful?

TK: *The Giving Tree,* the children's book, and *Mind of Clear Light: Advice on Living Well and Dying Consciously* by his Holiness the Dalai Lama. In it is a seventeen-verse prayer titled "Wishes for Release from the Perilous Straits of the Intermediate State, Hero Releasing from Fright" by the First Panchen Lama, Losang Chokyi Gyeltsen. Actually, there are many, many books on impermanence, many books that are excellent from all different angles. From the more secular model, there's one by a physician named Dr. Ira Byock, who wrote *The Four Things That Matter Most*, and he's released a new book called *The Best Care Possible*. He is a physician working very beautifully in the end-of-life field. His primary point is that the medical field is very advanced technologically but lacking and lagging in the support around the dying process.

SC: This is heavy work. How do you recover? How do you deal with your own grief, your own residue from it?

TK: It's *inspiring* work. It's helping me to look at my own mortality and that of those around me, and I work part time. If I had to do this full time, I think burn-out could happen. It's really painful when I think of the fact that my daughter and grandkids will one day have to face death, and it's also sobering. The people I work with inspire me constantly; I work with an amazing hospice team—the physicians, nurses, occupational therapists, social workers are really a great team. It's a different way of thinking, a different philosophy in working with the patients in hospice. It's much more providing comfort and a lot of psychological care, rather than going for the cure at all costs, when little can help anymore. It inspires me.

SC: Anything else you'd want to add?

TK: I think training in hospice work so that one can offer support is really, really important. To have more Buddhist chaplains out there would be wonderful. Hospices that really support the dying person in a spiritual way are essential. The fact that a lot of places—nursing homes and hospitals—are just littered with televisions going nonstop is not a very good imprint for the mind facing death. We need to really look at ways that we can support the end of life. Also, I think stretching our hearts so that we're not working in just one sphere is important. You know, working with Buddhist patients is great, but in the West there aren't that many Buddhist chaplains. As monastics and as Buddhist practitioners, we really need to expand our field in such occupations.

Postscript Comments (from a telephone interview in October 2012 after Tenzin returned her monastic vows)

SC: Will your new status as a lay woman cause you to change either your practice of the Dharma or your chaplaincy work?

TK: I'm still very much a Buddhist! I really believe that my change in status will allow me to expand my work. As a nun, I felt like I needed to explain myself all the time. Now, as a lay chaplain, I can just go in and be accepted as a chaplain. I could have done that as a nun as well, but now I can be a little more incognito as a Buddhist. I'm choosing to practice more from the heart space, rather than the mores of monastic appropriateness. For instance, having tea with a man—because his wife is dying—was worrisome for me as a female monastic. I can also sit more deeply with someone who is losing her husband and just wants to talk about God. I'm just more in that heart space with her and not defending or protecting my monastic vows. I can commune with her where she is, even though I'm holding my precepts inside.

I also returned my monastic vows because I need to take care of my own end of life. I don't have a pension or a retirement. I need to be able to focus on this without feeling bad about it. So for me, I'm rejoicing in the twenty-seven years of holding monastic vows—really appreciating the dedication and effort and the perseverance. It's just a different way of practice now, a different way of Dharma practice.

Sarah Conover *is the author and co-author of six books on world wisdom traditions and spirituality. Her book* Kindness: a Treasury of Buddhist Wisdom for Children and Parents *was ranked by Booklist as one of the ten best spiritual books for children of 2001. She is a long-time student in the Recollective Awareness sangha under Jason Siff and currently serves as editor in chief of* Present.

What Buddhism Gave Me

by Munissara Bhikkhuni

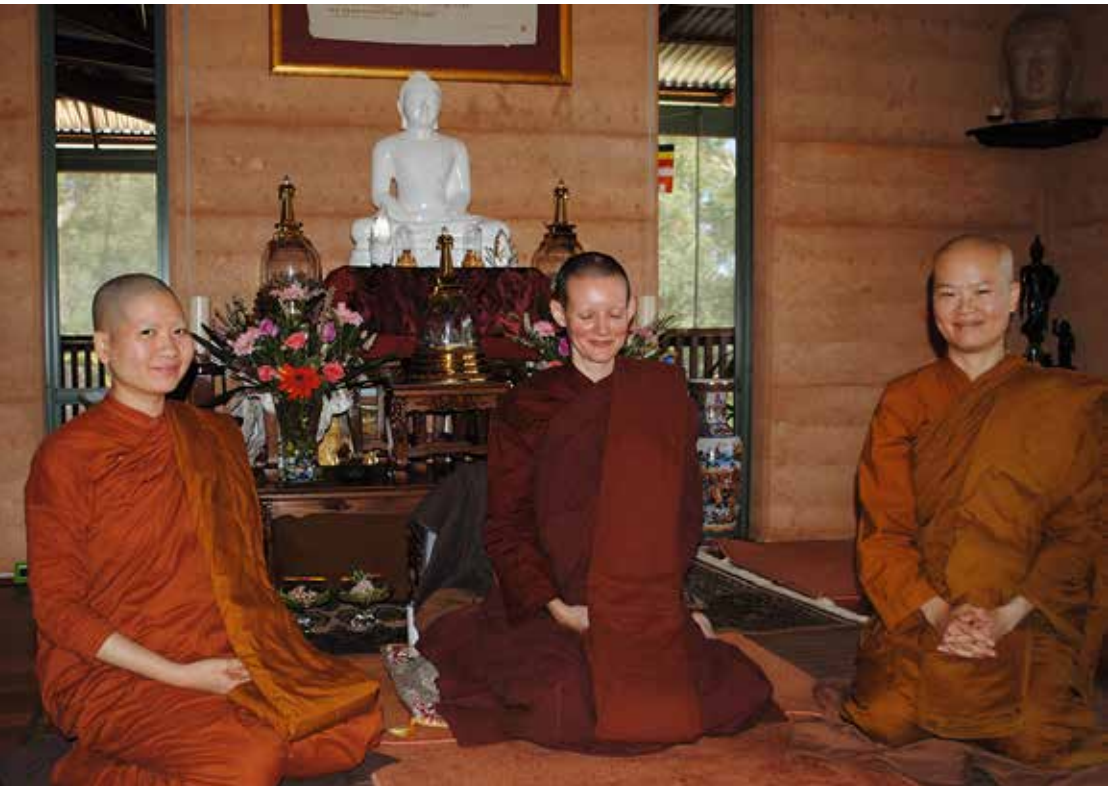
My passport says I am Thai, but actually I have lived most of my life outside of predominantly Buddhist Thailand. Although my contact with Buddhist-y things growing up was thus quite limited and ad hoc, it did provide me with a taste of a kind of happiness that did not come from simply satisfying the five senses or attaining worldly goals. This nascent interest in the spiritual dimension of life that was there since childhood became progressively more prominent as I grew older.

My parents were Thai, but I grew up mainly in the Philippines and lived there until I finished secondary school, whereupon I went to the U.S. to do my bachelor's degree. Living in the very Catholic Philippines, I grew up accustomed to seeing images of the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ, watching cartoons about the Bible, and loving the Christmas season (not just for the gifts). One of my earliest happy childhood memories was playing with the Catholic sisters at the convent just down the street from our home. Yet for some reason I never felt particularly drawn to Christianity.

Within our family, my mother had an interest in the Dhamma, which deepened as the years passed. Every year during school holidays we would return to Thailand to visit family, and occasionally my mother would take my sister and me to visit a Buddhist temple. For me, going to the temple was something special, not something I took for granted as I might have had I grown up in Thailand. I enjoyed it, as I would leave the temple feeling happy and peaceful. When I was nine or ten, my mother also galvanized my sister and me to do Buddhist chanting and a little meditation every day, although it devolved to once a week before too long. I ended up only doing some abbreviated chanting before bed, but I remember really liking this activity. Even though I didn't understand what we were chanting, as it was all in Pali, I found the chanting was soothing (and even kind of fun) and the meditation calming.

I started to question what so-called intelligence really was. It seemed to me that if a person were truly intelligent, they would know how to be happy.

Growing up, I also had a natural affinity for the actual teachings of the Buddha and wanted to learn more about them. For instance, completely on my own, with no prompting from anyone else, I chose to write a research paper in high school comparing the teachings in the major schools of Buddhism. However, it was not until university that I really looked to the Dhamma out of an earnest need of the heart. I was at Harvard, where supposedly everyone was very intelligent. Yet it struck me that most of the people walking around campus (myself included) sure didn't seem very happy. Mostly, people seemed stressed and obsessed about what they needed to do to succeed and achieve or even just to survive the daily grind. I started to question what so-called intelligence really was. It seemed to me that if a person were truly intelligent, they would know how to be happy.



Fortunately, because of my positive childhood experiences with Buddhism and my mother's interest in the Dhamma, I had a spiritual resource to turn to when the going got tough, rather than looking to alcohol or drugs, or worse. When I became severely depressed in my second year at university, upon my mother's urging, I went to a Buddhist monastery, where the friendly monk gave me an English translation of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's *Buddhadhamma for Students*. Although depression is no party in the park, looking back, I see it was an invaluable experience because it pushed me to the point where, for the first time in my life, I started asking the big questions. I was surprised I had lived as long as I had without ever thinking to ask, Why are we born? What are the most important things to do in life? What is a meaningful life? A life well led? So I read the Dhamma with a new kind of urgency, desperately searching for a way out of my misery and some answers to these questions. Reading that book by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, I was particularly taken with one sentence where he said that all of the Buddha's teachings, though vast, can be summarized into just two things: suffering and the end of suffering.

That brought me clarity. Right. So, really the point of life was to end suffering. That certainly resonated with my experience of acute unhappiness at the time, when what plainly mattered the most was somehow getting out of it. And there was a somehow—the Noble Eightfold Path—a path that wouldn't simply educate the brain, but one that would train the heart. So from that time on, I knew that ultimately the most important thing to do in life was to study and practice the Dhamma, to use this life to take further steps along the Path and grow in the Dhamma, and to work toward the ending of all suffering—both for myself and others.

Thus, the priceless gift the Buddha's teachings gave me was a clear sense of purpose in life and a path to follow.

Not just any path, but "a path secure." Once one has that in life, no matter how bad things get, at some deep level one has an internal pillar of strength, an anchor to keep one moored amidst life's vicissitudes. Because really, one of the worst kinds of suffering in life is not that which comes from a particularly tragic situation or grave disappointment, but the suffering of being lost without direction, groping around blindly in a terrible, confused muddle, not knowing whether to turn left or right, step forward or back. While treading the Path is challenging, just by getting on it, a whole heap of suffering is shed.

However, in my early twenties, while I had the vague notion that eventually I would like to get serious about the Dhamma, I still wanted to experience having normal worldly fun and get it out of my system. For a few years I lived it up as a young person, working and cavorting in one of the most happening places in the world, New York City. But it didn't take long to see the limits of that sort of fun and grow weary of it. So in my last year in the city I started attending meditation classes and volunteering at the New York Insight Meditation Center.

When I returned to Thailand at the age of twenty-five, my mother became seriously ill with a terminal condition, which made the concept of mortality a much more immediate reality to me. I asked myself, Who knows when you're going to die? How much longer are you going to wait before you get serious about the Dhamma? And now that I was back in Thailand, the land o' plenty in terms of Buddhist resources, there were ample opportunities to learn and practice the Dhamma. I started reading more about the Dhamma, attending Dhamma talks, going on meditation retreat courses, and visiting temples.

Over the years, as I became more and more engaged in Dhamma practice, I found the methods it provided for training the mind were having a gradual but noticeable effect of greater awareness and groundedness. However, I also started to feel certain conflicts and limits in trying to practice more seriously as a lay woman, when the activities and values I was giving greater priority to were at odds with what most people around me and the society at large was geared toward. At the same time, on a broader level, there was a trend emerging in contemporary Buddhism—not only in the West but also in Thailand—of growing laicization, with lay practitioners feeling more empowered to study, practice, and teach the Dhamma themselves, bypassing the need for monks, temples, and ordination. Yet to me there seemed to be something strange about that. There seemed to be inherent ambiguities and contradictions in the lives of committed lay practitioners, and an obscuration of the real and significant differences that exist between practicing as a lay woman or man and practicing as a monastic. I was so intrigued by this issue that I wrote my master's degree thesis about it, with the project serving not only to produce a piece of academic research but to enable me to reflect on these issues personally.

While every person is different and will find different pathways suitable for their particular life circumstances, for me personally, I felt increasingly drawn to the monastic life. When I started seriously thinking of ordaining and worked up the courage to actually voice my aspiration to people, I was met with support from some, but also opposition, skepticism, and discouragement from others. One monk said to me, "It is better being a lay woman because you have more freedom than if you ordain." But I thought, well, that's exactly why I want to ordain—there's too much freedom as a lay woman! But it's a phony kind of freedom. Yes, you are ostensibly free to do whatever you want, but what this really means is that you are bound to the tyranny of your *kilesas* (mental defilements), at the beck and call of the forces of greed, hatred, and delusion in your mind. True freedom, however, would be freedom from the *kilesas*.

A good case in point was my losing battle with potato chips. Yes, I was completely free to pop down to the 7-Eleven store down the road whenever I had a craving for those shiny little packages of chips (or what should be called "colon cancer in a bag"). But I was completely powerless to say no to Master Kilesa commanding me to do that. In the spectrum of vices, I suppose junk food is relatively mild, but my inability to get the better of my compulsion to eat ungodly amounts of what I rationally knew were unhealthy foods is emblematic of the essential difficulties anyone faces trying to train the mind and tame the *kilesas* without the support of conducive conditions.

Sila (virtue) is one of the great supports. In my last year as a lay woman, I started keeping the eight precepts once a week on the Buddhist holy day, and I honestly felt so blessed—saved, even—especially by the one about not eating solid foods after noon.

Sila (virtue) is one of the great supports. In my last year as a lay woman, I started keeping the eight precepts once a week on the Buddhist holy day, and I honestly felt so blessed—saved, even—especially by the one about not eating solid foods after noon. Rather than struggling so hard to hold at bay the late-night potato chip demons by myself, as I did, mostly unsuccessfully, the other six days of the week, I had the precepts as a ready-made wall to keep them out. They had no way to get close enough for me to have to deal with them. So I don't feel like more precepts caused me more hassle, but rather, more freedom. Or to be more precise, the precepts were external restrictions that worked as the means to bring about greater internal freedom.

Thus, the notion of taking on more precepts (the ten of a samaneri, or novice nun), not just once a week, but all the time, seemed like a very good idea indeed. Although I may have had some karmic reasons for being attracted to monastic life, I also had very rational reasons for wanting to ordain: basically, I had good reason to believe that the monastic way of life would be an excellent support in the study and practice of Dhamma.

The chance to hone meditation skills while on retreat also can lead to greater facility in maintaining mindfulness and wholesome mind-states on a daily basis outside of retreat.

It has now been almost three months since my going forth as a samaneri, and while this is a very modest amount of time in robes, I would say my personal experience so far has borne this out to be true, and in so many more ways than I had ever even imagined beforehand. If I were to encapsulate the manifold blessings I have gained from being ordained into one basic idea, it would be this: it is just *so much easier* to practice Right Effort, preventing unwholesome mind states from arising, abandoning unwholesome mind states that have arisen, encouraging wholesome mind states that have not arisen to arise, and nurturing wholesome mind states that have arisen that they may expand to their full development. After all, a happy mind is nothing other than a wholesome mind.

It is not just the greater precepts but the whole way of life and setup of the monastery that is designed to help support your growth in the Dhamma. So to play out the potato chip example further, it is immensely helpful not only that the precepts bar eating after midday, but also that the kitchen is closed. You don't see food laying around, you don't see anyone else snacking or inviting you to snack, you have all sorts of other wholesome activities to be occupying you at night and keeping your mind off food (what with the daily evening chanting, group meditation, and Dhamma talk routine). You can imagine your teacher fixing you with that disapproving eye if she ever caught you "illegally" snacking; you can imagine the disappointment of your monastic fellows, especially your juniors, if they saw you do it; and more importantly, you yourself would feel much more shame doing it now that you are wearing the robes and living on the generous donations of the laity.

In addition, living in an environment surrounded by the Dhamma, the Dhamma starts to seep into your mind in a more sustained and effective way than when you are living in the heart of, say, Bangkok inundated by the marketing messages of modern consumer culture. It is like trying to learn a foreign language. When you take a one-hour class once a week, or even every day, you could be studying for years and make only slow and choppy progress. But if you go and live in a place where you are totally immersed in that language, where you have to live and breathe that language, you can learn it so much more easily and quickly. That is what it is like when you ordain: you are fully living and breathing the language of the Dhamma.

Another very important benefit I have gained from monastic life is the opportunity to undertake longer periods of meditation retreat than was possible as a lay woman. Moreover, they are retreats empowered by the foundation of an existing lifestyle of renunciation, unlike the somewhat artificial meditation breaks taken out of normal lay life. I feel very grateful for those retreat opportunities generously granted me by my teacher and kindly supported by my monastic community. Those times spent devoting yourself to formal meditation practice in a more sustained and continuous way without external distractions can really give a boost to practice. When the mind becomes more subtle and clear, as can happen on retreat, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of the workings of the mind and the true nature of all things. The chance to hone meditation skills while on retreat also can lead to greater facility in maintaining mindfulness and wholesome mind-states on a daily basis outside of retreat.

Feminine Buddha at Wat-Thepthidaram
Photo: http://www.photodharma.net/Thailand/Wat-Thepthidaram/Wat-Thepthidaram.htm

While the benefits of ordaining as a samaneri have been immense and profound, after taking bhikkhuni ordination I have felt even more powerfully supported in my practice. I remember when I was a lay woman staying at a monastery in Thailand, all the monastery residents would convene to do morning chanting together. Whenever we got to the part at the end where all the laity remained silent and the monks alone would chant, "Like the Blessed One, we practice the Holy Life, being fully equipped with the bhikkhus' system of training (*Tasmim bhagavati brahmacariyam carama/ Bhikkhunam sikkha sajivasamapanna*)," I would feel a dagger in the heart. I felt so sad that women didn't have such an opportunity and really wished one day we could. I feel so grateful and incredibly blessed that now I, and increasing numbers of other women, have been able to take higher ordination and can likewise be fully equipped with the bhikkhunis' system of training.

People have asked me whether I feel keeping the bhikkhuni precepts (311 rules in the Theravada tradition) is troublesome or restrictive. Yes, they are restrictive. Wonderfully restrictive! Totally worth any minor trouble involved in keeping them. How I feel about the bhikkhuni precepts is much the same as how I felt about the samaneri precepts, only exponentially more so—that is, an even more amazing blessing and help! Again, what the rules are restricting is not your freedom, but your *kilesas.* More rules of restraint create an ever-finer sieve to keep out more and more refined defilements.

Even as an "infant" bhikkhuni of merely three months, I find having the bhikkhuni rules to work with has given so much more meat to the practice. Developing continuous mindfulness is very much aided by having more rules that impinge on the specifics of daily life. They add more concrete pegs to hang mindfulness on—simple, practical things you have to bring to mind at regular intervals rather than just floating through the day vaguely trying to maintain mindfulness. For example: "Gee, has this edible item been offered? When? For how long can it be used?"

Having more rules also means you have more things to bump up against, more often. Every time you are faced with a situation in which a rule applies, you have the chance to see the mind and any *kilesas* that pop up. You are able to look at why you might feel resistance to keeping a certain rule, whether it is laziness or greed or stubborn attachment to your ideas or whatever. It is easier to see the defilements in detail when you have these situational lenses to focus on them. You can't let go of defilements if you don't even know they're there. But every time that you can let go, every time you choose to keep the rules despite the objections of your defilements, you are reaffirming your commitment to the Path. Also, as in most cases, intention is an important factor in deciding whether you have committed an offence: you are able to practice becoming sharper and clearer about what your intentions are in doing something.

Learning about and practicing the Vinaya also helps you to develop wisdom, through the process of figuring out what the real spirit of the rules are and how to keep them in a sensible way, striking the balance between the unhelpful extremes of being overly loose or overly rigid.

During the recitation of the Patimokkha (which I feel so happy to be able to take part in), or just whenever I review the rules myself, I always feel deeply moved when I get to Bhikkhuni Pacittiya Twenty: "Should any bhikkhuni weep, beating and beating herself, it is to be confessed." That rule in particular clearly captures the spirit of the Vinaya for me—they are not draconian commandments to oppress or arcane rules to make life difficult, but compassionate measures the Buddha so caringly and patiently devised as safeguards to protect his children from causing harm to themselves or others.

Indeed, living with the bhikkhuni rules has made me feel closer to the Buddha, who now feels less and less like a statue and more and more like a real person; who, as father of the sangha, watched over the monks and nuns and lovingly helped to solve their problems and establish them securely. Bhikkhuni ordination has also made me feel closer to the sangha, for really the word *ordination* is not an accurate a translation of the Pali term *upasampada*, meaning "acceptance." As I was reminded at my *upasampada*, I have

now been accepted as a full member of the sangha, with full rights as well as full responsibilities.

Even prior to bhikkhuni ordination, as a samaneri I had already reaped enormous benefit from the Bhikkhuni Sangha. I feel tremendously grateful to Nirodharam Bhikkhuni Arama, under the compassionate guidance of Phra Ajahn Nandayani, for giving me the precious opportunity to go forth as a samaneri, then supporting me in my training as a novice nun. It is rare to find a place in Thailand that will fully support women to keep the ten precepts. It is also rare to find a place that has a large and thriving all-female monastic community. It feels very different living as a woman in a monk's monastery versus living as a woman, especially as a nun, in a nun's monastery. At a basic level, there is such a feeling of ease and comfort. Rather than always being on guard, trying to be as invisible and unobtrusive as possible at Nirodharam even when I was just a lay visitor, I could feel relaxed and free to go anywhere in the monastery and to relate casually with the nuns. Once I became a nun myself, I felt even closer to the other nuns, who felt like kind aunties or elder and younger sisters.

It was especially valuable to finally have spiritual role models who were female. Previously, I could only look to monks as role models, but no matter how wise or compassionate they were, there was still a subconscious disconnect because I just couldn't see myself in them. With Phra Ajahn Nandayani, however, I could be inspired by an example of someone who was a woman just like me, but unlike me, was clearly advanced in her practice, which gave me living proof that somehow it could be done in female form.

I am particularly indebted to Phra Ajahn for her tireless efforts to convey the Buddha's teachings to her students. Whether through her talks or the manuals, she puts much toil into producing for our benefit. Her ability to explain a wide range of Dhamma teachings in ways that are easy to understand and remember have been an invaluable help in my Dhamma education. More than that, being able to observe her at close hand in both formal and informal situations (which is much more difficult to do with monk teachers) has given me many real-life teachings in how to act, speak, and think. Conversely, being observed by her vigilant eagle eye is a great blessing because it is very rare indeed to find someone who will care enough to correct you.

However, it was not just Phra Ajahn who was my teacher at Nirodharam. I was also taught and inspired by the other nuns, whether they were my elders, peers, or juniors, as they exemplified so many beautiful qualities of the heart. Being able to live close to them in a warm and caring community, I was able to learn so much, and hopefully absorb something, from their wonderful examples.

I have also gained much from the wider Bhikkhuni Sangha outside of Nirodharam. I love the phrase *Sangha of the Four Quarters.* For me, one of the most beautiful aspects of the bhikkhuni order is that it is a timeless, boundary-less sisterhood. It does not hinge on any particular teacher (aside from the Buddha) or monastery or nation-state. It is very touching to see how the bhikkhunis around the world have been helping each other in this pioneering effort of reviving the Theravada Bhikkhuni Sangha. I felt this particularly keenly with my own higher ordination, seeing the great goodwill and generosity of bhikkhunis who readily lent their hand to help a sister—not even from their monastery or country—receive acceptance. I am profoundly grateful to my preceptor, Ayya Tathaaloka from the United States, for bringing it about and also to all the other bhikkhunis and samaneris from America and the far corners of Australia who were involved, particularly the community at Dhammasara Monastery for graciously hosting the ordination. I am also grateful to my teacher and the community at Nirodharam for giving their moral support and rejoicing on my behalf.

Yet by taking bhikkhuni ordination one is accepted not just into the Bhikkhuni Sangha, but also into the *ubato sangha* (dual sangha) of bhikkhus and bhikkhunis. It meant a great deal to me to be welcomed into the sangha by the bhikkhu brothers as well. I now feel like part of a big, warm family where all us kids, brothers and sisters alike, are trying to help Dad with the family business: Buddhasasana, Inc. (that is, incorporating both males and females, but totally nonprofit, of course). I have felt very encouraged hearing many bhikkhus saying to bhikkhunis, "Great, you can help us do the work of dispensation, the Sasana." We owe so much to the Bhikkhu Sangha, who for centuries in the Theravada tradition has been shouldering the great workload largely by themselves, preserving and passing on the Dhamma up until the present time. In these early days of the revived Bhikkhuni Sangha, the Bhikkhu Sangha has also been helping tremendously in facilitating or quietly supporting the ordination of bhikkhunis, as well as providing us with teaching and guidance. I feel very grateful for this support and hope that as we bhikkhunis grow and mature, we will be able to do more and more to help our bhikkhu brothers to serve the Sasana. May we all work together to help ever more beings, including ourselves, find liberation from suffering.

Munissara Bhikkhuni was born to Thai parents in Manila, Philippines, in 1978. After living in the Philippines, Bangladesh, and the United States, she returned to Thailand in 2003. She went forth as a samaneri in July 2009 at Nirodharam Bhikkhuni Arama in Chiang Mai, Thailand, and took bhikkhuni ordination in March 2012 with Ayya Tathaaloka Bhikkhuni as preceptor at Dhammasara Nuns Monastery in Perth, Australia. She is currently based at Nirodharam.

International Bhikkhuni Day 2012

Dedicated to the Legacy of Saṅghamittā Therī

Once a year, we pay respect to the Bhikkhuni Sangha, honoring their essential role in preserving the Dhamma. The aim is to teach people about bhikkhunis, their history, and their important role in the Fourfold Assembly. We remember prominent bhikkhunis and their unique achievements. We also honor all of our women teachers, including our mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and sisters. Celebrations range from formal events in temples to discussing the feminine in Buddhism over a cup of tea.

The 2nd Annual International Bhikkhuni Day (IBD) fell on September 29, 2012, and was dedicated to the legacy of Sanghamitta Theri, the legendary founder of the Sri Lankan Bhikkhuni Sangha.

As a support, the Alliance for Bhikkhunis offers a variety of "tools" to help groups create memorable Bhikkhuni Day celebrations. These include videos, audio talks, photos, slideshows, brochures, and articles. The following special section presents five articles from IBD 2012.

(All International Bhikkhuni Day resources can also be accessed on the Alliance for Bhikkhunis IBD webpage.)

Sanghamitta Theri Tells Her Story

By Susan Pembroke

***(Suggestions on using this article:** This article makes creative use of the known history as well as legends about Sanghamitta Theri, her father, and other key figures. The intent is to explore the moral lessons which still apply and continue to inspire. In a group setting, we suggest sitting in a circle and passing the pages from person to person, to be read aloud. A facilitator can use the questions at the end to initiate a discussion about Sanghamitta Theri, her times as well as ours.)*

My name is Sanghamitta Theri, meaning "friend of the Sangha." I don't think a more fitting name could have been selected for me. Every time someone addressed me, I was reminded of my life's mission. I was born to bring the Bhikkhuni Sangha, as well as a sapling from the bodhi tree and the Dhamma it symbolized, to Lanka, a teardrop-shaped island just off the coast of the subcontinent. In journeying there in the third century B.C.E., I preserved the Bhikkhuni Sangha.

I also imported the Buddhist values of my father, Emperor Asoka, who moved from wars of conquest to self-conquest, from aggression to peaceful coexistence with neighboring city-states. He envisioned an ideal and compassionate society, one that cared for the needs of its people and fostered learning, commerce, agriculture, health, and harmony. He forbade capital punishment. He urged religious tolerance and non-harming, and he even banned the hunting of animals for sport.

As my first Dhamma teacher, my Buddhist mother also played a crucial role in what I became. But my story, as you will see, is inextricably tied to my father's actions—the Emperor of Emperors—and their repercussions. He sent nine delegations to far-flung regions to spread the Dhamma. My brother, Mahinda, and I headed one such delegation as his emissaries in Lanka. I may have been the first woman ambassador in the world. My father's trust in me reveals how much respect and confidence he had in women, something revolutionary for the time. All of the foreign missions were charged with actualizing the highest principles of the Dhamma.

But you say I am ignoring the anguish of the hundreds of thousands killed or injured during his drive to expand his empire. Just think of all of those who died at the battle of Kalinga, you say. How many families were devastated by the deaths of fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons in that battle? How can I praise this cruel monster? Wasn't he the most feared and detested of rulers? Wasn't he called Candasoka, Asoka the Fierce? Didn't your grandfather, King Bindusara, want your father's brother Sushim to succeed him, but your father ignored his own father's wishes and instead conspire with high-ranking officials to take over your grandfather's empire? Your father eliminated the legitimate heir to the throne by tricking him into entering a pit of live coals. Your father went on to have all of your uncles killed, their heirs, and anyone else who might stop him.

Still singing his praises, Sanghamitta, you ask me? How convenient for him to convert to the Buddha's teachings and take on the title of Dhammasoka, Asoka of the Dhamma, and pile up good deeds to undo his horrifying kamma? He was no fool. He knew what awaited him. How many monasteries and stupas did he construct? Eighty-four thousand? Who wouldn't try to buy better kamma after all he did? Still not convinced, Sanghamitta, that your father was a frightened, cowardly hypocrite who was capable of immense brutality? After all, didn't he commission the creation of one of the worst torture devices imagined? We called it hell on earth for a reason. Didn't he kill his entire harem when he learned these young women had cut off the flowers and limbs of a beautiful Asoka tree, their actions revealing how they felt about him. He flew into a rage and had these young women burned, deaf to their pleas for mercy. Admit that his pride and need for total subjugation were everything, Sanghamitta. All had to bow down to him or risk their very existence.

All I can say to you and to those who denounce my father is that I did not know that monster. My father was loving and tender with my brother and me. He wanted us close to him and took us with him to the capitol Pāṭaliputta when he fought for control of the Mauryan Empire. He grew up in a world of assassins, revolts, and invasions. His harsh reprisals in the early years of his reign may have been intended to send a message: cross me at your own peril. It was what kings did at the time, or needed to do, or so he thought when he first took power, before he understood the Dhamma. Over time, he formulated another way of leading.

Many times he spoke of the war at Kalinga, the thousands of images of death forever etched in his mind, images that haunted him throughout his life. Kalinga was also a lesson to my father about the futility of aggression. Though the entire Kalinga state was annexed to the Mauryan Empire, in truth, my father only controlled a narrow strip along the coast, with strife in the rest of the country a frequent reminder to him of what hostility breeds. Kalinga was the worst and bloodiest battle for the great Mauryan Empire. It was also my father's last war. As he stepped over corpses, as he passed the weeping widows and orphans, he asked himself, is this what victory looks like? So many dying, so many maimed, or starving. He learned and he changed. I say: from this awful tragedy, much good came.

I know firsthand that he was transformed by what he witnessed at Kalinga and became determined to leave a legacy of peace and prosperity as well as model a different way of ruling. If my father had not felt tremendous guilt, if Kalinga had never happened, it is very possible I would not have been sent to establish a Bhikkhuni Sangha in the isle of Lanka. If I and my eleven bhikkhuni sisters had not gone to the island nation, the Bhikkhuni Sangha would have died out following the repeated wars and invasions from the north much later.

We brought the Bhikkhuni Sangha to the Sinhalese, we brought a cutting of the sacred bodhi tree, we brought the Dhamma to the women. Because of us, in 429 C.E. it was possible for Bhikkhuni Devasara, a Sri Lankan nun, to take a cutting from the Sri Lankan tree and travel to China with a group of bhikkhunis to establish a Bhikkhuni Sangha there. These Sri Lankan bhikkhunis gave higher ordination to more than 300 Chinese nuns at a monastery in Nanjing. A second group followed in 433 C.E. Thousands of years after my death, bhikkhunis will trace their lineage from me, to Lanka, and then to China, and then south from there again. In history's interesting twists, the revival of the Sinhalese Bhikkhuni Sangha thousands of years after I stepped onto its shores is a result of brave Lankan bhikkhunis making the dangerous trip north to China.

What people may not know is that long ago, the people of Kalinga and Lanka shared a very similar language and script. Many were kin, their ties stretching far back in time. About eighty years before my father invaded Kalinga, these seafaring, proud, and industrious people had won back their freedom from the Magadha Empire, only to suffer a much worst fate under my father. Many Kalingans fled to the island nation. If my father had not felt so much guilt about what he put the Kalingans through, he may not have felt the need to bring the Dhamma to the Lankan people, many of whom suffered under his hand at Kalinga or had family and friends who had lost their lives or all they had owned, so sacked and devastated was Kalinga.

One of the best ways to guarantee the Lankans remained a peace-loving people was to plant the Dhamma in their country. Going to Lanka was a large-scale, well-thought-out diplomatic effort. Being visionary as well as highly practical, my father had insisted that a wide range of craftsmen and artisans accompanied us in our journey. My father was sensible enough to know that people of Lanka needed more than spiritual ideals. They needed prosperity. Unless the people of Lanka flourished economically—the reason for the many tradesmen we brought—amity between our people would not last. Ensuring that Lanka became a peaceful extension of the Mauryan Empire accomplished multiple goals for my father: stability, harmony, trade to benefit all, as well as a way for my father to atone for his violence.

My brother and I were well aware of all of this. Raised in an imperial world, we were trained in diplomacy. We were also well trained in the Dhamma. Having memorized the suttas, my learned brother, Mahinda, was chosen to go to Lanka, as well as my son, Sumana. The people of Lanka so loved the Dhamma that Mahinda taught that hundreds converted. Many men went forth into the homeless life and the Bhikkhu Order established there.

But King Tissa's sister-in-law, the Princess Anula, and her retinue of 500 women also loved the Dhamma and wished to establish a bhikkhuni order. The Vinaya requires bhikkhunis to ordain bhikkhunis, so I was asked to come months later. My father, the Emperor of Emperors, King Asoka, wept, knowing he would never see any of us again. Yet he allowed me to travel with 200 people to Lanka. Does this sound like some last-minute capitulation by a father who could not say no to a daughter he loved?

Future historians would also note that of the hundreds who accompanied me, most of the high-ranking members of the delegation were my mother's relatives. Some scholars would later speculate that another reason my father sent an envoy to the island nation was to create a haven for my mother's clan from the confrontations between them and my father's clan. Before my brother left, he spent the better part of a year visiting my mother at Vedisa as well as meditating at a monastery she had constructed nearby at Sanchi. Do people think I was not a part of the many plans and conversations that took place, that my going to Lanka was not anticipated from the very beginning?

I am overdue in telling you about my Buddhist mother, who was the daughter of a Vedisa merchant. My father had stopped at my maternal grandfather's house on his way to Ujjayinī, where he was going to assume the position as the Prince Viceroy. My parents met and fell in love. They had my brother, and then two years later I was born. My mother was my first Dhamma teacher and had enormous influence on me as well as on my brother and father. From the same clan as the Buddha, my mother's Sākyan family had escaped the destruction of Kapilavatthu by Viḍūḍabha, who had invaded and massacred the Sākyas and annexed their territory to Kosala. The son of King Pasenadi, Viḍūḍabha overthrew his father and took revenge on the Sākyans for tricking his father into marrying the daughter of a slave.

Children, of course, are not privy to adult conversations or what transpires between their parents. I do know my father was determined to seize power and become the next Mauryan Emperor. I cannot imagine my mother would have encouraged my father to engage in wars of succession, especially considering how her family had been deeply scarred by violence and destruction perpetrated by Viḍūḍabha, really traumatized by the massive loss of life and annihilation of their city-state. If anything, she would have begged my father to do no harm. She may well have known what a murderous rampage my father was about to embark on and wanted nothing to do with it, which is why she did not accompany him to the capitol.

It was a time of upheaval and danger. Four years later, at my father's coronation, after he had eliminated all who stood in his way of becoming the next Mauryan ruler, the queen at his side was not my mother, but Asandhimitta. Knowing my mother as I do, I cannot conceive of her taking any joy in ascending to a throne won through so much sorrow and loss of life.

After my father became emperor, I married Aggribrahma in my early teens and we had our son, Sumana, who later became a monk and envoy for my father as well. My husband felt called to ordain after a couple of years into our marriage. I, too, had stirrings to commit myself to the Dhamma. I have Sakyan blood in my veins and felt a strong tie throughout my life to the Triple Gem and to the Buddha, who lived only 200 years before my father ascended to power. Soon, I too, ordained. My preceptor was the well-known nun Dhammapālā and my teacher Āyupālā.

The eighth year after my father's coronation, he waged war on the country of Kalinga, his last war. I was a young woman by then. The war, as I said earlier, marked a turning point for every person in our family and for every person in the empire.

Centuries later, scholars would wonder how and when my father became a Buddhist. The Pali scriptures name a couple of monks who featured prominently in my father's life. I, though, believe my mother, Devi-Vedisa, planted the seeds of the Dhamma and taught all of us the value of compassion and non-harming. I think it helps explain why the slaughter at Kalinga impacted my father so tremendously. He had absorbed more of the Dhamma than he realized. Afterwards, my father was very open about his commitment to the Dhamma in his many edicts but never mentioned my mother's impact on him.

It may be my father chose not to disclose my mother's influence as a way to protect her and her relatives. He was, after all, very sensitive about the impact on the local populace of what he wrote and thus wrote slightly different variations of his edicts to best suit an area. He also had a new chief queen who may not have appreciated his lavish praise of my mother, who remained one of his queens and someone he continued to hold in high regard. Some assumed that my mother was forgotten and abandoned by my father. Nothing could be further from the truth. Her family figured prominently in the Dhamma missions to Lanka. My father also built a magnificent stupa just outside of Vedisa, later known as the Great Stupa of Sanchi, where he helped my mother construct a lovely monastery. These and other actions reveal the depth of his devotion and respect for her.

Centuries after my death, my chroniclers will write the most fantastic things about me. They will claim I had miraculous power, such as having the ability to assume the form of a garuda, part human, part bird, to drive away nagas. For me, the real miracle is the profound impact the Dhamma had on my father, me, my family, the Mauryan Empire, as well as the isle of Lanka. When the Dhamma infuses a culture, when non-harming is the foundation of a nation, it does become heaven on earth. The fact that the Dhamma can produce the most sweeping and profound changes in anyone strikes me as utterly amazing. Let's all become miracle workers, for our good and the good of all.

Material for this article was drawn from the following sources:

Guruge, Ananda W. P. "Emperor Asoka and Buddhism: Unresolved Discrepancies between Buddhist" in *King Asoka and Buddhism: Historical and Literary Studies,* ed. Anuradha Seneviratna (Buddhist Publication Society, 1994), 37–91.

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Strong, John S. "Asoka's Wives and the Ambiguities of Buddhist Kingship." *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie, 13* (2002), 35–54.

Facilitator Comments and Questions

*(**To the Facilitator:** Please feel free to use some, all, or none of the following topics when leading a group discussion. Tailor questions and themes that are most fitting for your group. An option is to close with a guided meditation on metta, forgiveness, or peace.)*

1. What things were most striking about Sanghamitta's story? What most surprised you? What, if anything, moved you?

2. Bhikkhuni Sanghamitta Theri was a pioneer, bringing the Dhamma to a new culture. We also are pioneers, tasked with figuring out how to integrate the Dhamma into our culture. In real time, in our busy lives, how do we do that? How do we infuse the Dhamma into our family life, communities, workplace, and civic obligations? As envoys ourselves, how do we go about bringing the Dhamma to a community new to Buddhism?

3. Emperor Asoka, in his edicts, prescribes an ethical life based on broad, inclusive principles and grounded in integrity, respect, compassion, and religious tolerance. Non-Buddhist religious sects at the time could identify with what he outlined, find these ideas compatible with their own religious ideals, and wish to uphold them. Is there more we can do to find common ground with other religions and work toward a common good? How do we create greater harmony, safety, economic well-being, and justice?

4. In considering the enormous transformation Emperor Asoka underwent, can we imagine that we as well as others are capable of far greater change than we imagined possible? What would that look like? How can we encourage others to transform themselves? To feel hopeful about that possibility?

5. In purifying kamma, often it is not only our kamma but the kamma of generations and whole cultures which needs to be purified, with atonement and reconciliation called for. What aspects of our personal, family, or societal legacy demand action from us?

6. Consider reading some or a part of Emperor Asoka's Rock Edict XIII, which is his open confession about what he did to the people of the country of Kalinga (see next page). What is the value of making an open confession, of accepting responsibility for our actions and consciously atoning? How is that helpful to us, to others?

7. Is there more we can do to foster peace in our time?

Emperor Asoka's Repentance: Rock Edict XIII

[Please note that Asoka is referring to himself as King Priyadarsi, or Beloved of the Gods. In this edict, he reveals the profound and transformational impact the battle of Kalinga had on him.]

The country of the Kalingas was conquered by King Priyadarsī, Beloved of the Gods, eight years after his coronation. In this war in Kalinga, men and animals numbering 150,000 were carried away captive from that country; as many as 100,000 were killed there in action and many times that number perished.

After that, now that the country of the Kalingas has been conquered, the Beloved of the Gods is devoted to an intense practice of the duties relating to Dharma, to a longing for Dharma and to the inculcation of Dharma among the people. This is due to the repentance of the Beloved of the Gods on having conquered the country of the Kalingas. Verily the slaughter, death and deportation of men which take place in the course of the conquest of an unconquered country are now considered extremely painful and deplorable by the Beloved of the Gods.

But what is considered even more deplorable by the Beloved of the Gods is the fact that injury to or slaughter or deportation of the beloved ones falls to the lot of the Brāhmanas, the śramaṇas, the adherents of other sects and the householders who live in that country and among whom are established such virtues as obedience to superior personages, obedience to mother and father, obedience to elders and proper courtesy and are full of affection towards the former; even though they are themselves well provided for, the said misfortune as well becomes an injury to their own selves. In war, this fate is shared by all classes of men and is considered deplorable by the Beloved of the Gods.

Now really there is no person who is not sincerely devoted to a particular religious sect. Therefore, the slaughter, death or deportation of even a hundredth or thousandth part of all those people who were slain or who died or were carried away captive at that time in Kalinga is now considered very deplorable by the Beloved of the Gods.

Now the Beloved of the Gods thinks that, even if a person should wrong him, the offense would be forgiven if it was possible to forgive it. And the forest-folk who live in the dominions of the Beloved of the Gods, even them he entreats and exhorts in regard to their duty. It is hereby explained to them that, in spite of his repentance, the Beloved of the Gods possesses power enough to punish them for their crimes, so that they should turn away from evil ways and would not be killed for their crimes.

Verily, the Beloved of the Gods desires the following in respect of all creatures: non-injury to them, restraint in dealing with them, and impartiality in the case of crimes committed by them. So, what is conquest through Dharma is now considered to be the best conquest by the Beloved of the Gods.

And such a conquest has been achieved by the Beloved of the Gods not only here in his own dominions, but also in the territories bordering on his dominions, as far away as at a distance of 600 yojanas, where the Yavana king named Antiyoka is ruling and where, beyond the kingdom of the said Antiyoka, four other kings named Turamaya, Antikini, Maka, and Alikasundara are also ruling, and towards the south where the Choḷas and Pāṇḍyas are living as far as Tāmraparṇi.

Likewise here in the dominions of His Majesty, the Beloved of the Gods—in the countries of Yavanas and Kāmbojas, of the Nābhakas and Nābhapanktis, of the Bhoja-paitryānikas, and of the Andhras and Paulindas—everywhere people are conforming to the instruction in Dharma imparted by the Beloved of the Gods.

Even where the envoys of the Beloved of the Gods have not penetrated, there too men have heard of the practices of Dharma and the ordinances issued and the instruction in Dharma imparted by the Beloved of the Gods, and are conforming to Dharma and will continue to conform to it.

So, whatever conquest is achieved in this way, verily that conquest creates an atmosphere of satisfaction everywhere both among the victors and the vanquished. In the conquest through Dharma, the satisfaction is derived by both the parties.

But that satisfaction is indeed of little consequence. Only happiness of the people in the next world is what is regarded by the Beloved of the Gods as a great thing resulting from such a conquest.

And this record relating to Dharma has been written on stone for the following purpose, that my sons and great-grandsons should not think of a fresh conquest by arms as worth achieving, that they should adopt the policy of forbearance and light punishment towards the vanquished even if they conquer a people by arms, and that they should regard the conquest through Dharma as the true conquest. Such a conquest brings happiness to all concerned both in this world and in the next. And let all their intense joys be what is pleasure associated with Dharma. For this brings happiness in this world as in the next.

From: Guruge, Ananda W. P. "Emperor Asoka and Buddhism: Unresolved Discrepancies between Buddhist" in *King Asoka and Buddhism: Historical and Literary Studies,* ed. Anuradha Seneviratna (Buddhist Publication Society, 1994), 37-40.

Saṅghamittā's Story

(from Extended Mahāvaṁsa V, XV, XVIII–XX)

Text edited by G. P. Malalasekera (1937 A.D. / 2481 B.E.)
Translated by Ānandajoti Bhikkhu (July 2012 A.D. / 2556 B.E.)

Preface

The Mahāvaṁsa is a well-known chronicle from Sri Lanka that has seen a number of translations into English, most famously by Wilhelm Geiger.[1] It tells the story of the kings of Sri Lanka, the establishment of Buddhism in that country, and the support and challenges the religion has received down the ages.

What is little known to the general public is that there is a secondary version of the text, which its editor chose to call the *Extended Mahāvaṁsa*.[2] This text is almost twice as long as the original text,[3] which has been accomplished in two ways: through addition and through rewriting. It therefore contains much extra information about all aspects of the story, though the additions are unevenly spread.[4]

The sections presented here are those that pertain to the arahat Saṅghamittā's story. This is not told, as we might like, in a continuous narrative, but rather—as it is incidental to the main story—comes to us in isolated sections. Be that as it may, we still have a fairly large and interesting amount of information on a nun who was—and still is—held in the very highest esteem in Sri Lanka.

The episodes cover her birth, going forth, journey to Sri Lanka, and the central role she played in establishing the religion in that country. It also records her passing, along with the passing of the first generation of missionaries.

In what follows, the material that is different from the *Mahāvaṁsa* is set in italics and the materials that coincide are in normal font. The chapter headings are taken from the original end titles, while the internal headings in square brackets have been supplied by the translator to help give context.

The translations presented here are excerpted from a much larger selection I have been making centered around Asoka and the Missions,[5] and as far as I know they are the first translations into English[6] of any section from the extended version of the *Mahāvaṁsa*.

In preparing this translation I was fortunate enough to be able to consult with two experts on Sri Lankan medieval texts and history: Prof. Dr. Junko Matsumura in Japan and Ven. Dr. M. Wijithadhamma in Sri Lanka. If any mistakes remain, it is because I didn't get them corrected with these two scholars.

—Ānandajoti Bhikkhu, July 2012/2556[7]

From V. The Third Recital

[Saṅghamittā's Birth]

ExtMhv 246-263 ≠ Mhv XIII 8-11

Formerly in the Moriyan lineage, a son called Bindusāra was born to the previous king called Candagutta[8] in the city of Pāṭaliputta, and after the death of his father, while still growing, he became the king.

To that king there were two sons of the same mother, and to those two, there were ninety-nine other sons of the king who were brothers by different mothers.

To the eldest of them all, Prince Asoka, the Lord of the Earth gave the vice-sovereignty over the country of Avanti. Then one day the king came to the attendance hall, and seeing his son, he sent him off, saying: "Go to the country and dwell in the city of Ujjenī."

In accordance with his father's bidding, he went to Ujjenī by the interior road, and there in the city of Vedisa he arranged to make his dwelling in the house of the merchant Deva.

Seeing the merchant's daughter, he reflected gladly and said this: "I have heard she is endowed with auspicious marks, wealth, affection, and is amiable; if they will receive these gifts, I will win her favor."

They received what was given, and he became intimate with her. After life arose in the womb, she was led to the city of Ujjenī, and there she gave birth to the prince's handsome son, called Mahinda, and also had a daughter called Saṅghamittā.

When Bindusāra was lying on his deathbed, he remembered his son and sent ministers to fetch him from the city of Ujjenī. They went to Asoka with the news and announced his bidding, and he went quickly into their presence.

He placed his children and wife there on the interior road of the city of Vedisa and went into his father's presence. When his father died in the city of Pāṭaliputta, he did the proper duties to the body for seven days. Then he had his ninety-nine brothers by different mothers murdered and raised the royal canopy over himself and was consecrated right there in the city.

After the two children were sent out of the presence of the king, the venerable mother herself resided right there in the city of Vedisa.

[The Going Forth of Saṅghamittā's Uncle and Husband]

ExtMhv 462-479 = Mhv. 154-172

One day Prince Tissa went hunting and saw deer sporting in the wilderness, and having seen that, he thought thus: "Even the deer who live on grass enjoy themselves in the wilderness, will not the monks who live on pleasant food also enjoy themselves?"

He went to his house and informed the king about his thought. To teach him, Asoka gave him sovereignty for seven days, saying: "You can experience sovereignty for seven days, young man; after that I will kill you."[9]

With the passing of seven days, he asked: "Why are so you wasted away?" "Through fear of death," he said, and the king spoke again, saying: "Thinking that after seven days you will die, you did not enjoy them; how will the strivers enjoy themselves, dear, when they always contemplate death?"

Spoken to thus by his brother, he gained faith in the dispensation and in time having gone hunting again, he saw the restrained elder Mahādhammarakkhita, pollutant-free, being fanned with a sāl branch by a nāga, and the one with wisdom reflected: "When will I go forth in the Victor's dispensation and live in the wilderness like this elder?"

The elder, in order to instill faith, rose into the sky, went to Asoka's monastery and stood on the water of the pool. He hung the robes he wore in the sky and descended into the pond[10] and bathed his limbs.

The prince, seeing this psychic power, gained great faith, and saying: "Today itself I will go forth!," the wise one made a wise decision. He approached and respectfully asked permission from the king for his going forth, and being unable to prevent him, the Lord of the World, surrounded by a great retinue, took him to his own monastery, and he went forth in the presence of the elder Mahādhammarakkhita. With him roughly 4,000 other men also received the going forth, but the exact number is not known.[11]

The Lord of Men's nephew, called Aggibrahmā,[12] well-known as the husband of the king's daughter Saṅghamittā, and their son who was known by the name of Sumana, after asking permission from the king, went forth with the prince.

The prince's going forth was in King Asoka's fourth year and increased the benefit of the multitude. Right there he received the higher ordination, and having the supporting conditions, while striving, the prince became a worthy one with the six psychic powers.

[The 84,000 Monasteries]

ExtMhv 480-490 = Mhv. 173-183

All those delightful monasteries he had undertaken to build in all the cities were completed within three years. And through the superintendent elder Indagutta's psychic power, the one called Asokārāma[13] was also completed. In the various places that had been visited by the Victorious One, the Lord of the Earth made delightful shrines.

From the eighty-four thousand cities on all sides, letters were brought on the same day, saying: "The monasteries[14] are finished."

Having heard the letters,[15] the great king of great power, success, and heroism, desired to hold great festivals himself at all the monasteries. In the cities the drum was beaten and it was announced:

> A week from this day all the monasteries must hold a festival at the same time in all directions. On the whole earth, league by league,[16] give a great donation and make decorations along the pathways and in the village monasteries. In all the monasteries every day prepare a great donation for the community of monks, according to the right time and according to ability, with ornamentation of garlands of flowers and strings of lights here and there, and all musical instruments, and manifold presents. Having taken upon themselves the fast-day observances,[17] let everyone listen to Dhamma and make innumerable offerings and merit on that day.

And everyone, everywhere, in every way, in accordance with that order, prepared offerings, delighting the heavens.

[The Going Forth of Mahinda and Saṅghamittā]

ExtMhv 491-519 ≠ Mhv. 184-211

On that day the great king, decked out with all adornments, together with his harem and ministers and surrounded by his army, went to his own monastery,[18] as though splitting the whole earth,[19] and after worshipping the supreme community, stood in the midst of the community.

In that assembly there were 800 million monks, and of them, one hundred thousand were strivers who had destroyed the pollutants.[20] There were also ninety thousand nuns in that place, and at that time one thousand nuns had destroyed the pollutants.

Those who had destroyed the pollutants performed the miracle called "Opening the World"[21] for the purpose of instilling confidence in King Dhammāsoka.

Previously, because of his wicked deeds, he was known as "Violent Asoka," and later, because of his meritorious deeds, he was known as "Righteous Asoka."

He looked at the Rose Apple Island, which is surrounded on all sides by the ocean and all the monasteries decorated with many offerings, and having seen that, he was very satisfied, and after sitting down, he asked the community: "Was anyone, venerable sirs, so generous in the dispensation of the Greatly Fortunate One?"

The elder Moggaliputta[22] answered the king's question: "Even while the Fortunate One was living, there has been no generosity like unto yours!"[23]

Hearing that statement, the king was very satisfied and asked him: "Is there anyone who inherits the Awakened One's dispensation who is like unto me?"

The elder saw the supporting conditions of the king's son Mahinda, and similarly of the king's daughter Saṅghamittā, and being responsible for the dispensation, and seeing the conditions for the its growth, he answered the king:

> *Even such a one who is greatly generous is not known as an heir in the dispensation. Whoever, Great King, having amassed a heap of wealth from the plains of the earth up to the tip of the Brahma worlds would give it all as a great donation to the community of monks* is still only known as a supporter of material requisites, O Ruler of Men.
>
> But he who lets his son or daughter go forth in the dispensation is a true supporter of the dispensation, as well as our material supporter.

Then the Lord of the World, wishing to be a supporter of the dispensation, asked Mahinda and Saṅghamittā as they were standing there: "Will you go forth, dears? Going forth is known as a great thing."

Hearing their father's statement, they said this to their father: "Today we will go forth if the God-King wishes; there will be gain for us and for you in our going forth."

Since the time of the Prince Tissa's going forth, *the young man Mahinda had naturally desired to go forth;* and Saṅghamittā had made a resolve at her husband Aggibrahmā's going forth.

Although the Lord of the Earth desired to give the vice-sovereignity to Mahinda, even more than that he was pleased with his going forth. His dear son Mahinda, who was wise, handsome, and very strong, he let go forth with festivities, and also his daughter Saṅghamittā.

Then Mahinda, the king's joy, was twenty years old, and the king's daughter, Saṅghamittā, had reached eighteen.[24] On the same day he had the going forth and higher ordination, and on that very day she had the going forth and the placing in training.[25]

The prince's preceptor was called Moggali,[26] the elder Mahādeva let him go forth, but Majjhantika[27] made the formal announcement; and in the place of the higher ordination,[28] Mahinda attained worthiness, together with the analytic knowledges.[29]

Saṅghamittā's preceptor was the well-known nun Dhammapālā, her teacher the nun Āyupālā, and in time she also became pollutant-free. They both were lights of the dispensation, and helpers of the island of Laṅkā; they went forth six years after King Dhammāsoka came to the throne.

The great Mahinda, who brought faith to the island, in his third year learned the three baskets[30] in the presence of his

preceptor. The nun, a crescent moon, and the monk Mahinda, the sun, *younger sister and brother, these two were lights of the Awakened One's dispensation.*

From XV. The Acceptance of the Great Monastery

[The Great Cloud Monastery and Queen Anulā]

ExtMhv 1-37b ≠ Mhv. 1-26b

[The story now moves on around thirteen years. In the meantime, King Asoka had seen to the reunification of the Saṅgha and the holding of the Third Council, in which the teachings had been reconfirmed. Following this, the leading monk at the Council had arranged to send missionaries to the border area. The arahat Mahinda had been sent to the island of Laṅkā, where he had converted King Devānampiyatissa and many others. The story picks up as he continues with his teaching mission.]

"The elephant stall is crowded," said those who had assembled there; and outside the southern gate in the delightful Joy Wood, in the king's garden, which was well covered, cool, and grassy, the people reverentially prepared seats for the elders.

Having left by the southern gate, the elder Mahinda sat down there, *and the one skilled in Dhamma related the Simile of the Poisonous Snake.*[31] *In that place one thousand breathing beings entered into the first path and fruit*[32] *on that day, and on the second day also two and a half thousand penetrated the Dhamma.*

Many women from the great families came there *and after worshipping, sat down, filling the garden.* The elder taught the Discourse on the Fools and the Wise,[33] and one thousand of those women entered into the first path and fruit.

And so there in that garden the evening time set in, and therfore the elders departed, saying: "We go to the mountain."

Seeing them going, men said: "The elders have left straight away," and they went and informed the king. The king went quickly, and after going and worshipping the elder, the Lord of the Planet said: "Venerable sir, it is far from here to the mountain in the evening; live comfortably right here in the Joy Wood."

"It is unsuitable, being too near to the city," he said.

Hearing that he uttered this statement to the elder: "The Great Cloud Grove[34] *is neither too near nor too far,* delightful, endowed with shade and water; be pleased to reside there. You should turn back, venerable sir!" and the elder turned back.

In that place where they turned back, on the banks of the Kadamba River,[35] the shrine called the Turning Shrine was built.

The Best of Charioteers led the elders to the south of the Joy Wood and through the eastern gate in the Great Cloud Grove. There, near the delightful palace, he spread good beds and chairs and said, "Dwell comfortably here."

The king worshipped the elders and, surrounded by his ministers, entered the city, but the elders dwelt for the night right there.

Having gathered flowers in the morning, the Lord of the Planet, after approaching the elders and worshipping them with the blossoms, asked, "How? Did you abide happily? Was the garden comfortable?"

"We did abide happily, Great King; the garden is comfortable for strivers."

He asked, "Is a monastery suitable for the community, venerable sir?"

The elder said: "It is suitable," and the one skilled in what was suitable and unsuitable spoke about the receiving of the Bamboo Grove Monastery.[36] *Hearing that, the Lord of the World was happy and very joyful.*

Queen Anulā, *together with five hundred women,* came in order to worship the elders, *and after listening to the Dhamma teaching with faithful minds, they entered the second path and fruit.*[37]

Then Queen Anulā had a desire to go forth together with the five hundred women and said this to the Lord of the World: "Today itself we will go forth, if it is your wish, Lord of the Earth."

Hearing her statement, the king said to the elder: "Venerable sir, Queen Anulā desires to go forth together with five hundred women; please give them the going forth."

"It is not suitable, Great King, for us to give the going forth to women.[38] There is in Pāṭaliputta[39] a nun who is my younger sister, Saṅghamittā by name, who is famous and very learned, Lord of Men.

"Bring the southern branch from the great bodhi tree of the Lord of Ascetics,[40] and also the noble nuns, *to the city in the island of Laṅkā, King. Then as the bodhi trees of the three self-made buddhas*[41] *were planted by the kings, so today the bodhi tree*[42] *of the famous Gotama, which has a resplendent halo, should be planted, Lord of the Earth.*

"Send a message to the king, our father, saying: 'Let her come,' and that elder nun will come and give the going forth to these women."

After saying: "Well said!" and taking the noble water jug, the king said: "I give this Great Cloud Grove to the community," and sprinkled water over the right hand of the Elder Mahinda.[43]

As the water fell on the earth, with that statement the earth, in excess of four myriads, for two hundred leagues in extent, or a thousand thick, bearing waters to their edge, shook on all sides.

Having seen that wonder, fearful, frightened and apprehensive, the Guardian of the Earth asked, "Why does the earth tremble?"

"Do not be afraid, great king, the dispensation of the One of Ten Powers will be established here, and because of that this earth trembles. The first monastic dwelling place will be in this place."[44]

Having heard that statement, the Lord of the World had great faith and offered sweet-smelling jasmine flowers to the elder.

From XVIII. The Acquisition of the Great Bodhi Tree

[Requesting Venerable Saṅghamittā and the Bodhi Tree]

ExtMhv 1-32 ≠ Mhv. 1-18

In order to bring the great bodhi tree and the elder nun, the Lord of the World, remembering the statement spoken by the elder, on a certain day in the rainy season while sitting in his own city near the elder, consulted his ministers and urged his nephew, the minister called Ariṭṭha, to undertake these deeds.

After considering it and inviting him, he uttered this statement: "Dear, after going into the presence of King Dhammāsoka will you be able[45] to bring the elder nun Saṅghamittā and the great bodhi tree here?"

"I will be able, God-King, to bring these two from there if, after returning here, I am allowed to go forth, your Honor."

"You may go, dear, and after bringing the elder nun together with the bodhi tree and reaching Laṅkā, you can go forth according to your wish."

Having said that, the king sent his nephew, and he took the message of the elder and the king and worshipped them.

Leaving on the second day of the bright fortnight in Assayuja,[46] he, being dedicated, boarded a ship in the port of Jambukola[47] and crossed the ocean, and through[48] the power of the elder's determination, *on the very day of departure it arrived at Pāṭaliputta.*

Then Queen Anulā, with five hundred young women, and together with another five hundred women of the harem, having undertaken the ten precepts, pure in the yellow robes,[49] looked forward to the going forth and for the training rules that would come with the elder nun.

She made her dwelling in good conduct in the delightful nunnery in a certain district of the town where the Lord of Men had had it made.[50] As these lay women lived in the nunnery it became well-known throughout Laṅkā as the Lay Women's Monastery.[51]

His nephew Mahāriṭṭha, having reached King Dhammāsoka, spoke the king's message and the elder's message: *"Your son Mahinda, God-King, sent me into your presence. The queen named Anulā, your friend the King Piyatissa's brother's wife, O Chief of Kings, desiring the going forth, has undertaken the ten precepts together with a thousand women and lives constantly restrained. Please send the elder nun Saṅghamittā to give the going forth* and, together with her, a branch from the south side of the great bodhi tree."

Then the minister went into the presence of the elder nun and said this: "Noble sister, your brother Mahinda sent me into your presence. Devānampiyatissa's brother's wife, the lay woman called Queen Anulā, through having a desire for the going forth, together with a thousand women, lives constantly restrained. Go together with me and please give them the going forth."

Hearing the minister's word she very quickly went to her father, and the elder nun related the elder's thought: *"My brother Mahinda has sent these into my presence, and after we have sent the people back, I will go. Very many people, daughters of good families, with Anulā at their head, desiring the going forth, are looking forward to my journey."*

The king, who was flushed,[52] *hearing the elder nun's statement, with a shower of tears set rolling, said this to the elder nun: "My son Mahinda, dear, and my grandson Sumana having left us here, I am as though with my hands cut off. They both have gone to the Copper Dust Island, I no longer see them, and great grief has arisen.*

Seeing their faces today your grief will be allayed. But not seeing you also, dear, how will I put aside my grief in being parted from my son and grandson? Enough, dear, if you were to go today, you also will not return."

Hearing the statement of her father, the elder nun said this: "My brother's word has importance for me, king, together with the request of the great queen and the thousand women. Further, I suppose, this is not just my brother's word and many are waiting for the going forth, which I also desire to give, Great King, and so now I must go."

"If you desire to go, take a branch of the supreme bodhi tree and go, noble sister. You must see your brother in Laṅkā."

[Festivities for the Bodhi Tree]

ExtMhv 111-120 ≠ Mhv. 64-68

On the first day of the bright half of the month Kattikā, the Guardian of the World Asoka placed a branch of the great bodhi tree to the east of the root of a lovely great sāla tree, and worshipping it day by day, on the seventeenth day new shoots started taking hold and arose on the trunk of the delightful bodhi tree.

Seeing that, the Lord of the World, his mind faithful and satisfied, with his ten fingers raised in reverential salutation to his head, said: "I give it sovereignty over the whole of the Rose Apple Island," and the Lord of the World consecrated the great bodhi tree with sovereignty.

The novice Sumana, who was sent by Mahinda in order to take a relic of the Teacher together with his bowl, on the full moon day of Kattikā, flew through the sky and arrived in the delightful City of Flowers.[53]

At that time the great bodhi tree had been placed at the root of the lovely sāla tree, and in that place he saw them worshipping with the offerings at the Kattikā festival. The Lord of the Planet placed a guard around the bodhi tree and dwelt near it together with his council of ministers.

All the women of the harem, with Saṅghamittā at their head, went out from the city and worshipped it with all sorts of offerings, and they dwelt near the great bodhi tree, together with their husband.

The worship of the beautiful, noble, excellent bodhi tree, with many and extensive flags, flowers, and fruits at its head, opened the minds of men and the protective gods, like a lotus opened by the rays of the sun without any effort on its part.

The blossoming flowers in the lakes of Pāṭaliputta delighted the minds of the people and the protective gods. After emitting six colorful rays in the sky and on the ground, and instilling faith in all the people, it dwelt there like an Awakened One.

Written for the faith and invigoration of good people
the eighteenth chapter in the great lineage called
The Acquisition of the Great Bodhi Tree

From XIX. The Journey of the Great Bodhi Tree

[Saṅghamittā and the Bodhi Tree Set Out for Laṅkā]

ExtMhv 1-37 ≠ Mhv 1-22

In order to protect the great bodhi tree, the Best of Charioteers appointed eighteen from royal families, eight from ministerial families, *eight from brahminical families, eight from merchants' families, and from the foremost and faithful cowherders' families, the sparrow weavers',*[54] *the potters' families, the hyena families, eight of each were also appointed.*

He sent nāgas and yakkhas together with their assembly and sprinkled it with water brought for the purpose day by day and gave eight gold and eight silver water pots, as was desired. Then taking the great bodhi tree and worshipping it in various ways, he said: "In whatever way you like, go from city to city."

The Ruler of Men, surrounded by his army, dismissing them, went immediately with his elephants, horses, and chariots, and by crossing through the jungle called the Viñjhā Forest, he arrived at Tāmalitti[55] *within seven days.*

The gods, nāgas, and men quickly assembled on the highway and worshipped the bodhi tree in the way they liked, and worshipped it with a great offering day by day with manifold heavenly musicians' music and song, and going gradually they also arrived on the seventh day.[56]

The Lord of the World placed the great bodhi tree on the bank on the great ocean and worshipped it with various offerings for seven days, and the Guardian of the World, the Best of Charioteers, consecrated the great bodhi tree with sovereignty over the whole of the Rose Apple Isle.

On the first day of the lunar fortnight in the bright half of Maggasira,[57] *he raised the great bodhi tree with help given by eight of each from the highborn families appointed at the root of the sāl tree with all kinds of offerings. He descended into the water up to his neck and established it properly on the ship and invited the great elder Saṅghamittā with eleven other nuns*[58] *onto the ship with various offerings.*

Then he uttered this statement to his chief minister, Mahāriṭṭha: "This great bodhi tree, dear, I consecrated three times with sovereignty over the whole of the Rose Apple Isle. Now, after bringing the great bodhi tree myself and arranging all kinds of ceremonies here in the port town, I descended up to my neck into the water and established it on the ship with the elder nun Saṅghamittā.

"Seeing that you are sent back from the city to my friend, the king should also worship it with sovereignty in the same way. As I have made all kinds of ceremonies and offerings, my friend the great King Devānampiyatissa should also make all the offerings that have been made by me."

Having given this advice to his friend, the resplendent Guardian of the World, lamenting tearfully, uttered this statement: "Alas, the bodhi tree of the virtuous one, the One of Ten Powers! While it is still emitting a net of twenty colored rays, we have gladly given it up."

Having said this, the great king, after making reverential salutation with his head, seeing the great bodhi tree going with the elder nun, stood depressed on the bank with a shower of tears set rolling.

While watching the ship with the great bodhi tree on board going from the multitude and the king, after crossing the water someway, the waves settled down for a league all round on the great sea.

Five-colored lotuses on all sides blossomed, and in the firmament manifold instruments played, manifold offerings were made by the gods, and the nāgas worked magic in order to seize the great bodhi tree.

The great elder Saṅghamittā, who had gained the strength of psychic powers, took the form of a supaṇṇa[59] and frightened the great snakes.

Trembling and fearful, seeing the spiritual power and the splendour of the great elder nun, they worshipped the elder's feet with their heads and begged for their lives, saying: "Don't be angry with us, noble sister, on this journey today there will be no obstacle for you, you will be safe; we have come in order to ask for the bodhi tree."

She gave the great bodhi tree to the nāgas to worship, and they took the great bodhi tree to the dragons' abode. They worshipped it with various offerings and gave it sovereignty over the nāga realm for seven days, brought it back, and placed it on the ship, and that same day the ship arrived at Jambukola in Laṅkā.[60]

King Dhammāsoka, affected with grief[61] *over separation from the great bodhi tree, helpless, looked longingly toward that region, and after making great lamentation, he went back to his city.*

[Reception in Laṅkā]

ExtMhv 38-51 = Mhv. 23-31

King Devānampiyatissa, who delighted in the benefit of the world, had heard from the novice Sumana about the day of the arrival of the bodhi tree, and from the first day that began the month of Maggasira, he decorated the highway from the north gate as far as Jambukola with silver leaves of cloth strewn like sand that had been sprinkled all round on the highway.

From the day the king went out from the city, he waited at the grounds of the reception hall by the ocean, and there the Lord of the Earth, through the psychic power of the great elder nun, saw the great bodhi tree coming in the middle of the great ocean, decked out in all its splendor, and by the power of Mahinda, he drew as though close to it.

In that place a hall was made to display the wonders which became well-known as the Ocean Reception Hall. After leaving the Ocean Reception Hall and standing outside, while raising the pandal, he saw both of the roads strewn all round with five-colored flowers and various flags and clothes, together with priceless flowers, great water pitchers, all full with lilies.

The Guardian of the World, having placed them at intervals on the road, through the power of the great elder together with the other elders, after leaving, in one day had reached Jambukola.

The Lord of the Earth, driven by joy at the coming of the great bodhi tree, plunged into the water up to his neck and raised the beautiful body of the great bodhi tree on his head.

He emerged from the ocean, placed it aside with all offerings, and put it under the care of the sixteen families in that lovely pavilion. For three days on the shore of the ocean, the Lord of Laṅkā, having adorned it, worshipped it with sovereignty over Laṅkā.

[Saṅghamittā and the Nunneries]

ExtMhv 118-120 & 166-189 ≠ Mhv 68-85

Near the Lord's great bodhi tree, through the wonder of being near the flag of the true Dhamma preached in the lovely words of the land of Laṅkā, Queen Anulā, with five hundred women and together with another five hundred women of the harem, received the going forth in the presence of the elder Saṅghamittā, and those one thousand nuns, after developing insight, in no long time attained the state of worthiness.

The great elder Saṅghamittā lived in the nunnery known as the Lay Women's Monastery together with her Community. She made there three dwelling places which were considered the foremost.[62]

Previously, Queen Anulā had heard a Dhamma teaching in the elder Mahinda's presence, understood the truths, donned the yellow robes, undertook the ten precepts and made her dwelling in the home of the minister named Dolaka.[63]

Afterwards, with the coming of the elder nun to the island of Laṅkā, these three foremost palaces—Small Chapter, Great Chapter, and Increasing Splendor—were made by the Lord of the World.

For the benefit of his retinue and many others in the palace, when the great bodhi tree was brought in the ship, the Ruler of the World had the mast placed in the house named the Small Chapter, the sail was established in the Great Chapter house, and then the rudder was placed in the Increasing Splendor house.[64]

The Lord of the World, who was of such a kind, endowed with virtue and respect for the Three Treasures, paid lifelong respect to the bodhi tree and caused all the places in the isle to be prepared, gaining a famous name, lasting even until today.

The king's state elephant, which wandered wherever it liked, stayed on one side of the city in a cool spot in a mountain grotto, near to a kadambapuppha bush, where it grazed.

Often people journeyed there, and after seeing the elephant, and saying, "This elephant delights in the Kadamba Grove," fed it with rice and fattened up the elephant, and that place came to be known by the name of the Measure of Grain.[65]

One day the elephant didn't take even a morsel, and the king asked the elder who brought faith to the island the reason. "Near the kadambapuppha bush site he desires that a sanctuary be built," the great elder said to the great king.

The king, who was ever delighting in the welfare of the people, quickly built a sanctuary there together with a relic and a sanctuary room.

The great elder Saṅghamittā, who longed for an empty abode, as the dwelling place she lived in was crowded, seeking the benefit of the dispensation and the welfare of the nuns, being wise and desiring another nunnery, went to that lovely shrine house, which was comfortably secluded, and spent the day there, she who had faultless skill in dwellings.

The king, after going to the first nunnery in order to worship *the elder nun, heard that she had left the place. He departed from the nunnery, arrived near the shrine house, and worshipped the great elder.*

After exchanging greetings with the elder Saṅghamittā, understanding her intention, the Guardian of the World, who was a wise man, skilled in intentions, a hero of great power, *had a delightful nunnery built near the sanctuary house.*

The nunnery was built near where the elephant took his measure of grain therefore it became well known as the Elephant's Measure Monastery.

The good friend,[66] the great elder Saṅghamittā, who was greatly wise, then made her dwelling in that delightful nunnery.

Thus benefitting the world of Laṅkā, and accomplishing the development of the Dispensation, the great bodhi tree, endowed with various wonders, remained for a long time[67] in the Great Cloud Grove, in the delightful island of Laṅkā.

Written for the faith and invigoration of good people
the nineteenth chapter in the great lineage called
The Journey of the Great Wisdom Tree

From XX. The Complete Emancipation of the Elders

[The Passing of Arahat Mahinda]

ExtMhv 43-64 ≠ Mhv 29-47

After the King Devānampiyatissa's passing, his younger brother, well known as Uttiya, *also born of King Muṭasīva, ruled righteously.*

The elder Mahinda was the Light of Laṅkā, a leader of a great crowd, who lit up the island of Laṅkā, who propogated the supreme dispensation of the Victor consisting of proper study, practice, and penetration. He, who was like the Teacher,[68] benefitted many in the world in Laṅkā, *with a virtuous crowd of wise monks in the community,* in the eighth victorious year of the King Uttiya, *within the rains retreat, after he had dwelt sixty years near the Cetiya mountain,* on the eighth day of the bright half of the month Assayuja,[69] *that passionless elder, who increased the light,*[70] *attained emancipation.*

As the passionless Mahinda passed on the eighth day, it was agreed upon that his name be given to the eighth day.[71]

Hearing that, King Uttiya was affected by the dart of grief, and after going, worshipping and lamenting the elder a great deal, he had the body of the elder quickly laid out in a golden casket that had been sprinkled with perfumed oil.

He placed that perfect casket on a golden bier and lifted it, and while making righteous ceremonies with a great flood of people who had come together from here and there, he made various offerings with a great army of people.

Going through the city's decorated path that had many decorations, *they lifted and carried the bier along the highway, and led it to the Great Monastery, together with the assembly, and placed the decorated bier there.*

The Guardian of the World celebrated in the Mango Question enclosure for seven days with arches, flags, and flowers, with pots full of incense, adorned for a distance of three leagues around the monastery.

This was through the power of the king, but the whole island was decorated through the power of the gods.

The Lord of the World made many offerings for a week, then in the easterly direction in the elder's enclosure, he made circumambulation of the fragrant pyre near the Great Sanctuary and led the delightful bier to that place and placed it on the pyre, paying his final respects.

After lighting the fire and sprinkling with perfumed water, the Lord of the Earth, right there in the elder's cremation spot made a shrine and deposited the relics there, as was fit.

The Ruler of Men had half of his relics deposited in the Cetiya mountain, and deposited the rest of the relics in all the monastic sanctuaries, and he *made offerings day by day.*

The place where the sage's body had been laid is called, out of respect for him, the Seer's Courtyard. Thenceforth after bringing the body of the noble ones from three leagues all round, they were burnt in that place.

[The Passing of Arahat Saṅghamittā]

ExtMhv 65-74 ≠ Mhv 48-53

The great elder Saṅghamittā, of great power, great intelligence, *fulfilled all duties to the dispensation with virtue and wisdom, and benefitted many people in the delightful island of Laṅkā.*

Nine years after the beginning of the reign of King Uttiya, being fifty-nine years old,[72] *while residing in the Elephant's Measure House, this light of the world passed away.*

Hearing that, King Uttiya, affected by the dart of grief, with a shower of tears set rolling,[73] *went out with his assembly and just as for the elder Mahinda, he made supreme offerings and paid respect to the elder nun for a week in that place,* and decorated the whole of Laṅkā as for the elder Mahinda.

After seven days the elder's body was placed on top of a bier and *was led round the delightful city with the assembly and the Guardian of the World, placing the decorated bier aside,* near to the beautiful hall, in sight of the great bodhi tree, *on the eastern side of the Sanctuary Monastery,* in the place indicated by the elder nun, had the cremation carried out.

The Lord of the World Uttiya also had a sanctuary built in that place. *Having taken her relics, he deposited them in the sanctuary, and he worshipped there day by day, with all kinds of offerings.*

[The Passing of Other Elders]

ExtMhv 75-82 ≠ Mhv 54-58

Also the five great elders—Ittiya, Uttiya, the great elder Bhaddasāla and the greatly intelligent Sambala, and Mahinda—these five, being without pollutants, attained emancipation.

Also beginning with the great elder Ariṭṭha, greatly wise and skilful, after skillfully teaching many students in the discipline, doctrine, and abstract doctrine, being expert in discrimination, together with innumerable thousands of monks who had destroyed the pollutants, passed away.

Also the twelve elder nuns, beginning with Saṅghamittā, and many thousands of nuns who had destroyed the pollutants, who were learned, greatly wise in the discipline of the Victor's tradition, after showing the light, shining forth, and lighting up the earth like a mass of fire, being pollutant-free, attained emancipation.

King Uttiya made his reign for ten years, then, *being oppressed by disease, he attained the state of impermanence,* just so is the whole impermanent world heading for destruction.

That man who, knowing that impermanence is very violent, strong, and unstoppable doesn't grow weary of coming to existence, and being tired of it, doesn't have disgust for wicked things and doesn't delight in meritorious things, because of the strength of his great delusion is one who, though knowing the truth, forgets it.

Written for the faith and invigoration of good people
the Twentieth Chapter in the great lineage called
The Complete Emancipation of the Elders

Endnotes

[1] First published in 1912. The edition I have access to was published by the Ceylon government in 1950 and reprinted in 1986. There are also translations by George Tourner (1837), Ananda Guruge (1990), and an abridged translation by Ruwan Rajapakse (2001).

[2] Extended Mahāvaṁsa, Chapters XII-XIV, edited by G. P. Malalasekera, Colombo 1937. Reprinted by the Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1988. I think it would have been better called the Expanded Mahāvaṁsa, as there is a danger of thinking of it as an extension rather than enlargement of the original, and confusing it with the so-called Cūḷavaṁsa.

[3] 5,791 verses against 2,904.

[4] Sometimes the extended version simply follows the original-for a long time, at others it gives a lot of information otherwise not recorded there.

[5] For more selections please see http://www.ancient-buddhist-texts.net/English-Texts/Asokan-Missions/index.htm.

[6] The text has not yet been translated into Sinhala either.

[7] Buddhist era.

[8] Candagutta was the founder of the Mauryan Empire, which eventually Asoka inherited.

[9] As he had already killed ninety-nine of his brothers, this must have sounded very threatening.

[10] Monks are allowed three covers for their bodies: their robes, a fire-house (sauna) covering, and a body of water covering. See Vinaya Cullavagga, Ch. 5, 16, 2.

[11] A curious admission, as the numbers never seem to be realistic anyway. Geiger interprets this as meaning: *the number of those who afterwards were ordained is not known*; but quite how he derives this meaning is unclear to me.

[12] Although I cannot find more information on Aggibrahmā, it appears he must have been Tissa's son, as it is inconceivable that Asoka, who had killed all his rivals to the throne except Tissa, would marry his daughter to one of his rival's sons.

[13] I.e., Asoka's monastery.

[14] *Vihāra* literally means *"a living place,"* but by this time it had taken on the special meaning of *a living place for monastics,* i.e., a monastery.

[15] We would say *"having read the letters,"* but in court the letters would have been read out.

[16] Meaning "*in every place.*"

[17] This means the eightfold precepts, in brief: to restrain from killing, stealing, sexual contact, wrong speech, intoxicants, eating after noon, amusements, and decorations.

[18] I.e., the Asokārāma.

[19] The simile is not clear; maybe it is meant to indicate his power.

[20] I.e., were arahats.

[21] Described in the Buddhavaṁsa commentary as making all the beings in the universe visible to each other, from the highest heaven to the lowest hell.

[22] Ven. Moggaliputta Tissa was the chief elder in the Saṅgha at the time and would soon head the Third Council.

[23] Interestingly, this places Asoka above Anāthapiṇḍika as the most generous supporter.

[24] I do not know how we can reconcile this with her having had a son who had taken novice ordination two years earlier. If it were so, it would mean that she gave birth to her son around age 11.

[25] This means she was given the further ordination as a *sikkhamāna,* which she must hold for two years, before acquiring her higher ordination as a *bhikkhuṇī.*

[26] I.e., Moggaliputta Tissa.

[27] These are two of the named missionaries in the later part of the text, who took the Dispensation to Mahisamaṇḍala and Kasmīra Gandhāra, respectively. They were sent on their missions by Mahinda's preceptor, Moggaliputtatissa.

[28] It means right there in the *sīma*, or boundary hall.

[29] They are four: *analytic knowledge of meanings, conditions, language, and of improvisation.*

[30] The three baskets of the teaching: Discipline (*Vinaya*), Doctrine (*Dhamma*), and the Abstract Teaching (*Abhidhamma*).

[31] Probably SN 35, sut. 238, although there are others that include a relevant simile. It was also taught by Majjhantika in Kasmīra Gandhāra, see above XII v. 30.

[32] I.e., they became stream-enterers (*sotāpanna*).

[33] MN 129; it relates the deeds done by fools and by wise men and their respective rewards.

[34] Situated south of the Joy Wood, which itself was south of the city area.

[35] Which lay to the east of the city.

[36] By the Buddha from King Bimbisāra; see The Great Chapter, section 40.

[37] They became once-returners (*sakadāgāmī*).

[38] Mahinda says this because he believes dual ordination is necessary, whereby a female aspirant needs to be ordained by nuns first, and then have the ceremony confirmed by monks. This is sometimes disputed, as the Buddha never revoked the original ordination by monks only, but clearly this was Mahinda's understanding.

[39] The capital of the Asokan Empire. It is mentioned in

Mahāparinibbānasutta, DN 16, as *Pāṭaligāma*, and is called so because of the *Trumpet Flowers* (*Pāṭali*) that were growing there when it was founded; it is also known as *Pupphapura* and *Kusumapura* (both meaning "*Flower City*").

[40] It means *"a sapling."*

[41] These are the three buddhas preceding Gotama in this aeon: Kakusandha, Konāgamana, and Kassapa. All the buddhas have different bodhi trees; in their cases they were *acacia sirissa, udumbara (glamorous fig tree),* and *nigrodha (banyan tree).*

[42] The *assattha* or *fig tree (ficus religiosa).*

[43] This is a way of making a formal donation by pouring water; it was also done this way by King Bimbisāra when he donated the Bamboo Wood.

[44] I.e., the Mahāvihāra, or Great Monastery, which became the seat of Theravāda orthodoxy. The emphasis is changed somewhat from the Mahāvaṁsa version; there, as soon as he had given the grove, the dispensation is said to be established; whereas here it will be established only when the monastery has been built.

[45] *Sakkhissasi* is unclear; it suggests a verb *sakkhati*, which is not found in Pāḷi. In Mhv. there are many vvll, most of which connect it with *sakkoti*, *being able*.

[46] Normally falling in October.

[47] Probably on the northern coast of the Jaffna peninsula.

[48] ExtMhv: *Therādiṭṭhabalena pi; through strength unseen by the Elder,* which doesn't make much sense.

[49] It is interesting that she is portrayed as already wearing the yellow robe, even though she only has ten precepts, which are not even *sāmaṇerī* precepts. It is a strong echo of the first nun Mahāpajāpati and her following, who also donned robes before they were ordained.

[50] The exact location cannot now be determined, except that it was within the city limits.

[51] The proper name for a residence for nuns (*bhikkhuṇīs*) is an *upassaya*; but before they were ordained they lived there as lay women under ten precepts, so it became famous as the Lay Women's Monastery.

[52] Lit., *white-throated*. I cannot find this word or phrase used elsewhere, and the reading must be in doubt.

[53] Another name for Pāṭaliputta, Asoka's capital, now known as Patna.

[54] It is unclear why the weavers are designated as "*sparrow weavers*" or what the *hyena* families mentioned were. Geiger suggests these may be totem clan names.

[55] On the coast of the Bay of Bengal, near to modern-day Kolkata.

[56] This account is different from the Mahāvaṁsa, where the bodhi tree is put on board ship and sails down to Tāmalitti. Here it appears to be taken by the land route before it sets sail.

[57] Normally falling in December.

[58] These are named in Dīpavaṁsa, XVIII, vv. 11–12 as follows: *Uttarā, Hemā, Pasādapālā, Aggimittā, Dāsikā, Pheggu, Pabbatā, Mattā, Mallā and Dhammadāsiyā.*

[59] The traditional enemies of the nāgas (mythical snakes) were the supaṇṇas (mythical birds).

[60] This is the same port from which the envoys had left Laṅkā, see Ch. XVIII, vs. 8 above.

[61] A play on his name. *Asoka* means "*griefless*"; here he is said to be *sasokavā (with grief)*.

[62] In Mhv. it mentions that she built twelve dwelling places in all.

[63] It appears from this that the Lay Women's Monastery had previously been Doloka's residence. Exactly how we reconcile this with the statement in XVIII v.12 that the king had built the nunnery, I don't know. It may be that the traditions were not properly harmonized at this point.

[64] Dr. Hema Goonatilake, in her paper "The Unbroken Lineage of the Sri Lankan Bhikkhuni Sangha from 3rd Century B.C.E. to the Present," makes the interesting point that these nunneries are the first museums we hear of in history.

[65] Contrary to Geiger, who interprets *ālhaka* as meaning "*post*" (a meaning not found in the dictionaries), this story indicates that the reason for the name is that the elephant was given a full measure of food by the visitors to the place.

[66] This is a play on her name, which means "*friend of the community*."

[67] Indeed, it still remains there to this day, being the oldest historical tree in the world.

[68] I.e. the Buddha.

[69] Around October.

[70] Or perhaps, "*who increased the (virtue in the) island.*"

[71] It seems each day of the lunar month had a name specially assigned to it, and they gave Mahinda's name to the eighth day of the month.

[72] Note that in verse 46 above Mahinda is said, in the eighth year of King Uttiya's reign, to have lived sixty years in the caves at Mahintale. Evidently these figures cannot be reconciled with what is now said here.

[73] The third time this phrase has been used about the elder: first when she told her father, King Asoka, she was going to Laṅkā, and next when she actually left for the island, never to return.

Ānandajoti Bhikkhu has been resident in the East since 1987, mainly in Sri Lanka, India, and Malaysia. He ordained in the Theravāda tradition in 1995 and received higher ordination the following year. Being already familiar with Indian languages from his stay in India, in his first Rains Retreat he began an intensive study of Pāḷi. For a couple of years he worked for the Sri Lanka Tripitaka Project, correcting and re-editing the databases of the Sinhalese edition of the Canonical texts, and since then he has also studied Sanskritized Prākṛt and Classical Sanskrit. Ānandajoti started the website Ancient Buddhist Texts in 2002 as a way of publishing material from the broader early Buddhist Tradition in the original languages. The website, which is still expanding, includes texts, translations, and studies from both the early and medieval periods, in Pāḷi, Sanskritized Prākṛt (BHS), and Classical Sanskrit, with a special emphasis on the collection and organization of the texts, and also their grammar and prosody.

Beautiful Eyes Seen with Insight as Bereft of Beauty

Subhā Therī and Her Male Counterpart in the Ekottarika Āgama

By Bhikkhu Anālayo

With the present paper I follow up a theme broached by Olivia (2011: 14) in the previous issue of *The Sati Journal: The Journal of the Sati Center for Buddhist Studies* regarding ways of reading the Therīgāthā. She observes that "We are indeed fortunate that any texts composed by ancient women have been preserved. However, we should not let our gratitude for these female voices lead us into projecting our values anachronistically and observing only their 'femaleness.'" Instead, she notes that "it is necessary to read the Therīgāthā within its specific cultural and historical contexts. Not doing so does an injustice to the poems of these female disciples."

Regarding Buddhist Studies in general, Faure (2003: 5f) observes that at times "feminist scholars tend to project current normative conceptions and ideologies onto past cultures . . . much feminist work on Buddhism has been concerned with 'singing the praises of exceptional women' or chronicling the indignities suffered by women. This approach, however, is increasingly criticized as being blind to cultural and historical contexts."

Since the groundbreaking translation and study by Rhys Davids (1909/1964) and Horner (1930/1990: 162–210), considerable scholarly attention has been dedicated to the Therīgāthā.[1] Due to the efforts of these scholars, we have become aware of many facets of this collection, and I believe that Olivia has a point that the Therīgāthā is sometimes read from a slightly one-sided perspective that overemphasizes gender-related issues, thereby running the risk of ignoring the doctrinal points the stanzas intend to convey. With this I certainly do not intend to downplay the central importance of the Therīgāthā as a remarkable record of female spirituality in the early Buddhist tradition. My point is only that there is often more to its stanzas than the topic of gender.

To illustrate this point, in what follows I take up the motif of gouging out one's eyes as a way of demonstrating their lack of inherent beauty. The idea of taking out an eye is to some degree a natural one, given that the eye is the only physical organ that can be disjoined from the body without recourse to a surgical instrument. Moreover, once taken out of its socket an eye indeed loses all of its former attraction. In the Therīgāthā this motif occurs in a set of stanzas attributed to the nun Subhā, which report that she took out one of her eyes in order to keep a sexually aroused man at bay. After presenting the main plot, I then survey comments made by some scholars regarding this tale, followed by presenting a discourse in a collection preserved in Chinese translation which contains a similar motif, but where the gouging out of an eye is undertaken by a male protagonist rather than a female one.

The stanzas of the Therīgāthā attributed to Subhā Jīvakambavanikā begin by describing that, while on her way to Jīvaka's Mango Grove, she is intercepted by a man with evil intentions (Thī 366). She asks why he is obstructing her, indicating to him that it is not proper for him to touch a woman who has gone forth, adding that she is one who has gone beyond sensual desire. The man replies by praising her beauty, telling her that she should give up her robes. Instead of going alone into the woods, he wants her to be dressed up beautifully and live in luxury with him. On being asked what particularly attracts him, he praises her beautiful eyes, explaining that looking at her eyes arouses his sensual desire ever more (Thī 381f). Subhā replies by declaring her total disinterest in sensuality and pointing out that an eye is simply a little ball set in a hollow place. She then plucks out one of her eyes and hands it to the man (Thī 396). He is shocked by this act and comes to his senses, begging her forgiveness for his foolish behavior. The stanzas conclude by reporting that later, after having seen the Buddha, Subhā's eye is miraculously restored (Thī 399).

In his study of the Therīgāthā, Rajapakse (1995: 16f) makes the important observation that Subhā's stanzas are a striking example for a tendency in the Therīgāthā to depict "a veritable role-reversal: far from fostering passion, in its verses women proclaim piety and dispassion to worldly and passionate men." He concludes that with the stanzas spoken by Subhā "it is women's success in overcoming . . . men, and their considered attempts to divert women from spiritual endeavours, that the verses . . . most strikingly record."

In a detailed analysis of the stanzas attributed to the man who accosts Subhā, Kloppenborg (1995: 160) points out that these reflect "the traditional arguments of male chauvinism," namely that:

- "a young, beautiful woman should not be celibate,
- "a woman should not be alone and needs male protection,
- "a woman is a man's playmate,
- a woman under male control is happy,
- "if a woman decides to remain alone, she is despicable."

In this way, the Subhā tale can be seen to caricature such male presumptions—needless to say, such presumptions are not confined to an ancient Indian setting—set against the vivid contrast of a woman who has reached the acme of spiritual perfection and gone beyond any interest in what male company might have to offer.

In a paper dedicated entirely to the Subhā tale, Trainor (1993: 65) draws attention to the eyes as "the central metaphor of the poem, with its complex associations of aesthetic beauty and spiritual insight." The primary contrast in the stanzas indeed revolves around a male blinded by passion in contrast to the nun's insight. By offering her eye to the man, Subhā in a way bestows on him at least an inkling of her vision of the true nature of the human body. The same theme continues until the happy end of the story, as on coming to see the Buddha, her eye is miraculously restored.

Based on a detailed study of the Subhā tale as part of her investigation into instances of misogyny in Buddhist texts, Wilson (1996: 169) comments that "there is great irony in the fact that Subhā must blind herself in order to get the attention of the rogue and make him listen to her. It is only by blinding herself, it seems, that Subhā is at last treated as a woman of insight—a seer and not just a sight to be seen. Perhaps we can also read Subhā's willingness to give up her own organs of sight as an indication that she eschews the female gaze."

Wilson (1996: 179) then concludes her study of several such cases by indicating that "self-disfiguring nuns like Subhā who edify men through heroic displays of their bodily repulsiveness . . . thereby repudiate their role as agents of Māra. In so doing, these potential minions of Māra show themselves to be dutiful servants of their male counterparts within the *Sangha.*"

In her study, Wilson (1996: 169) also provides a translation of the Subhā Therīgāthā, the last stanza of which indicates that "when she [Subhā] saw the one with the marks of perfect merit [the Buddha], her eye was restored to its former condition." The formulation in this stanza (Thī 399) makes it clear that, contrary to what Wilson states earlier, Subhā had not blinded herself. Subhā had gouged out one eye, but the other eye was still intact, since it was on seeing the Buddha with this eye that the other eye she had earlier taken out was restored. Wilson appears to have overlooked this part, as she speaks of Subhā blinding herself and then also of Subhā's giving up her own organs of sight, where the plural does not match the single eye taken out according to the actual stanza.

Furthermore, I am also not convinced by Wilson's view of Subhā as a potential minion of Māra, a role the nun then supposedly repudiates. Since throughout Subhā's stanzas there is no explicit reference to Māra, if Māra is to be brought in, we need to turn to similar episodes where a male acts as a sexual aggressor in regard to a nun. Such episodes can be found in the Bhikkhunī Saṃyutta (and its Chinese parallels), where several discourses report how nuns are challenged by Māra, inviting them to enjoy sensuality, implying a sexual threat similar in kind to the present case (Anālayo 2012). Based on the parallelism to the Subhā incident, the one who could be identified with Māra in the Subhā Therīgāthā is clearly the impassioned male, not the detached nun. Thus, as far as I can see, Subhā is not a minion of Māra in the first place and thus has no need to repudiate such a role.

I also have difficulties in understanding why Subhā's action provides a dutiful service to Buddhist monks, as suggested by Wilson. Similar to the case of Māra, throughout Subhā's stanzas there is no reference to monks at all. It also seems safe to assume that monks would not constitute the target audience of the Therīgāthā. The relative dearth of discourses spoken by nuns in the canonical collections in general, and also the circumstance that counterparts to the Therīgāthā have not been preserved by other Buddhist schools clearly point to the predilection of the male monastic reciters, who apparently had little interest in teachings given by nuns. Thus I find no real basis for interpreting the action undertaken by Subhā as in some way providing a service to Buddhist monks.

Instead of a minion of Māra who blinds herself as a service to monks, I would see the main point of this story to be simply about contrasting the attraction of physical beauty with the Buddhist doctrinal view about the true nature of the body.

Instead of a minion of Māra who blinds herself as a service to monks, I would see the main point of this story to be simply about contrasting the attraction of physical beauty with the Buddhist doctrinal view about the true nature of the body. In support of my interpretation of the significance of the gouging out of the eye when confronted with someone who is full of passion, I would like to turn to a tale found in the Ekottarika Āgama collection preserved in Chinese translation. This tale reports a similar situation, with the notable difference that the main protagonist is a male. That is, here a male gouges out an eye when confronted with an impassioned woman.

The Ekottarika Āgama as a whole is a collection of discourses that remained open to later additions for a longer time compared to both the Pāli Nikāyas and the other Āgamas preserved in Chinese translation (Anālayo 2009). Thus one

"You should give attention to the perception of impermanence and make much of the perception of impermanence. By giving attention to the perception of impermanence and making much of the perception of impermanence, you will eradicate craving for sensuality, craving for form and craving for the formless, and you will completely eradicate conceit and ignorance."

regularly finds stories in Ekottarika Āgama discourses that in the Pāli Canon only have counterparts in the commentaries.

According to modern scholarship, some degree of lateness is also evident in both the Theragāthā and the Therīgāthā collections.[2] This much can in fact be seen in the last of the stanzas related to Subhā, which reports her magical recovery of the one eye she has earlier taken out of its socket. While in the early discourses the Buddha is often compared to a doctor, this is usually meant only symbolically. The idea that seeing him miraculously brings about an actual healing of the body is something found mainly in literature belonging to the later, commentarial period. Hence Horner (1930/1990: 339) is probably correct when she comments that the magical healing of Subhā's eyes is "a legendary accretion obviously inserted later."

Thus the tale of Subhā and the tale in the Ekottarika Āgama could have come into being at more or less the same period and there is no *a priori* reason for us to assume that the relevant stanzas in the Therīgāthā must be earlier than the discourse from the Ekottarika Āgama,[3] to which I now turn.

Translation

I heard it like this.[4] At one time the Buddha was staying in the Deer Park at Benares together with a great company of five hundred monks. At that time the Blessed One told the monks: "You should give attention to the perception of impermanence and make much of the perception of impermanence. By giving attention to the perception of impermanence and making much of the perception of impermanence, you will eradicate craving for sensuality, craving for form and craving for the formless, and you will completely eradicate conceit and ignorance. Why is that?

"In the distant past, a long time ago, there was a solitary Buddha named Beautiful Eyes. His facial appearance was very handsome,[5] with a complexion like a peach blossom, he was of dignified appearance, his mouth exuded the fragrance of lotus flowers and his body exuded the fragrance of sandalwood.

"At that time the solitary Buddha Beautiful Eyes, when the time had come to go begging alms, put on his outer robes and took his bowl to enter the city of Benares. Gradually proceeding he approached the house of an eminent householder and stood in silence outside the gate.

"At that time the householder's daughter saw from afar that there was a practitioner of the path standing outside the gate.[6] He was incomparably handsome, with a very special facial appearance, rarely found in the world. His mouth exuded the fragrance of lotus flowers and his body exuded the fragrance of sandalwood.

"Her mind was aroused with sensual desire. She approached that monk and said: 'Now, you are handsome, with a complexion like a peach blossom, rarely found in the world. Now, I am a virgin and I am also handsome. Let us be together. In my home there are many treasures and immeasurable wealth. Being a recluse is not at all easy.'

"Then the solitary Buddha said: 'Dear sister, now what part [of me] do you feel lustfully attached to?' The householder's daughter said: 'Right now I am attached to the color of your eyes, also to the fragrance of lotus flowers exuding from your mouth and the fragrance of sandalwood exuding from your body.'

"Then the solitary Buddha held out his left hand and with the right hand plucked out an eye and placed it in the middle of his palm. He said to her: 'The eye you crave—here it is. Dear sister, what part [of me] are you attached to now? Just like a boil, which has nothing desirable to it, so this eye oozes impurities. Dear sister, you should know that the eye is like foam, being unstable, deceptive and false, deceiving people in the world.

"'The ear,[7] the nose, the mouth, the body and the mind are all unstable, deceptive and false. The mouth is a container for spittle; what comes out of it is impure matter; what it contains, [the teeth], is just white bones. The body is a container of pain, its nature is to become worn away. It is a place constantly full of foul smells and troubled by worms, being like a painted jar full of impurities inside. Dear sister, what part [of me] are you attached to now?

"'Therefore, dear sister, apply your mind and give attention to these phenomena as deceptive and false. If, sister, you give attention to the eye and forms as impermanent, then whatever perception you have of attachment and desire will naturally disappear. The ear, nose, mouth, body and mind are all impermanent. Having given attention to this, whatever desire there is in the mind will naturally disappear. [If] you give attention to the six sense organs [like this], there will be no more perceptions of sensuality.'

"Then the householder's daughter felt embarrassed and stepped forward to pay respect at the feet of the solitary Buddha. She said to the solitary Buddha: 'From now on I am going

to correct [myself]. I will cultivate what is wholesome, without giving rise to further perceptions of sensuality. Please accept my regret for my transgression.' Three times she spoke like this.

"The solitary Buddha said: 'Wait, wait, dear sister, this is not your fault. It is because of my offences done in the past that I have received this body. On seeing it, people arouse sentiments of sensuality.

"'One should carefully contemplate the eye: "This eye is not me, nor does it belong to another;[8] it is not made by me, nor is it made by another. It has arisen from nowhere and, having come into existence, it will naturally decay and be destroyed. Whether in the past, in the present or in future, all this is caused by the coming together of conditions."

"'The meaning of the coming together of conditions is: "In dependence on this, that exists; with the arising of this, that arises. This not being, that is not; with the cessation of this, that ceases." The eye, the ear, the nose, the mouth, the body and the mind are just like that; they are all completely empty.

"'Therefore, dear sister, do not attach with the eye to forms. By not attaching to forms you will attain the place of peace, without further sentiments of sensual desire. You should train yourself like this, dear sister.' Then the solitary Buddha, having given that woman a teaching on the fourfold impermanence, rose up into the air, manifested the eighteen transformations and returned to his dwelling place.

"Then that woman contemplated the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind, understanding that there is nothing to them. In a tranquil place she gave attention to this teaching. That woman also gave attention to the fact that the six senses are without an owner. She attained the fourfold even-mindedness (*brahmavihāra*) and on the breaking up of the body, after death, was reborn in the Brahmā world.

"Monks you should know that if you give attention to the perception of impermanence and make much of the perception of impermanence, you will completely eradicate craving for sensuality, for forms and for the formless, and you will get rid of all conceit and ignorance. Therefore, monks, you should train like this."

At that time the monks, hearing what the Buddha had said, were delighted and received it respectfully.

Study

The doctrinal significance of the gouging out of the eye is self-evident in the above tale from the Ekottarika Āgama, since the whole story comes as an explanation of the initial instruction given by the Buddha that perception of impermanence will lead to freedom from all types of craving. That is, the theme of going beyond craving is the central topic. The same can safely be assumed to apply to the Subhā tale as well.

Unlike the Subhā episode, however, the exchange that leads up to the act of gouging out the eye in the present tale is rather brief, lacking the dramatic buildup and the tension created by the apprehension that the other might eventually use force to achieve his aim. In the above tale, the solitary Buddha is obviously not under any kind of physical threat, hence the scene is naturally less dramatic.

In Buddhist thought, a solitary buddha (*paccekabuddha*) differs from a full-fledged Buddha by not having a following of disciples.[9] Nevertheless, a solitary Buddha does at times dispense short teachings, as seen in the present case. Such a teaching regularly tends to contain a strong visual component, as solitary Buddhas often teach through their appearance or through magical feats (cf. Wiltshire 1990: 66f and 76ff). Thus for the solitary Buddha in the present tale to gouge out an eye is in line with this tendency of teaching through some form of action. The same can be seen in the miracles he performs when he is about to depart. In Buddhist literature in general, the teachings delivered by a solitary Buddha arouse inspiration in the listener and lead to rebirth in a higher heavenly realm, while teachings that result in the listener's awakening are usually rather the domain of a full-fledged Buddha.

As already noted above, unlike the Subhā episode, the present motif of gouging out the eye recurs with a significant shift of gender in the protagonist, as the disfiguration is undertaken by a male. Moreover, even the solitary Buddha's attractiveness is not depicted in terms that emphasize maleness. The text introduces him as handsome with a face like a peach blossom, a comparison with flowers that one would have rather expected to find in a description of a beautiful woman. Moreover, the fragrance of lotus flowers that exudes from his mouth and the scent of sandalwood from his body both highlight more feminine descriptions of beauty. In another discourse in the Ekottarika Āgama the same type of description is associated with the queen of a wheel-turning king, as part of a depiction of what, according to ancient Indian standards, apparently constitutes the acme of female beauty and attractiveness.[10]

Also noteworthy is how the solitary Buddha tells the woman to stop worrying about what she had done, clarifying that from his perspective it is his own fault to have such an

attractive body. The fact that the speaker of these words is a male makes it clear that these words need not be interpreted as a form of self-reproach for being attractive—a natural interpretation had the speaker been a female—but may simply be meant as a kind remark in order to dispel the embarrassment and regret felt by the householder's daughter.[11]

Clearly, the present tale inverts simplistic gender roles, thereby offering a significant corrective to readings of the Subhā tale from a perspective that is only concerned with the issue of gender discrimination. Once the gouging out of an eye by Subhā is considered in conjunction with the same act undertaken by the solitary Buddha, it becomes clear that this is simply a teaching aimed at deconstructing the notion of beauty of any body, male or female.

Detachment from craving in regard to the body is in fact a requirement in the early Buddhist soteriological scheme, the relevance of which is independent of the gender of the practitioner. This can be seen in the instructions given in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta and its parallels on contemplating the anatomical nature of the body, which are clearly meant to be applied first of all to one's own body. The Pāli version introduces the listing of anatomical parts with the phrase "there are in this body," a phrase similarly found in the two Chinese parallel versions, one of which explicitly speaks of this body "of mine."[12] That is, a male will first of all have to contemplate his own body, just as a female will first of all have to contemplate her own body. It is only when such contemplation has been successfully cultivated that the same understanding will also be applied to the bodies of others.

Due to the circumstance that the Buddha apparently traveled together with monks, it is only natural that the discourses often address a male monastic audience, with the inevitable result that the dangers of the attraction of female bodies are a frequent topic. Neither the frequency of such instructions nor the tale of Subhā, however, implies that early Buddhist texts adopt a simplistic logic where one gender is cast unilaterally in the role of being the tempter and the other of being the victim.

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Notes

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[1] Besides translations provided by Norman 1971/1989, Murcott 1991, and Pruitt 1998/1999, studies of aspects or the whole of the collection have been undertaken by, e.g., Lienhard 1975, Gokhale 1976, Lang 1986, Kloppenborg 1995, Rajapakse 1995, Blackstone 1998/2000, and Choubey 2009, to name just a few.

[2] Norman 1983a: 74 points out that the Theragāthā has various metres, ranging from very early to later metres, besides which there are "also references to beliefs and practices of the type which . . . point to lateness." He concludes that, while incorporating early material, the collection as a whole took probably about three centuries to come into being, followed by indicating (page 77) that the same applies to the Therīgāthā. In a similar vein, von Hinüber 1996/1997: 53 explains that "probably both collections have been growing over a long period, slowly absorbing verses commemorating monks or nuns living at quite different times, for although the commentary states that Ānanda recited these collections at the first council . . . other verses are supposed to be much younger even by the tradition and as having been added on the occasion of the second council . . . or still later at the time of the third council under Aśoka."

[3] This has been suggested by Greene 2006: 51 note 136, who discusses this tale and also translates a few excerpts.

[4] The translated text is EĀ 38.9 at T II 724a7 to b27.

[5] My translation follows a variant reading.

[6] My rendering as "householder's daughter" follows an indication by Hirakawa 1997: 1195 regarding the Sanskrit equivalent to the Chinese characters found in the present instance.

[7] My translation follows a variant reading.

[8] My translation follows a variant reading.

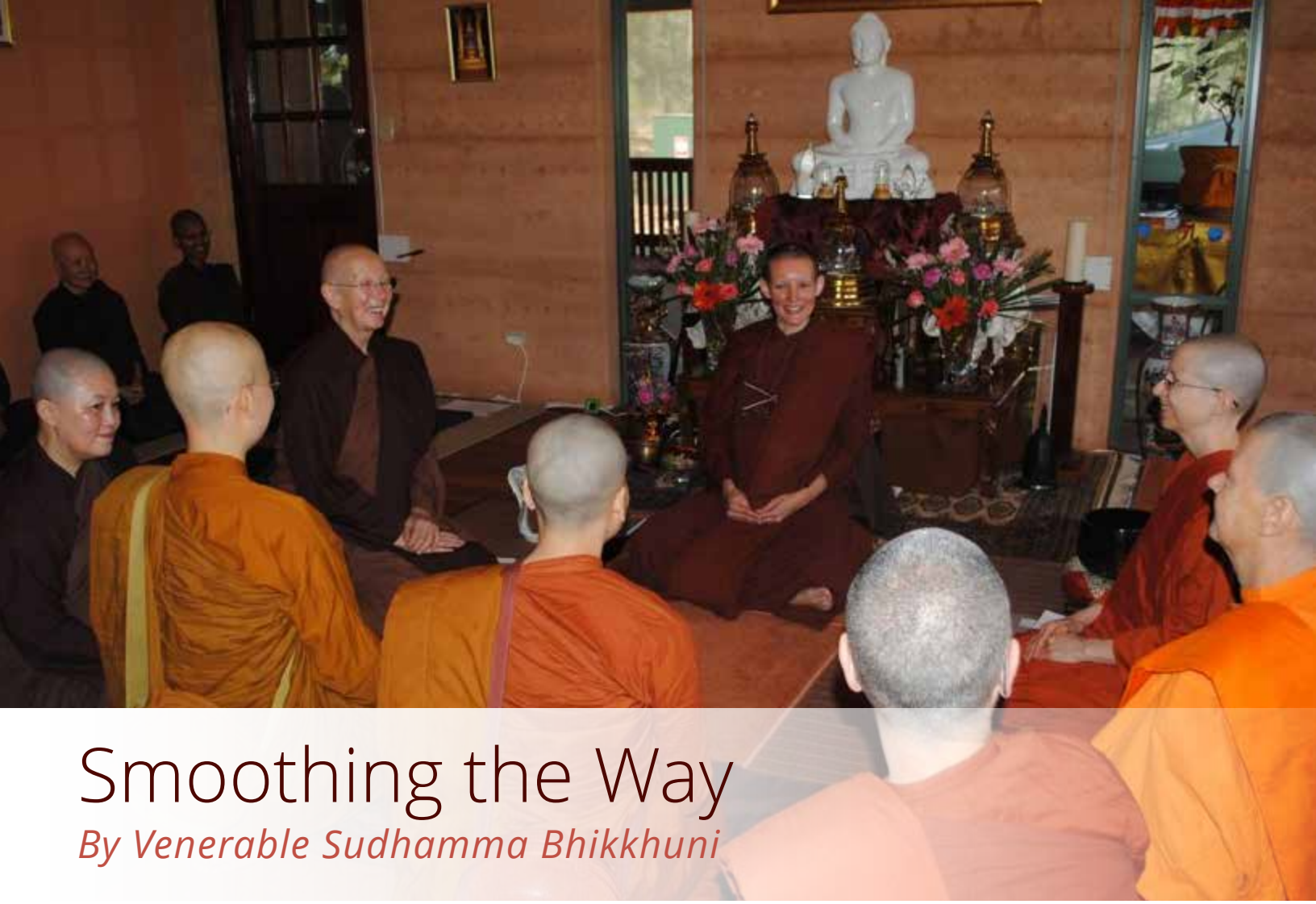
[9] On my reasons for adopting the expression "solitary Buddha," contrary to suggestions by Norman 1983b, cf. Anālayo 2010: 11ff.

[10] EĀ 50.4 at T II 807c15; for a translation of this discourse cf. Anālayo 2011.

[11] The present case thus stands in contrast to what Faure 1998: 20 sees as a pattern in Buddhist texts, where "in a man, beauty is often perceived as the effect of good karma, whereas in a woman it is usually seen as the result of past sin—paradoxically enough, because it produces attachment in men."

[12] MĀ 98 at T I 583b6 indicates that the contemplation is to be undertaken "within this body of mine," something implicit in the corresponding reference to what is "in this body" in MN 10 at MN I 57,15 and EĀ 12.1 at T II 568a19.

Bhikkhu Anālayo was born in Germany in 1962 and ordained in Sri Lanka in 1995. In the year 2000 he completed a Ph.D. thesis on the Satipatthana Sutta at the University of Peradeniya (published by Windhorse in the UK). In the year 2007 he completed a habilitation research at the University of Marburg, in which he compared the Majjhima Nikaya discourses with their Chinese, Sanskrit, and Tibetan counterparts. At present, he is a member of the Centre for Buddhist Studies, University of Hamburg, as a Privatdozent, he teaches at the Sri Lanka International Buddhist Academy and works as a researcher at Dharma Drum Buddhist College, Taiwan. Besides his academic activities, he regularly teaches meditation in Sri Lanka.



Smoothing the Way

By Venerable Sudhamma Bhikkhuni

Focused. Determined. Candidates sit apart, reflecting upon this change in their lives. Perhaps they worry that something may yet interrupt this long-awaited moment. Members of the Sangha in flowing bright yellow or dusky orange robes gently settle onto their cushions on the floor. In every bhikkhuni ordination ceremony I've witnessed thus far, the room becomes breathless, hushed. In some ordinations, flowers adorn the room. There may be a few onlookers, or hundreds, or none allowed. The air becomes perfectly still yet vibrant, the ceiling bright as though devas dance above our heads.

A nun, her hands trembling, grasping a tray loaded with carefully arranged flowers, candles, and incense, appears from one corner, approaches the seated group, then bashfully stands to one side. She awaits her preceptor's signal. In this pause, with all eyes upon her, this nun prepares to step into something new, different, unknown. The venerables on the floor send thoughts of encouragement to her. Then the signal occurs. Their soon-to-be new member carefully steps amid the group, sets down her tray, bows, and tremulously breaks the silence with her plea: "*Ayye, saṃghaṃ upasampadaṃ yācāmi, ullumptu maṃ ayye saṃgho anukampaṃ upādāya.*" "Venerable Ayye (Ladies) Sangha, I request ordination. In your compassion, Ayye, raise me up."

By the end of the ceremony, nothing much has happened, just some words said, a carefully rehearsed script in an ancient language to affirm her basic qualifications and her acceptance into the Order—a little skit really, reportedly directed by the Buddha himself, in which the junior nun plays a petitioner and others play her advocates or adjudicators. The actors perform the motions of requests and recommendations, a preparatory interrogation off to the side, then interrogation in front of the group, and more advocacy, most of it repeated three times, all accompanied by countless prostrations and awkward postures. Then finally comes the Bhikkhuni Sangha's silent vote of acceptance: by raising no objection to the proposal stated at length three times, they approve of her. Soon afterwards the new bhikkhuni will be ushered into the presence of the Bhikkhu Sangha to confirm her ordination.

The candidate's training and qualifications were long ago assessed; there are no surprises on this day. It is all a mere formality. Yet something extraordinary has occurred, and the ceremony concludes with joyous shouts of "*Sadhu!*" A woman crossed over from the fringes of monastic life into full center, a rite of passage. She is no longer even called a "woman" but a bhikkhuni (a fully ordained nun or, as some of us say, a female monk). Many onlookers weep.

A candidate may attempt to approach the ceremony casually, but the sight of the solemn, upright bhikkhunis awaiting her stirs even the skeptics. Something powerful shakes us.

For me it was like a spiritual rebirth. I went into an altered state, sensing a connection to something much greater than myself, a heart-level partnership—you could say perhaps with others who have done this, who have walked a path cleared by the Buddha that leads to the highest possibilities for us as human beings. I see a similar effect on others; awe arises.

Not every nun hearkens to the deep meaning of higher ordination. But fools and frauds aside (every life endeavor has them), something has changed for most of us. We drop previous inner affiliations to see ourselves as members of an ancient community joined for the most worthwhile purpose imaginable. Part of the deal is accepting a high code of conduct and making personal sacrifices to uphold that code of conduct. Part of the deal, too, is loyalty to the larger group.

Hence, when called by a duty to the Bhikkhuni Sangha, particularly when needed for an ordination— someone's plea to be "raised up"—you go. Imagine, Dear Reader, if a friend asked you to advocate for her to save her life, and only you and a handful of others were capable of assisting. What wouldn't you do to help her? Would you travel a long distance? Would you drop all your personal concerns and go? Of course. If not sick in the hospital, you get up and rush to her aid. You go even if it means a long drive. You go even if it means missing a day of work or your kid's soccer match or your friend's birthday lunch. You go even if you have to get on a plane and travel to another city, another country, another continent. But what if she were not your friend; what if she were your friend's friend, and you hear of this woman's good qualities and learn that your presence can save her life. Don't you still go? Yes. Even if you know nothing about her—only her reputation as a good person—if she needs you, it is not easy to say no.

Similarly, when called upon as a member of the Sangha, you go. For my novitiate ceremony one elder bhikkhuni had agreed to travel from a long distance to be my witness from the female Sangha. Unexpectedly she had to forgo officiating at her close friend's funeral to be there for me. We had never met before. That tug of the heart is hard to put into words, but many of us find it impossible to ignore or deny. Personal consequences recede into the background. Perhaps in 300 B.C. Arahant Sanghamitta felt this way when she got word that the royal ladies in Sri Lanka had undertaken novice vows and earnestly awaited their chance to fully ordain like the many thousands of men around them had already done. That great nun left her adoring father, the Emperor Asoka, and set sail with her companions for Sri Lanka, to spend her life nurturing the growing Sangha there, never to return home.

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A couple of years ago, when two admirable Siladhara nuns, acquaintances from long-ago visits I'd made to England, mentioned their interest in taking higher ordination, I told them I would happily travel a long way to help facilitate their ordination, would travel from the other side of the world if necessary. I meant it. Truly, I'd have gone at their call if it took my last breath! These two nuns did invite me to help with their higher ordination in California last year. I traveled from the other side of the USA to participate.

Of all the ordinations I may witness, aside from my own, the former Siladhara nuns' full ordinations will perhaps move me the most deeply. Those nuns went through a lot to see this excellent day. First they labored many years in their English monastery doing community building, which after much effort

Looking at the young nun, I marveled, thinking, "This is who we did it for! This is who we pioneers have suffered for. We hoped that someday, a young woman shall easily find her Teacher, train without troubles for two years, and become a bhikkhuni. Here she is!" I hope to see many more like her.

and self-reflection (and despite having to navigate the waves of gender politics that occasionally swept through) culminated into a peak of strength in nuns' unity—only to see their strong group slowly strangled by the monks who had been like their fathers, then finally shattered by them. Many of their most cherished sisters quit in despair, and some moved away. They shed many tears.

Having meanwhile founded a satellite group in San Francisco, these two Siladhara nuns discovered the breezy, wide-open possibilities offered by America, an answer to the stuffy oppression they had long accepted from their ambivalent monk benefactors in England. With much trepidation, the two nuns chose to join the worldwide Bhikkhuni Sangha, allying themselves with the strength of us all—not only Theravada, but other Buddhist traditions as well. To do that, they had to formally take leave of the siladhara form, rejecting the remnants of their beloved nuns' community. More tears.

A third person joined the higher ordination ceremony of these two former Siladharas. As a young woman seeking to ordain, she quickly located through the Internet a bhikkhuni teacher in her home country (Canada). After two years of peaceful novitiate training, she happily sat together with the older two nuns awaiting ordination. She has never been traumatized in the name of enlightenment or training or submission to a tradition. Her face, youthful and without signs of worry, her eyes bright, she stood out among the rest of us nuns. The former Siladharas seemed to me like weathered ships at the port for repair after having seen many battles, whereas the young nun looked like a sweet new boat ready to launch, unmarked by any harsh weather or troubles.

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A long journey brought me to see this day. In the early 1990s, I suffered many changes, including intensive treatments for an advanced cancer and watching my marriage crumble under the duress. Monks from Thailand had

introduced me to the Dhamma, a lifeline as my life fell apart. My priorities changed from family and career (attorney) to valuing what counts beyond this life. Having recovered from illness, having picked up the pieces and started my life over—new location, new career, new friends, with Buddhism now the central focus of my life—it hit me one day in early 1994 that if I could become a monk like the compassionate Thai monks, it would be the best gift I could possibly give myself.

Imagine my horror on learning that women of our Buddhist tradition (the only school of Buddhism I could embrace or even, at that time, perceive as truly Buddhist) cannot ordain. People suggested that I take eight precepts, wear white robes, and cook and clean for monks, since I could never join the holy brotherhood. Appalled, for weeks I pondered whether to turn away from the Dhamma completely. I've since met women who say they did quit for this reason.

Then it occurred to me that it would be a great shame were I to give up the best thing I've ever come across simply because I cannot get past my own inner pain. That is, the pain of being shut out, the pain of being thwarted from pursuing the highest path, the pain of never emulating the gentle monks whom I admired, the pain of doubting the fairness and hence the full enlightenment of the Buddha, but most especially the pain of every one of the countless past incidents in my life in which males gained and females lost out, including multiple sexual assaults that had stoked a volcano of rage into my heart. Would I let all this pain block me from gaining what is good in the Buddha's teaching? No, I decided.

For the next few years I cheerfully served monks, dutifully attended lay retreats and talks at Dhamma centers, yet also wept tears of frustration that I could not live as a monk and railed against the unfairness. I constantly saw doors opening up for men, my fellow travelers who also sought a way to end their suffering, but the doors were not open for people like me.

One day a voice in my mind told me it is time to leave home, to find out what kind of a holy life may be out there for me—and I gave notice, packed up my life, and left, not knowing where to go. It was 1997, one year after ten Sri Lankan nuns had fully ordained to form the first modern Bhikkhuni Sangha in our Theravada school. News had not yet traveled to my part of the world.

I landed at the Bhavana Society, becoming a pupil of respected elder Bhante Gunaratana ("Bhante G"), my goodkarma rather than his. A rare monk willing to give a woman a chance, he was in for a ride. I arrived at the monastery not understanding much of monastic sensitivities and protocols, accustomed to special status as a generous lay donor, and tending to reject or criticize whatever I failed to understand. Outspoken, opinionated attorney feminists take more work than most candidates to soften into gentleness and grace, like a tough cut of beef needing more pounding to tenderize. To this day I still draw upon memories of Bhante G's diplomacy, grace, and self-restraint to inform myself how to continue to develop.

Even after having found my monastery, nothing was the same for a woman as for a man. Men received more one-on-one mentoring, men could more casually socialize with the teachers (men) in robes, men had companions with whom to walk out in the woods around the monastery, newly ordained male novices received three times more financial support donated to the monastery on their behalf than did females. For long periods of time, I would be the only novice nun, or only long-term female resident, occasionally the only female on the property. The monks didn't fully understand women, and I often couldn't discern whether my volcanic defilements were at issue, or whether typical male/female social issues were making my life more difficult than the men's lives. Or I would wonder whether it was Western versus Asian culture on some particular occasion—indirect communications and unstated expectations being the Asian monastic norm. In retrospect, often it wasn't one thing or the other, but a combination. Where subtle female guides from my home culture perhaps could have led me around my troubles, my compassionate male guides tended to lead me directly into a brick wall composed of my shortcomings on one side and male superiority on the other, with cultural miscommunications some of the cement in between.

Yet over the years, I saw dozens of earnest women, some clearly more qualified than me, abandon pursuit of the holy life when faced with difficulties too severe to endure. Many more observed how hard it would be for women and decided to not even try.

With faith in the Buddha and his amazing teaching, I persevered through what seemed insurmountable obstacles at the time. The bhikkhuni lifestyle that I finally gained is its

own reward, and it has also has been an extraordinary device for causing me to give up painful shortcomings and slowly but steadily improving my character. I have so greatly benefited that people remark upon the positive changes. Yet over the years, I saw dozens of earnest women, some clearly more qualified than me, abandon pursuit of the holy life when faced with difficulties too severe to endure. Many more observed how hard it would be for women and decided to not even try.

Before ordaining, I dreamed once that I was scaling up a mountain. It was steep and terrifying, nearly sheer. At one point, far above the ground, I wedged into a small niche to regain strength before continuing the terrible upward climb. Finally I reached the top and somehow hauled myself over the overhang, to the secure firm flat ground. I then looked down the cliff edge below me where another woman was struggling upwards. I stretched out my hand and helped her up. As I pulled her up, the cliff shifted and became less steep. She reached the top with a breathless joy. I reached out for the next woman, and as she came upward, the incline again softened. It shifted yet again with the next one. I rejoiced and thought that in the future the women coming up this mountain will never know how hard it was to climb in the past!

My own ordination took place on the shoulders of those who came before me. I was the first American woman and first Western woman to receive higher ordination through the newly established Bhikkhuni Sangha of Sri Lanka. Most of the half dozen or so Western women who fully ordained ahead of me had received higher ordination through the Mahayana Sangha, some with Theravada monk participation. Not all were well received after the ordination, and they struggled. Many other women found it challenging simply surviving as ten-precept novices. Some of these nuns resigned themselves to not moving forward towards bhikkhuni ordination, while others chose to disrobe. I know of one who lost her mind due to the obstacles faced by women, not by men. Only because of their efforts and their heartaches did the steep mountain become possible for me to climb!

Those arriving after me may find a much more level slope. I hope all sincere future candidates make it here without breaking a sweat. Of course, our defilements await us as the monastic path places us into direct confrontation with our own downsides until we let them go. But at last, at least in some places in the West, we are reaching a point where the process need not be more traumatic than receiving the necessary poundings of a good compassionate teacher seeking to soften a tough student.

In 2011, when making plans to help officiate at the higher ordination ceremony of the two former Siladharas in California, those conversations led to the idea of traveling afterwards from California to Australia together with an old friend who was also participating in the ceremony. At that time I was running a small center, the Carolina Buddhist Vihara in South Carolina where I had served as abbot for eight years. During our trip to Australia, we helped in a going forth ceremony near Perth, and I visited Santi Forest Monastery near Sydney, Australia. Delighted with Santi, I resigned from my position in South Carolina and returned to Santi a few months later for my current residency, thereby stumbling into a situation in which the abbot is departing. Now I have the opportunity to help this community make its big transition from a beloved male abbot to perhaps long-term leadership by bhikkhunis, and this began with answering the call for the nuns' higher ordination. Amazing how these things come together.

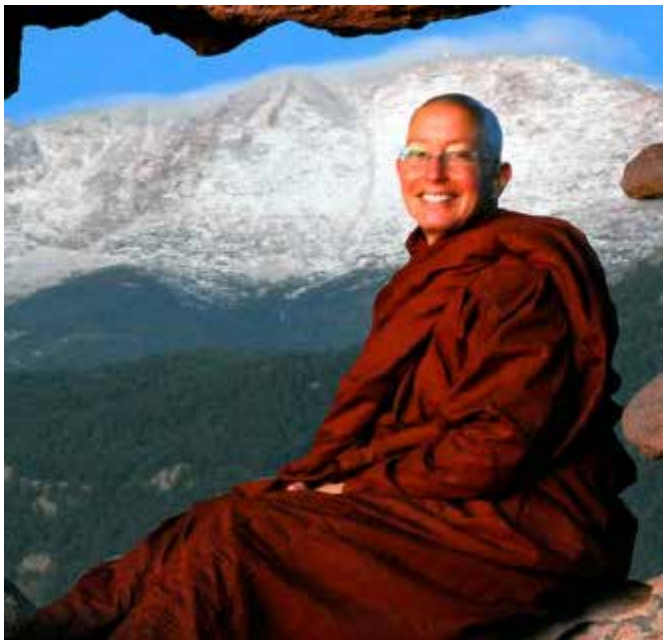
Ven. (Ayya) Sudhamma Bhikkhuni *was born in Charlotte, N.C., in 1963, and educated at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and New York University School of Law. She was married and enjoyed a brief career as an attorney in San Francisco, but then encountered the teachings of the Buddha while suffering personal losses that forcefully drove home the truth of the Buddha's teachings on impermanence and suffering. She obtained higher ordination as a bhikkhuni in Sri Lanka in 2003. She is currently helping guide Santi Forest Monastery in Australia through the process of (hopefully) establishing Bhikkhuni Sangha leadership for the monastery.*

For photos of ordinations held at Dhammasara in 2012, visit www.flickr.com/photos/67319631@N04/sets/72157629587684545/

Bhikkhuni Today

The Joys and Challenges of a Pioneer

By Amma Thanasanti Bhikkhuni



I am blessed to be an American-born bhikkhuni living in the United States, blessed to be part of a society that insists on equality, celebrates pioneers, and encourages living according to one's values. My vision of how the laity and monastics can evolve as an integrated community to support each other to awaken would not be possible in many other contexts. For a variety of reasons, the United States is a highly favorable container in which Buddhism can flourish in our postmodern world.

I am also aware that we live at a unique and pivotal time in history. In numerous places around the world where I have taught, I experience a deep readiness to see women come into fullness and maturity, to find their voices and lead. This is particularly true here in the U.S. At a bhikkhuni ordination in Northern California in 2011, the renowned scholar Venerable Anālayo remarked that full ordination for Theravada bhikkhunis is the single-most important event in the Buddhist world these last hundred years. He is not alone in recognizing the inestimable value of women monastics.

Other blessings of establishing the Dhamma in America include the opportunities produced by its entrepreneurial ethos in which hard work, clear vision, and the right contacts make projects blossom. As Americans, we know how to innovate, how to make things happen. This culture's commitment to social justice is another precious gift. America's dedication to equity makes it far easier to develop leadership structures that support not only women but others who have been marginalized. Perhaps even more significant is that we are free to teach what we know from our own experience rather than having to fit into a prefabricated model of how things are supposed to be. We are able to teach in a way that is applicable to the global challenges we are facing today.

Snapshots from My Daily Life

In offering the following glimpses of my life, I hope to convey a sense of what it is like to be a bhikkhuni in today's America. As one example, I regularly take my alms bowl onto streets and make myself available for receiving food offerings from passers-by. Recently in Manitou Springs, a small town next to Colorado Springs, a middle-aged woman came up to me and offered some food for my noon meal. I checked with her to see if she would welcome the traditional blessing. Before chanting, I asked her to place her attention on her own goodness. This simple suggestion elicited tears. Standing on the sidewalk, tears and chanting flowing together, we touched something timeless. The exquisite tenderness of the moment was accentuated by the circumstance of having only just met and being so public.

Though being moved to tears happens infrequently to those I interact with on alms round, almost always someone who has just met me and offered something for my meal leaves saying "Thank you." When I think of the reversal from our consumer-driven, greed-based society—whereby someone I don't know and who isn't familiar with monastics and what they bring to the world thanks me for being able to make an offering—I am touched by the power of the monastic form and the way it brings out the goodness in others. Being willing to stand in my own vulnerability as an alms mendicant, I become an emissary reminding others of their own goodness.

Just last week someone else invited me to her deathbed. To be allowed into the deepest intimacy of sharing without pretense and touching what is tender and true with another is an honor and privilege. Time and again this deep intimacy is a feature of the contact I have with others.

Living with renunciation, we are trained to relinquish suffering. My hermitage was in the evacuation zone from the recent Waldo Canyon fire in Colorado. When I realized that the hermitage was at risk of going up in flames, I felt the vulnerability of the situation and my own powerlessness to protect it. Opening to my feelings, including gently embracing my wish it were otherwise, meant that I could be present with the pain of the possible loss. As I attended in this way, the ache softened and then released. With acceptance, I felt much more peaceful. As I touched my own sorrow, I felt greater compassion for others, a blessing from decades of practice.

Challenges Created by American Culture

Despite the many advantages of American culture, there are significant hurdles to overcome if we are to anchor Buddhist monasticism here. One such obstacle arises from the fact that contemporary Buddhists in the U.S. are taught mostly by lay teachers. Having had little contact with monastics, the average lay woman or man lacks the knowledge of what blessings arise from close association with ordained women and does not know what monastics need to flourish. There is always much for me to explain and a great deal for the laity to learn.

The current culture is very different compared to the time of the Buddha. We are up against the American work ethic, where self-sufficiency is highly valued. To further complicate creating the needed infrastructures that would enable bhikkhunis to thrive, we live in a society chronically overcommitted, where individuals and families do not have enough time to take care of simple tasks in their own lives, let alone plan to be part of the regular support system of a monastic community. Providing daily support for monastics is often only possible if shared by a large group of lay supporters, when there are lay stewards in residence, or when the monastics make accommodations for their circumstances like storing or cooking food, handling money, and driving. Some monastics today are shouldering responsibilities that have traditionally been carried by the lay community.

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The cost of health care and private insurance requires significant funds. An alliance that allowed separate communities to buy insurance for their committed monastic members would be very helpful. Establishing monasteries may be stressful for everyone involved. Leaders are often trying to balance and prioritize a huge number of details while they are often learning many things for the first time. In my own situation, I was regularly stretched beyond my capacity. If there are different levels of experience, the junior members as well as the supporting lay community may feel overextended with duties. The Board may be learning the ropes of a nonprofit and its application to monastics. The supporting lay community may also feel stretched by additional duties and by finding equilibrium while the community takes shape and unfolds. It takes skill and resources to balance building a community and developing a monastery with needed meditation and monastic training from which the Dhamma can take hold. As monastics set up places of practice, more collaboration would ease the need for each new community to reinvent the wheel.

Further, it is extremely supportive when retreat centers make accommodations for monastics to attend without charge so they can take essential time to recuperate and retreat themselves.

Challenges Generated by Buddhist Monastic Tradition and Institutions

Our postmodern culture has significant implications on our values, the kind of leadership styles that inspire faith, and the way the teachings can either be received contextually or miss their audience altogether. Most of us wish to be part of a community that speaks to where we are at and addresses the issues meaningful to us. The very power structure itself must be compatible with our principles and reflect the Dhamma.

In the history of Buddhist tradition, there are stark contradictions between the ideal for all to awaken and the reality that disallowed women to participate with equal access and legitimacy. This has been particularly true for monastics, and this painful split has resulted in many nuns and a few monks being marginalized, ostracized, or silenced in their communities because they spoke up about discrimination and its harmful effects. This widespread ambivalence toward women in general and nuns in particular has affected many different monastic as well as lay communities. While we have a collective challenge that must be addressed, we have yet to develop forums for healing. This adds to the load that is carried by a community and the leaders within it.

Many come to spiritual practice after being touched deeply by suffering. The Buddhist path of generosity, integrity, calm, inquiry, and insight addresses many kinds of suffering. But for many of us who have a personal background laced with trauma, more is needed. I was humbled to realize that the meditation I had done for twenty years hadn't allowed me to touch, let alone heal, some of the emotional upheavals and psychological issues that I carried. When I did attend to this level of my experience with appropriate support, my meditation went deeper. The insights I acquired have now integrated into many other aspects of my life as well.

When senior members have not attended to their trauma or their psychological issues, dysfunctional community

dynamics are the inevitable result. This is often exacerbated by the internalized oppression that remains as a legacy of patriarchal power structures. Nuns are not exempt from using power dominance models of leadership with members of their own communities. Monastic life aspirants who enter a community may be completely unprepared for the kinds of suffering they may confront.

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One aspect of the Amaravati and Chithurst nuns' community that I valued and feel really proud to have helped shape, along with the other sisters, was the willingness to painstakingly distinguish between what belonged to the individual and what was part of the collective—the myriad complex factors of not having a clear place in the patriarchal power structures and the way that it affected our minds and bodies as well as group dynamics. As we did this work, the nuns became more cohesive as group. It took about fifteen years since the nuns' community first began before we started working in this way and five years after we started for me to experience coherence and congruence in our community. By the time I left the community, the nuns had developed the ability to stay in empathetic resonance during times of adversity, respond compassionately to diverse views, and accurately name what was happening—all invaluable skills.

Where We Are Now in America and How to Move Forward

More and more women are being offered the bhikkhuni ordination, and yet in North America there are not sufficient places providing basic requisites and training. This creates difficulties for lay women and men who wish to offer support for bhikkhunis as well as for the newly ordained monastics themselves. Part of this is due to the Bhikkhuni Sangha only beginning to delineate agreed-upon standards about who may take the "going forth" and what minimal support needs to be provided by the preceptor. As pioneers, we are figuring things out as we grow.

Knowing these blessings and challenges, we are wise to move forward with care and attention to how things actually are. For any aspiring monastic, it is wise to carefully consider the experience of living in different situations and notice the effect it has on oneself. This will be much more telling than ideas about how it is supposed to be. Consider the way the community is structured in terms of basic requisites of shelter, food, robes, medicine, and support from the surrounding community, and whether teachers have the ability, interest, and time to train students in monastic codes of conduct and Dhamma. Take note that leadership styles vary. It is important to see whether what is offered in any specific community is a good enough fit for one's needs and temperament. Ask questions and stay long enough so a decision is made from one's own clear and direct experience.

I have never been in a community that was perfect, nor do I expect to be. While accepting this reality, I recommend assessing whether the basics afforded by a community are adequate for the heart and body to respond with ease before making a commitment to enter. As these are the early days for Theravada bhikkhunis in North America, few communities are solid and stable. Nevertheless, if the leadership and basic structure of the community inspires confidence, then consider making a commitment. As pioneers, we are paving the road, and those who follow will benefit from what we have done. It would be good to be prepared for the long haul. It would be wise during these decades when we are building monasteries to develop a practice that moves toward the goals we seek without compromising our basic needs. Our training is to see what is arising and where our desire and aversion are activated. As we let go of wanting things to be otherwise, as we release our resistance, we can find peace. It is also important to learn to identify and speak up for what we need and not allow the idea of renunciation to support choices where our basic physical needs and psychological well-being are compromised.

Since I returned to the U.S., I have had to navigate a lot of uncertainty as I wait to see how things will unfold. I also have had to live with self-doubt about my own capacity to meet the problems that arise. Grateful for the extended training in the Dhamma and Discipline, I know fundamental principles to return to. Again and again I have met what is arising. When my resistance to what I am experiencing releases, I am left with some simple truths: the joy and simplicity of living with precepts, valuing kindness, the peace and contentment that comes from resting in awareness, the effect of living with few needs, living in a field of generosity, sharing what I know and love with others, and watching others suffer less, awaken to joy, and find genuine meaning in their lives. When I feel daunted by the demands that lie ahead, I shift to what is happening in the present. I may not have a map for the next several years, but for the next few days I can be content with what is, living as a bhikkhuni for now.

I have had to relinquish grandiose ideas of how things should evolve. Over time, I have learned to place a priority on simply moving forward, on working with what is given to me while simultaneously trusting that future growth for my

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community will develop when conditions are right. I have made mistakes and have needed to learn to reflect, make amends, forgive myself, let go, and move on. I now recognize that what needs to happen for a community to take root will require the coming together of many factors that largely depend on others coming forward and getting involved.

Seeing the ways things are unfolding reinforces my appreciation that, while the blessings to live as a monastic continue, we will flourish only if our interdependent relationship nourishes the many-fold Sangha, the Sangha that includes all genders, sexual orientations, and precept levels in the globally diverse cultural context in which we are now living. For monastics to thrive, we need to grow in ways that support all of us awakening.

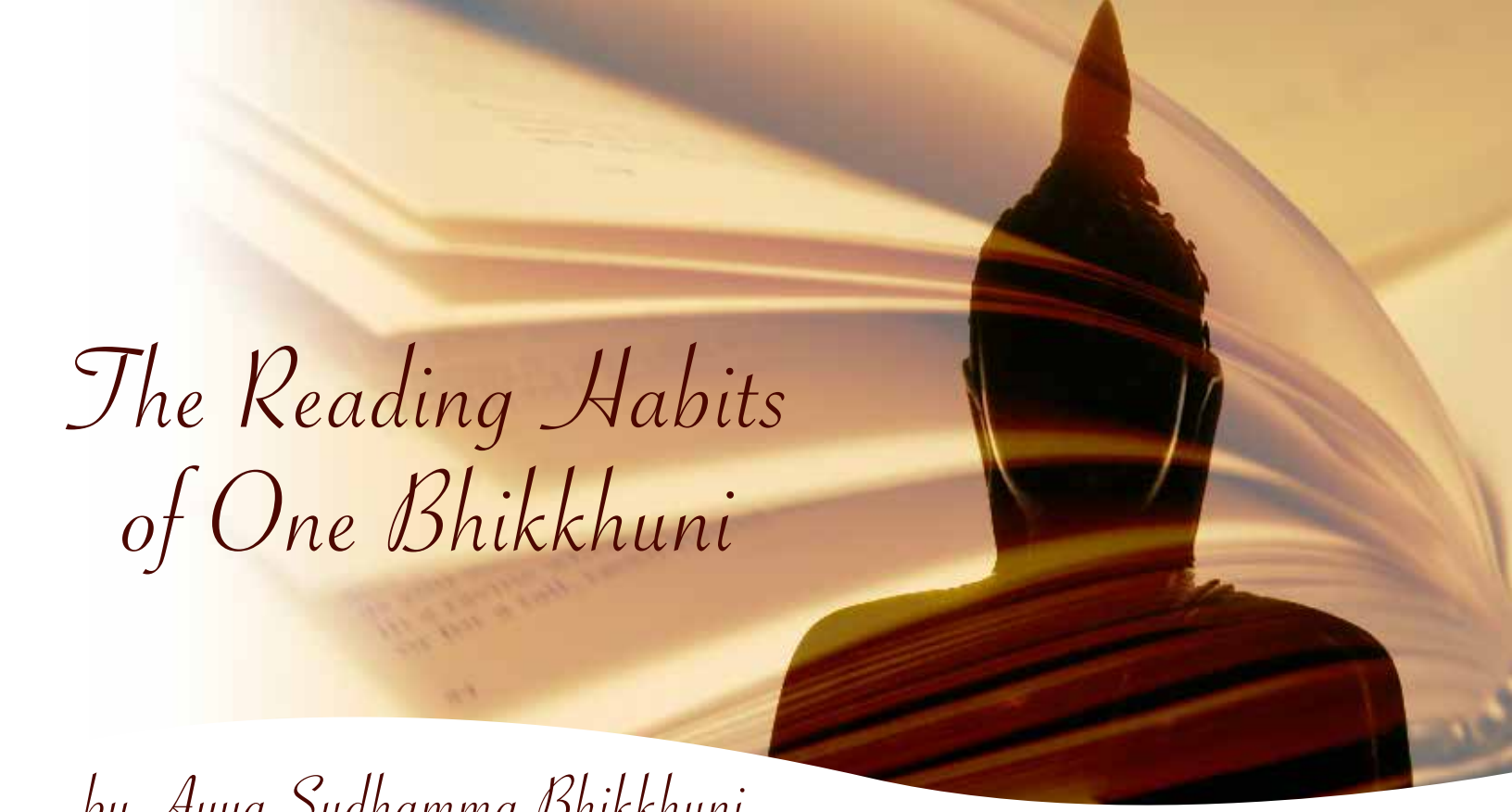
The Buddha taught us to contemplate suffering and realize the end of suffering. No matter what we do, it has to come back to this. When attention rests on what's left when things fall away, the multiplicity of our world ends and the many objects of attention shift to the awareness that knows. Attuned to the clear light of this knowing, the right questions are asked. Eventually what emerges from this awareness takes shape in ways that serve many.

Bhikkhunis today are pioneers filled with the joy of emergence and enriched by the traditions from which we have come while facing challenges unique to our time and place. I see a model of monasticism coalescing which has the intention and capacity to stay rooted in what is essential in the Dhamma and Discipline, embrace the best of our cultural legacy, attend to what is present, ask the right questions, and use these in the process of awakening. Where the many-fold Sangha feels committed and involved, it is possible for nuns to take root and bring the awakened mind, the truth of the ways things are, and the value of community to society at large. What an extraordinary time!

(Amma) Thanasanti Bhikkhuni was born in California and first encountered the Dhamma in 1979. Since that time she has been committed to awakening. On a trip to Asia she met highly accomplished meditation masters Dipa Ma and Ajahn Chah. She went to England in 1989, where she joined the nuns' community in the Ajahn Chah Forest Tradition and lived for twenty years. In 2009, she left her monastic community to return to the U.S. to pursue her vision of developing a bhikkhuni training monastery integrating ancient teachings of the Forest Tradition into the modern world. She founded Awakening Truth, a tax-deductible religious charity dedicated to this vision. In 2010, after being a nun for nineteen years, she received ordination in the first Theravada dual-platform bhikkhuni ordination in North America with Ayya Tathaaloka as her preceptor. Currently she resides in Colorado Springs at the Shakti Vihara hermitage.

"The bedrock of my readings remains the thirty-something books of the Pali Canon (in English). I've gone through most of the books at least once, but the deeper teachings come across differently in later readings and little is retained the first few times anyway, so they remain a source of interest, always new."

-Ayya Sudhamma Bhikkhuni



The Reading Habits of One Bhikkhuni

by Ayya Sudhamma Bhikkhuni

Present requested that I describe my reading habits in case it may offer a little insight into the life and intellectual development of a bhikkhuni.

The bedrock of my readings remains the thirty-something books of the Pali Canon (in English). I've gone through most of the books at least once, but the deeper teachings come across differently in later readings and little is retained the first few times anyway, so they remain a source of interest, always new.

When I want a good source of reading-in-bed pleasure (yes, I still do that at times), I can turn to our tradition's rich storytelling legacy: the three volumes of the Jatakas' entertaining tales on the Buddha's past lives, the Dhammapada Commentary's colorful stories behind the Dhammapada verses, the inspiring Udāna stories and verses, and the Therigatha Commentary's sobering and uplifting stories behind the verses of the elder bhikkhunis.

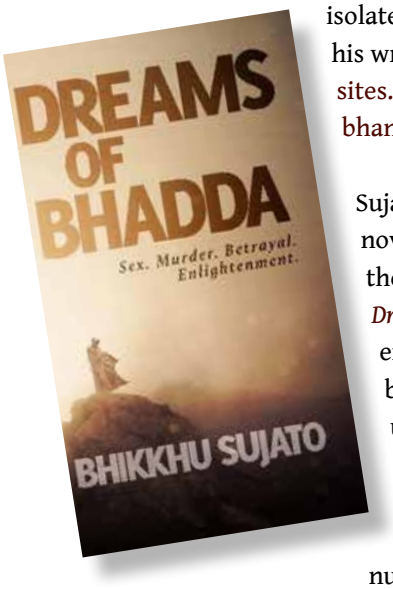
While shaping up the library at Santi, I found a draft copy of Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi's long- awaited, soon-to-be-released translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya (Numerical Discourses), and occasionally delve into it with delight. Aside from that, these days I open the other books of the Canon such as the Majjhima Nikāya (Middle Length Discourses), the Saṃyutta Nikāya (Collected Discourses), the Sutta Nipāta, and the Vinaya (Code of Discipline) in order to do research—either to answer questions that have arisen or prepare teachings for others. Once I've cracked open one of these books for a research purpose, I usually go on to read nearby sections because they catch my eye and make me think.

I keep a journal with a personal collection—my own anthology—of words of Dhamma that greatly inspire me. This has become central to my personal development both as a student of Dhamma and as a teacher to others. My efforts started a couple of years ago with encouragement from a good spiritual friend, a *kalyana mitta*, who pointed out a new website that teaches how to make the best use of scriptures (including keeping a journal), called Reading Faithfully. He then lovingly nagged me until I chose a small pseudo–leather-bound journal and began writing my favorite scriptures into it. Now I carry the potent little journal with me when traveling and use it when giving teachings (since these words inspire me the most, these teachings come across well). I refer to it often and find it most helpful when feeling dull. I recommend everyone check out Reading Faithfully and start their own anthology of scriptural passages that speak to them.

At Santi Forest Monastery, I discovered that residents rely upon an amazing resource book by Ven. Analayo: *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima Nikāya,* referring to it frequently when we study a discourse. This reference book compares, chapter by chapter, the contents of the Pali Canon's Majjhima Nikāya with similar Indian scriptures (some just fragments) recorded in ancient Chinese, Tibetan, Sanskrit, and a few more languages. Since the various versions of each discourse tend to be nearly identical, any variations between

them become fascinating bits of evidence of changes made to one or more texts, often—but not always—with the more believable reading coming out of the Chinese version. Now I cannot imagine attempting to study the Majjhima Nikāya without access to Ven. Analayo's valuable work. (Note: This book isn't easy to obtain. It is listed first among Ven. Analayo's 200-plus writings here: http://www.buddhismuskunde.unihamburg.de/fileadmin/pdf/analayo/publications.htm.)

In addition to frequent brief forays into the Canon, I'm now reading, or re-reading, Bhante Sujato's books—all of them—as fast as I can. He recently announced his intention to retire from leading his community (where I'm currently staying), Santi Forest Monastery, before this Vassa to go into seclusion as a lone monk. All my questions about his teachings must get answered now, I'm afraid; therefore I'm pursuing this effort with urgency. His writings are brilliant, oftentimes too chock-full of detailed research to be of interest to a wide audience (not to mention his complex wording that conveys every nuance to maintain an exacting accuracy). It is worth the effort to glean what one can. Bhante Sujato's writings challenged, perhaps crumbled, my earlier simple faith in the Pali Canon and hence in Buddhism; perhaps that is partly why I wanted to come study with him, to learn the basis of his faith, which clearly didn't rest upon any easily refuted assumptions. Now, absorbing his discoveries and perspectives both from his writings and in person, my understanding has become more nuanced, less righteous, less isolated, and broader. (A collection of his writings can be found at: http://sites.google.com/site/santipada/bhantesujato%27swork.)



Just yesterday I re-read Bhante Sujato's unique, highly creative novel based on the life of one of the early arhat nuns, entitled *Dreams of Bhadda*. Though short enough to read in one sitting, the book's haunting imagery—based upon a true story—will not soon leave you. My one complaint about the book is that it gives the impression that the nun's success as a debater of religious philosophy came directly from her loss in love, whereas according to tradition, she was actually a highly educated master of religious traditions.

Foremost among Bhante Sujato's writings in its impact upon me personally has been *A History of Mindfulness: How Insight Worsted Tranquility in the Satipatthana Sutta*. It's not found online right now only because he is currently editing the book. Be patient; it will reappear. When I read the book in early 2010, I skipped the difficult parts and focused on the main message of the second half of the book, where Bhante dissected parts of the Satipatthana Sutta to argue effectively that much of the text was added in later times to the Buddha's basic sutta. I found the resulting new—yet older—stripped-down version more useful to my practice. This was my first real introduction to text-critical studies of Buddhism and the beginning of the end to my comfortable unquestioned beliefs as a Buddhist fundamentalist. Now I am going back to the beginning of the book, trying to understand it all, particularly Bhante Sujato's detailed explanation of how to analyze text using other ancient recensions of scripture as a basis of comparison.

When the PDF version of *A History of Mindfulness* was first linked onto the Santi website, it came with a warning: "This is a complex and scholarly work, not for the fainthearted." A few days ago, after puzzling over it for some time, I resorted to asking Bhante Sujato how to understand one of his charts in the book; despite several minutes of explanation, I'm still not clear what he meant. Even Bhante came to notice the difficulties plowing through his text and conciliatorily offered a brief synopsis, writing in his blog with his usual self-effacing style: "I've been revising . . . *A History of Mindfulness*, and I'm kind of amazed that anyone actually read it. It's hard going." For those with better things to do than wade through oceans of textual references, here's the *sankhittena* (short version): http://sujato.wordpress.com/2011/01/18/a-brief-history-of-mindfulness/.

Next on my list of to-read books are background histories of Indian thought that may explain some social expectations and pressures to which the Buddha responded, as well as the classics in text-critical studies. These include Richard Gombrich's *How Buddhism Began: The Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings* and Erich Frauwallner's *The Earliest Vinaya and the Beginnings of Buddhist Literature*.

Human-interest writings such as autobiographies and travel accounts also catch my attention easily, and we have seventy such books on the shelves here at the Santi library. One that I often recommend to visitors is Ajahn Sucitto and Nick Scott's hilarious yet deeply moving two-volume account of their travels in India, *Rude Awakenings* and *Great Patient One* (both available as free downloads or as print editions).

That Bird Has My Wings, the autobiography by Jarvis Jay Masters, a death-row inmate who found a refuge in Buddhist practices, caught my eye one day when someone left it on the library table; it turned out to be a page-turner that I hardly set down until done. Jarvis offers a moving account of the terrors of his early life, with an honest, insightful assessment of how early influences led to his bad choices and ruin. Efforts to free him have been in the news recently.

Despite trying to make quick progress with Bhante's works, I cannot yet put down the autobiographical travel account that I'm currently reading: *Ten Thousand Miles Without a Cloud* by Sun Shuyun. This book is further broadening my worldview, so I want to describe it in more detail. Ms. Shuyun, a highly educated Chinese woman raised under Communism, hoping to better understand her Buddhist grandmother's religion, decided to personally retrace the epic journey taken in the seventh century by the famous Chinese monk traveler, Ven. Xuanzang (also known as Hsüan-tsang). This monk helped establish Mahayana Buddhism for future generations by going to India to retrieve many scriptures not yet known in China, which he later translated. He also kept such remarkably accurate accounts of the lands through which he traveled that historians rely upon them to understand the habits of people long ago, and modern archeologists continue to use them to dig for lost cities and holy places. We owe our current knowledge of the primary Buddhist pilgrimage sites in India to British men in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who used this ancient Chinese Buddhist master's precise and detailed records.

Ms. Shuyun's travels take her across mountain passes and deserts, into the middle of war-torn regions, through abandoned ancient cities, and into bustling modern tourist sites. While traveling through Central Asia to India (passing through western China, Afghanistan, and more before exploring India and heading home again), she weaves together a tale of her family history, the history of the lands and people she encounters, and the modern forces affecting them. Ms. Shuyun draws such a sympathetic picture of the individuals in every land that the reader is left caring for these people as if they were her own relatives. Meanwhile, the author explores the Mahayana Buddhist beliefs that drove Ven. Xuanzang to bravely undertake his nearly impossible journey. She discerns a continuing, subtle impact of the Dhamma upon the countries that later lost their memory of Buddhism while trying to truly understand the Dhamma for herself.

Ten Thousand Miles Without a Cloud is autobiography, travelogue, history, and spiritual journey, all in one go. I gained a much greater understanding of the history and modern problems of every land through which Ms. Shuyun passed, a deeper appreciation for how history generally unfolds over the centuries, and more respect and interest towards Mahayana teachings.

One more area to address: What do I read online? I use the Internet to look up specific suttas, the other day joyfully beating Bhante Sujato in locating a debated quote. (As he quickly flipped through the pages of the Connected Discourses, I used Google.) Occasionally, I read articles sent to me by monks and nuns on Facebook. I check headlines, read up on social changes, and find I am drawn to dramatic stories, particularly news of generosity or heroism. If I have some time, I read the news analyzed in more depth on Slate.com, which also helps me catch up on what is happening in the U.S., but the human-interest and storytelling angles continue to grab me: Doonesbury and Slate's advice column ("Dear Prudence") both continue to rate high among my favorite reading material.

With the mid-year months here in New South Wales, Australia, bringing a chilly, dreary, damp winter quite unlike the sweltering summer heat of my hometown in the U.S.A., a hearty fire in the library's wood stove warms the room. I pull off my woolen things and perhaps break into a sweat while settling in comfortably to read. In the morning we work; in the afternoon, we often find leisure to meditate or read. Time passes too quickly while reading in the library, and often the daily evening teatime catches up with me. As other residents arrive for refreshments, I must move my books aside to make room for the trays.

Ven. (Ayya) Sudhamma Bhikkhuni was born in Charlotte, North Carolina, in 1963, and educated at UNC-Chapel Hill and NYU School of Law. She was married and enjoyed a brief career as an attorney in San Francisco. She encountered the teachings of the Buddha while suffering personal losses that forcefully drove home the truth of the Dhamma on impermanence and suffering. Soon she wished to ordain. In 1999 she gratefully received from the elder Sri Lankan monk Ven. Bhante Gunaratana the opportunity to enter the holy life as a novice at his monastery, the Bhavana Society, in West Virginia. She obtained higher ordination as a female monk (bhikkhuni) in Sri Lanka in 2003. For eight years she served as the resident monk at the Carolina Buddhist Vihara in Greenville, South Carolina. Currently, on the invitation of out-going abbot Bhante Sujato, she is helping the Santi Forest Monastery in New South Wales to establish a Bhikkhuni Sangha leadership for the monastery.

For the nuns the travelers are seeking to visit, being born female in eastern Tibet means being born to hardship. The local dialect's word for woman literally means "lower birth" or born into a lower status than baby boys. In the late 1800s, a local guru quite startlingly directed a wealthy spiritual seeker to build monasteries for women and to care for the women. This was a highly unusual rupture away from the history of male-dominated Tibetan practitioners. The seeker was Tsoknyi Rinpoche I, the current lama's first incarnation. By the mid-twentieth century, there were 4,000 nuns living and practicing in the area's monasteries.

FILM REVIEW

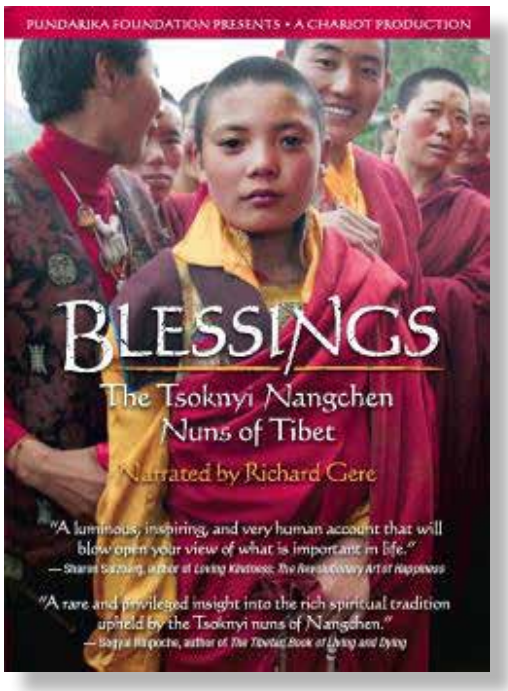
BLESSINGS:

The Tsoknyi Nangchen Nuns of Tibet

Reviewed by Kathy Jean Schultz

Directed by Victress Hitchcock
Chariot Videos, 2005, DVD, 90 minutes
Sound-track music from the CD *Chö* by
Choying Drolma and Steve Tibbetts

Blessings: The Tsoknyi Nangchen Nuns of Tibet, a documentary film directed by Victress Hitchcock, is an account of a 2005 journey up into the mountains of Nangchen. Hitchcock and a group of Westerners, mostly women practitioners from the U.S., arrive in Tibet to visit Nangchen's remote monastic nunneries, which are home to some 3,000 Tibetan nuns. The group travels with Tsoknyi Rinpoche III as their guide. He is a lama who ministers to the monastic women. The party sets out with some trepidation about what they already know from their preparations will be a journey into mixed metaphors: It will be life in the slow lane—and it will be that on steroids.



As they climb into several jeeps at 3:00 A.M. and prepare to travel twelve hours up the mountains, away from Tibet's populous areas, the soundtrack's ghostly music melts into the breathless, arid, clear, and wondrous landscapes that can't help but alter the heart of anyone in their thrall. Hitchcock's pacing is never slow, but rather matches the climb, marbles into the scenery, and sets a suspenseful tone.

The travelers' courage in attempting this venture is tested only a few miles out. Their vehicles predictably get stuck in deep mud, and there are other car troubles that nomads met along the way help out with as well. An umbilical sensation rises, a knowing the cord has been cut. We can almost feel the pinprick of there being no safety net, no road service to be phoned, no tow truck mechanic in rescue mode. The people here do everything for themselves and live completely on their own, even rebuilding a bridge if and when needed. Off the beaten path and off the grid, in a place where there is, indeed, no path and no grid to be off of anyway. Fittingly, we learn the Nangchen mountains are known as the Land of Meditators. Why would such a place have a repair shop?

With deft touches, Hitchcock captures the travelers as they laugh, joke, and demonstrate acceptance and simplicity while pushing their vehicles out of deep ruts. But in more than one set of eyes, concern for the growing distance from civilization is evident. When the road ends, the last few hours of the journey are made on horseback. In the rain. The now-travelers-on-ice experience the physical pain and hardship that Tibetan mountain people live with every day, albeit with a still-jolly ethos.

Richard Gere narrates portions of the documentary, filling in the blanks non-Buddhist viewers might not know. Basic tenets include the understanding that all of life is suffering, and detaching from suffering is the goal. The urge to cling—to conditioning, delusions, new cars, designer clothes, socioeconomic pecking order, glory, and more delusional thinking—is not the Buddhist road to peace of heart. Indeed, clinging stands to be seen through new eyes on this trip. Relaxing into things as they are—and not what someone dictates they should be—brings relief.

For the nuns the travelers are seeking to visit, being born female in eastern Tibet means being born to hardship. The local dialect's word for woman

Tsoknyi Rinpoche and Mingyur Yogini
Photo: http://www.tsoknyirinpoche.org/monestaries/questions-and-answers-about-the-nangchen-nuns/

literally means "lower birth" or born into a lower status than baby boys. In the late 1800s, a local guru quite startlingly directed a wealthy spiritual seeker to build monasteries for women and to care for the women. This was a highly unusual rupture away from the history of male-dominated Tibetan practitioners. The seeker was Tsoknyi Rinpoche I, the current lama's first incarnation. By the mid-twentieth century, there were 4,000 nuns living and practicing in the area's monasteries.

In 1959, these monasteries were attacked and destroyed by Chinese soldiers of the Cultural Revolution. The lama at that time, Tsoknyi Rinpoche II, was jailed and then died in prison. Some of the nuns were sent to labor camps. Many of them scattered to their nomadic families. A few of them escaped to hide in caves, where they lived and continued to practice secretly for nearly twenty years in the harshest of climate conditions.

In the 1970s, the surviving nuns began to emerge from hiding. They rebuilt a monastery, and then another, brick-by-brick and wood slab-by-wood slab. These monastic women managed to rebuild their monasteries with their own labor. Understating that history, Hitchcock notes their struggle "shows me how much superfluous stuff I do not need."

Along the road, the travelers meet nomadic peoples eagerly awaiting a blessing from the lama. Tsoknyi Rinpoche III is welcomed everywhere, like any beloved traveling friar, rabbi, priest, or pastor. A universal human need for spiritual solace and a strong belief that his blessings will help them through their travails wafts through the sights, sounds, and music here in the Land of Meditators. Nomadic peoples in primitive villages gather around, approaching the lama for blessings, and their confidence the lama can help them is ironclad. The question arises: Is this naïve, quaint, and pre-scientific—or something the world could use in an era of endless war and terrorism?

As the travelers finally arrive at the first of several monasteries they will visit and hear the nuns' stories, the thread of suffering runs prominently through each. When questioned about why they chose to live monastically, several of the nuns recount tales of suffering and pain within their families. Seeking a life of prayer, meditation, and preparing their own food and shelter, they felt their lives were actually easier than those of their neighboring villagers. The nuns' lives of serenity and joy, as well as compassion for each other, seemed the better choice when faced with the choking circumstances of their birth. Moreover, in the monastery, the women—the lower births—could read and sing, whereas women in the nomadic groups were illiterate and without any scholarship in their lives. As more of the nuns recount through translation how they came to join the monastery, more speak of the suffering their tribes endured, poverty, and family strife in a milieu where they are doomed as lower births. For them the monastic life seemed more peaceful and serene by comparison. What looks like isolation and hardship to the visitors is joy to the nuns.

The visitors witness the nuns lugging their water up a hill in the damp and cold, and it's yet another reminder of the Grand Canyon–esque contrast between lifestyles. The visitors remark on how they practice in their own lives, how they try to deepen their practice, and how they do grasp that the concept of renunciation in the historic Buddhist framework would include physical discomforts unknown to them. How often do we leave a meditation class or retreat and warm up our cars immediately because it is so cold? If they had come

on this trip to truly wrap their heads around "renunciation," they got more than their money's worth.

To the video makers' great credit, as viewers we are on that same quest. Hitchcock frames each scene with such nuance—of shadows and light conveying the lack of electricity and the candlelit world—that when we learn another constant medical problem the nuns face is eye trouble due to reading in candlelight for so many years, we can almost feel it, and certainly understand how it happens. And so there is another example of physical hardship and primitive medicine to help us reimagine the Western concept of renunciation. Not for the fainthearted, this renunciation—or the coddled. Renunciation can seem to be separated from practice in the West, but not here. One nun witnessed a woman enduring a long childbirth that was so painful and fruitless, with the baby stuck and not able to be born, that the mother grabbed a knife and cut her own throat. Many of the nuns came to the monastery after witnessing some terrible tragedy. One says there is "no comparison" between living the peaceful life of a monastic and living in the world.

Lama Tsoknyi Rinpoche III explains that in the regions surrounding the monasteries, the communities welcome the nuns and what they are trying to achieve. They respect that there are these little pockets of residents praying for all the others. He says that since the monasteries or nunneries have grown, crime has actually decreased. The nuns serve the surrounding peoples by bringing solace. "Having a kind heart" works, he notes.

The nuns make the point that they are always meditating, whether cooking, weeding their food gardens, or talking with visitors and locals. Their goal is continuous practice. In this regard they proceed with tremendous confidence. Because they have the older nuns as guides and teachers, they are able to believe they are capable of achieving understanding and enlightenment, capable of bringing spiritual peace to their neighborhood. In this manner they can overcome the destiny of their birth, the lower birth of women in Tibet, and know that they are entitled to self-confidence and self-esteem, like men are.

The older nuns kept alive methods of concentration during the twenty years they spent in hiding, living in caves, guarding their traditions. The younger nuns learn from the older ones in this regard, with great determination. "They never give up," Lama Tsoknyi says. Near the end of their trip the visitors are taken to meet the oldest nun, who dwells high up in a cave-like shelter. She prays every waking moment and believes "Every moment you can benefit other beings." Although this statement may have been heard in a Pollyanna-ish tone in any number of Western retreat houses, standing atop the mountains in the cold mist, meeting someone who personifies the teaching, it takes on a different perspective. The shallowness of its Western meaning can almost be smelled, and it feels like the visitors are literally inside a prism, recasting perspectives.

The nuns' collaborative lifestyle serves long retreats and periods of meditation with apparent ease. Some sit in retreat for weeks, months, and in one example, years, while the others manage the household by tending to the food, maintenance, and garden. Then they switch places. Upon visiting a monastery where some nuns had just completed a three-year-long retreat, the visitors naturally had questions. Imagine a Westerner not talking for three whole years? The retreaters explained, "If we don't practice, we let down all sentient beings."

The nuns make the point that they are always meditating, whether cooking, weeding their food gardens, or talking with visitors and locals.

One of the practice-deepening gifts of the film is the visitors' respect and awe for their hosts, evident in shots steeped in both contrast and silence. Four weeks into their journey, the visitors notice that "having no personal space" has become an irritant. Chuckling at their discomfort over being crowded into sleeping spaces after long days of hiking or horseback riding, they are able to vividly see that the nuns live in close quarters all the time—close and primitive.

"Is this the same practice I'm doing?" Hitchcock herself laughs.

It's inspiring, one visitor notes, to see people so devoted to practice, people who embody a quality of un-self-consciousness. "I could not be a nun," one of them decides, acknowledging the cultural divide. "They've truly achieved something," another observes. Yet the Westerners are not sure what it is. What the nuns have achieved seems untranslatable. The genuineness

of loving kindness and compassion strived for by the nuns is striking to the point of seeming surreal or unreal to the visitors. How could this be taken back home? The answer is that one doesn't know. It may take a lifetime to figure that out. Deepening practice is challenging for Westerners, and to see the real thing in action is akin to nothing most Westerners have experienced.

Lama Tsoknyi notes it is helpful when Western practitioners can "slow down their engines." Hitchcock demonstrates just how ingrained fast-engine ruminating is when she asks him, "How do the prayers of these nuns impact others?" He explains that while the mind has obstacles, the heart sees that there are these "pockets of practitioners" here in the mountains who can actually benefit the peoples around them. "More pockets of kindness could completely transform the world," in his view.

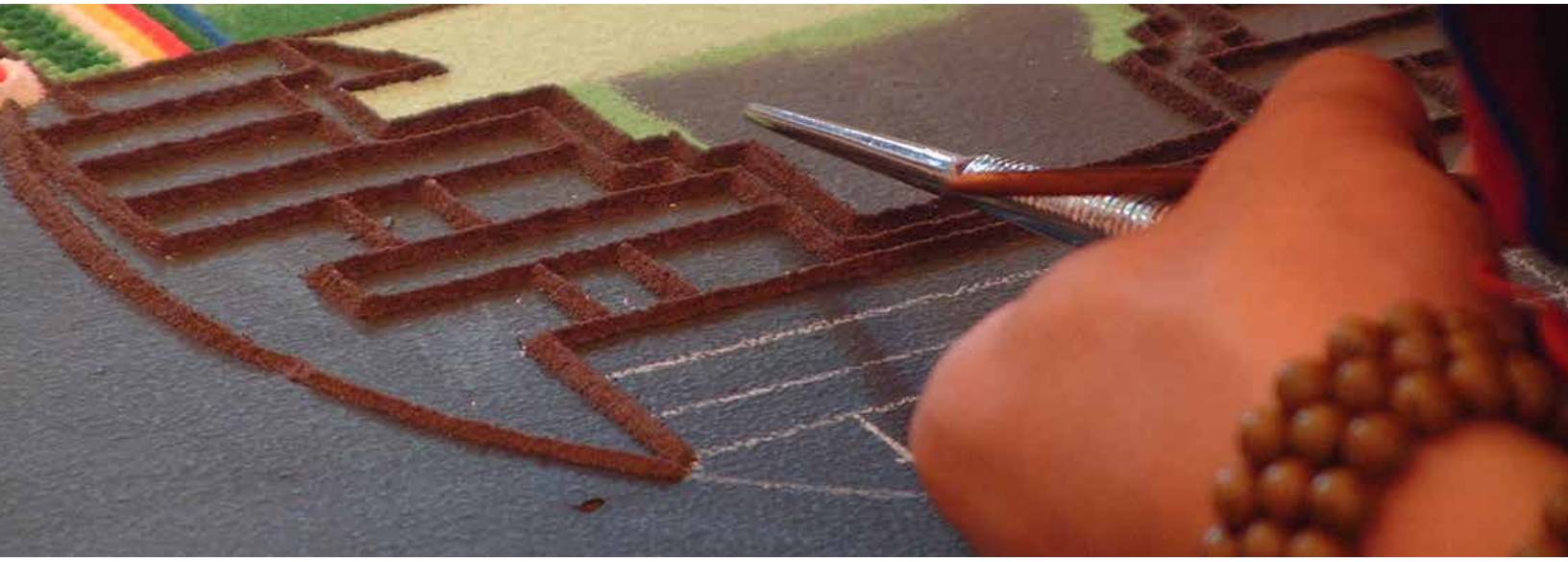
On their last night before leaving Tibet, the visitors and the nuns sing songs to each other in a cultural exchange. The visitors sing the pop song "Girls Just Want to Have Fun," which greatly amuses the nuns, followed by "You Are My Sunshine." The lyrics, "You are my sunshine, my only sunshine," translated for them, prove even more thought-provoking for the monastics. The little songfest is a moment where Hitchcock's vision truly shines. She captures this slice of life with both nuance and thunderbolt at the same time: One wonders what in the world the nuns must truly have thought of this performance. An astonishing level of acceptance and respect, from and for all parties, flowing in all directions, soaks right through the viewer's screen, inducing yet another of Hitchcock's visual mixed metaphors—gentle shock. This moment is why the filmmaker came here; this is why she made this arduous journey. She captures the attempt so many Westerners make of trying to practice an ancient tradition wrapped and hidebound in Asian history, its many hills and valleys highlighted in this moment of music-sharing. So far apart the two groups of women are, yet so mystically alike in their goal. All roads lead to Rome, we'd say in the West. Here, all roads lead to Buddha.

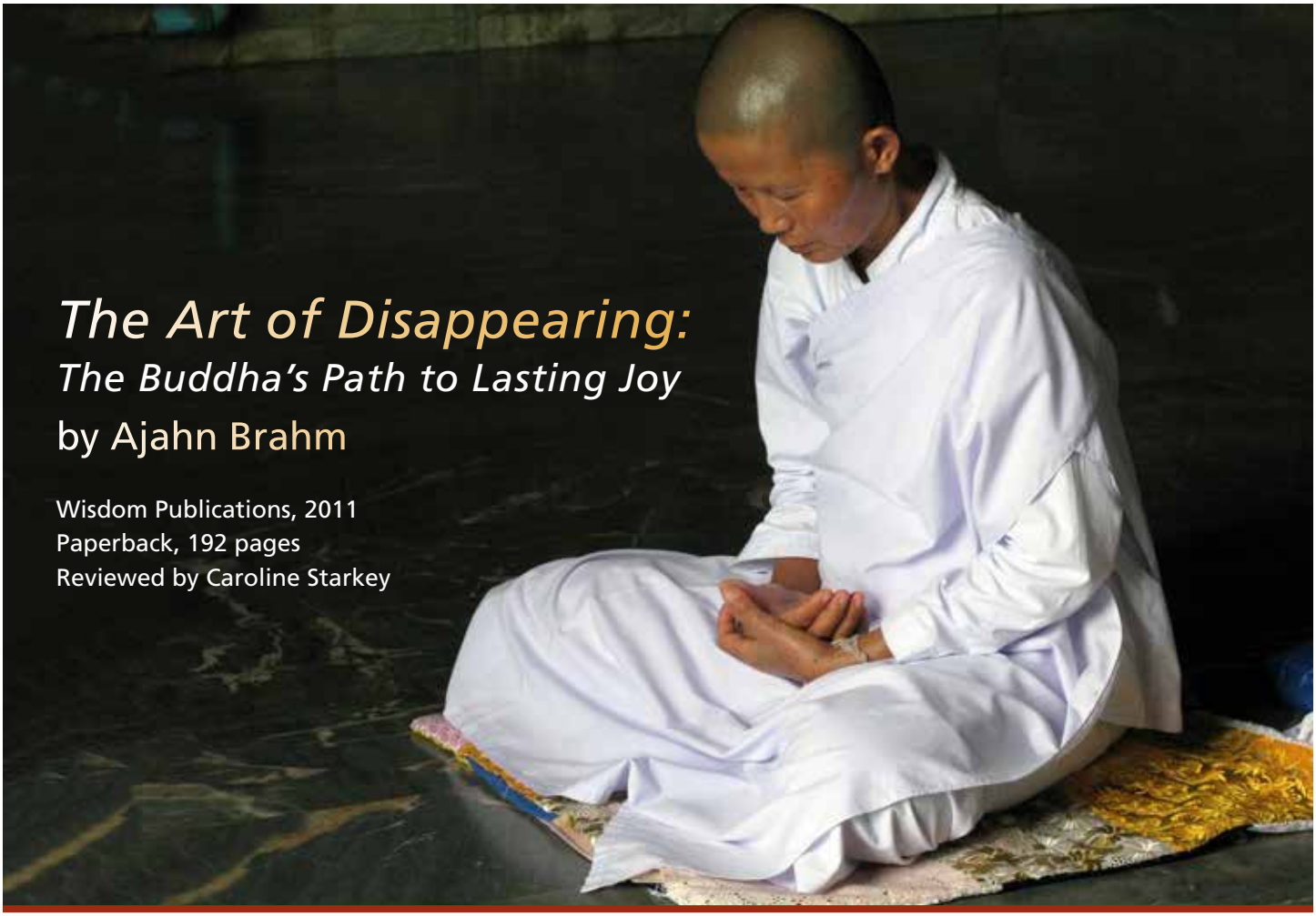
Well, not roads actually, but horse paths.

If there is to be any minor quibble with the film, it might be that sexuality is not addressed and at some points in the story seems a bit of an obvious omission. When the lama speaks of lower crime rates and less alcoholism in the neighborhoods near the nunneries, he doesn't mention whether local men ever try to break in or force sex on the nuns, and the filmmaker also never addresses homosexuality in a story of many women living in close quarters for all of their lives. One of the visitors, when talking about whether she could live the Tibetan lifestyle, answers no because she "is a sexual being." From her perspective this precludes her ever being able to live in a Nangchen nunnery. This would have been the perfect point at which the filmmaker might have doled out just a slice of information. The nuns seem somewhat ethereal and perhaps even over-blessed by the end of the film, but we know they must be quite human.

In all, *Blessings* can't help but deepen our practice and be intriguing for anyone seeking transformative metamorphosis. It is the diary of that quest. Director Victress Hitchcock, with the combination of her camera angles, lighting that could tell the story by itself, haunting music, and perfectly paced editing, takes us to a place we really could not possibly have gone before.

Kathy Jean Schultz *is a writer, editor, and video maker living in Ventura, California. She co-authored the book* Intuitional Healing: Finding the Healer Within, *available on Googlebooks. Her short video* Perishables in Love *was screened at the 1998 Channel Islands Indie Film and Video Fest. She has authored dozens of magazine and newspaper articles, as well as written and produced programming for public-access TV.*





The Art of Disappearing:
The Buddha's Path to Lasting Joy
by Ajahn Brahm

Wisdom Publications, 2011
Paperback, 192 pages
Reviewed by Caroline Starkey

Photo: http://fr.fotopedia.com/items/flickr-2520014407

As you learn how to calm the mind down, you also learn little by little how to disappear, how to fade away.

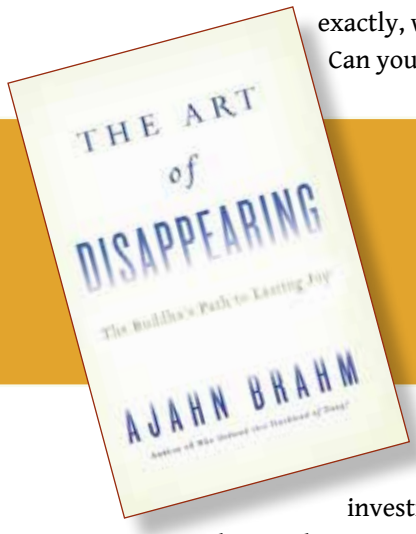
There is nothing quite like comparing your mind and meditation practice to shooting a hail of excited gunfire at a concrete cinema screen, yet in his new book, *The Art of Disappearing*, Ajahn Brahm does just that. Offering a number of traditional (and some rather nontraditional) stories, *The Art of Disappearing*'s central concern is to help the meditator let go and embrace becoming nobody. The disappearing happens, as Ajahn Brahm explains, "in spite of you" when you practice *nibbida* (disengaging or standing back). In fact, the real purpose of meditation, he extols, is to become a loser! To gradually lose ego, to lose your attachment to attainment, and to begin the process of disengaging because at the heart of it, "When even a little bit of you disappears, you have more peace, freedom, and joy."

This is a book that returns again and again to its central theme of letting go—yet it does not seem like a book for the beginner meditator. As Ajahn Brahm states in his preface, this is not a "how to meditate" guide. It does not tell you how to sit or exactly what to do in your meditation from one moment to the next. As he says, "Sure, I could give you a few instructions, but you're already off having a wonderful time. And that's exactly what I want for you." Instead, I believe the principle conceit of this book is to provide inspiration—and what better inspiration than giving a glimpse of the fun and bliss of what deep meditation might offer?

If you are struggling with your meditation practice, Ajahn Brahm's advice might give you pause for thought. If each time you sit, you are faced with firing guns at a concrete cinema screen, mind-numbing boredom, or tiredness, or you tend to just employ brute willpower to keep watching your breath, Ajahn Brahm's book could help. His style is gentle but at the same time disciplined. He's gentle in that he

continuously shows awareness of the problems that might be faced during meditation and provides pragmatic reassurance. His advice on dealing with tiredness exemplifies this: "Be careful not to own your sleepiness—it has nothing to do with you; it's just an effect stemming from a cause, that's all." The discipline he espouses features his characteristically direct statements relating to the importance of the attitude of the meditator: "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and success in meditation is in the attitude of the meditator." This is Ajahn Brahm giving attitude adjustment in kind but no uncertain terms. "You've got a choice," he offers. "You can keep on suffering, or you can attain parinibbāna."

Yet, is it really as easy and as straightforward as that? Doesn't a dedication to outcomes (e.g., parinibbāna) actually *hinder* the success of meditation (an aspect which Ajahn Brahm does suggest later)? Who is it, exactly, who is making this choice? Can you really give meditation the full dedication that this book advises without having some investment in the possible outcomes that might occur as a result of the practice? It does seem as if there are two seemingly contradictory sides to the advice. On the one side, be dedicated, make a choice; and on the other, "You don't become a meditator; meditating just happens." While I don't feel that this tension is ever satisfactorily resolved (perhaps it can't be), I do think I understand what Ajahn Brahm is saying. He is advising that there needs to be a balance between being disciplined in your practice and committed to making the effort, and forcing the meditation. "Meditation really is an easy thing to do, but most people just don't get it. What they do is try harder to make it easy—but that's a self-contradiction."



Instead, he suggests, stay with it, despite the experience of difficulty. Even though this is a challenging balance to strike, he assures the meditator that "When the energy stops going into the doing, it starts to flow into the knowing." Interestingly, Ajahn Brahm highlights that the difficulties that sometimes accompany meditation (including boredom, frustration, and irritability) actually provide a means to become aware of and really know the First Noble Truth of *dukkha*. And again he advises you to stay with it: "Next time you are bored, see how long you can be bored. Keep a diary of your boring moments . . . and see if you can beat your own record." Among other things, it is the gentle humor of this book that sets it apart.

Quite possibly the most useful tool he gives the reader in this book is his advice about dispassionate detachment, something you can do at any time, not just on the meditation cushion: "When you disengage and go inside to the place where Māra can't reach, there's a beautiful freedom from suffering." It's a movie, just a movie, he says. Let go, disengage, and disappear. He knows his Western audience well, but in our culture of attaining and striving, it is sometimes challenging to hear that: "I now know I was wasting my time trying to be somebody by studying to pass all those exams. You've probably been through all that . . . that's the kamma you have to face."

The difficulty with that is, what is the alternative? Can you really put effort into studying and education without ambition? I was left, very occasionally, wondering whether what he was suggesting was really possible for the majority of lay men and women navigating their lives. Although perhaps that is my kamma as a Ph.D. student! Indeed, although some of the advice in *The Art of Disappearing* does make you think deeply with a questioning mind, perhaps that is the point even though you may not always find the suggestions easy to put into practice.

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Still, I put the book down after each chapter with the desire to meditate, not to read—and you get the impression that this is what Ajahn Brahm wants you to do, as he sees his role as a teacher helping "to [pull] people out of their own piles of dung." But he is clear that the Buddhist path is about "virtue, stillness, and wisdom" and, ultimately, making the effort to find out for yourself. "Let go of the past, don't try to get anything, and have no expectations. Just allow things to disappear."

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