

Present

The Voices and Activities of Theravada Buddhist Women | Spring 2010

Buddhist Discrimination Against Women in Modern Burma • Venerable Anālayo • **Take It or Leave It and the Ground Between** • Saccavadi Bricker • **Welcome Good Branch, You are Not Unwelcome** • Thea Mohr • **Dignity and Discipline** • Thanissara Mary Weinberg • **Archotyping and the Language of Personhood in the Mātugāmasamyutta** • Jampa Tseodren • **The Bahudhātuka-sutta and its Parallels On Women's Inabilities** • Marica Pimentel • **The Four Assemblies and the Foundation of the Order of Nuns** •



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Present invites your letters—reactions, responses, reflections, and whatever else comes to mind. All letters to are subject to editing. Please email editor@bhikkhuni.net, or send post to PO Box 1058, Santa Barbara, California, USA 93102-1058

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A Joyful, Fragile Revival

The ordination of four bhikkhunis in Australia in October 2009 ignited a firestorm of controversy covered in the media, and various Buddhist blogs and web sites. A newcomer to the phenomenon of bhikkhuni ordination might assume this much uproar accompanied any woman taking higher vows. This could not be further from the truth.

At this time there are, for example, thirty women training to become bhikkhunis at Sri Lanka's Dekanduwala Monastery, a ten-acre complex funded by the Buddhist Cultural Center. This bhikkhuni training monastery is one of several places a woman may go to in Sri Lanka to pursue samaneri training. In all likelihood, these women will ordain without any fanfare or publicity and will return to their teachers for ongoing guidance.

The vast majority of the hundreds of women who have ordained since the late 1990's have done so without any notoriety. When I was in Horana in March of 2009, I met Thai and Malaysian samaneris who were ordaining as bhikkhunis the following month, and were planning on returning to northern Thailand to train in the Thai Forest tradition under highly esteemed Thai bhikkhus. One Thai samaneri—an articulate, well-educated woman—was stunned that anyone would be interested in them or what they were doing.

It is lovely to imagine their dignified ordinations and their subsequent opportunity to disappear into practice amid the lush forests of Thailand. Typical of bhikkhunis worldwide, they wish to be left alone to study and meditate. The last thing they want is the limelight. A good number of ordained women have refused interviews altogether, not because they are indifferent to others but because they realize they are still very newly ordained. They are maturing, and need quiet and solitude to develop fully.

Those of us who are working toward the revival of the Bhikkhuni Sangha believe that the contributions of fully ordained women are as vital to men as to women. Everyone at Alliance for Bhikkhunis (AfB) has had—and continues to have—knowledgeable and adroit bhikkhu teachers. We would never wish to lose them, but simply want our sisters to be heard as well, and to be allowed to join their brothers in their noble efforts.

Seeing a female monk opens so many possibilities for women. A young girl taught to revere bhikkhunis cannot help but come to respect herself in the process: young girls will internalize images of themselves as precious, noble, and containing the potential for immense spiritual attainment. What a loving message and legacy to bequeath to them. Men, in turn, can learn from their sisters and can become skilled in cultivating the feminine expression of the Dhamma. They can experience the joy that comes with being gentle, kind, and nurturing—all tender dimensions of heart essential to progress on the path.

and have been working energetically behind the scenes to help women ordain. Many openly. Delicately, skillfully, patiently, they have been altering the monastic landscape. We are grateful to them for their huge, loving hearts and dependable helpfulness.

Change usually comes in fits and spurts. Often it is not pretty and can feel awkward, even chaotic. We are all at risk for preferring the familiar and can feel disequilibrium and unease when new elements and ways of doing things are introduced. Moving from one state of consciousness to a fresh and broader

If disenfranchising monastic women were allowed, this disavowal would undoubtedly prove an insurmountable barrier in attracting critically-minded and compassionate people—men and women alike—to the Dhamma.

The AfB is not simply seeking the revival of the Bhikkhuni Sangha but is ultimately committed to the spread of Buddhism in the West and other parts of the world, as well as strengthening Buddhism where it is already anchored. If disenfranchising monastic women were allowed, this disavowal would undoubtedly prove an insurmountable barrier in attracting critically-minded and compassionate people—men and women alike—to the Dhamma. Literate and progressive individuals would have grave doubts about a religion that did not cherish the feminine. Protective fathers would not entrust their beloved children to a religion that demeans their daughters.

As little as fifteen years ago, there were no Theravada bhikkhunis. That is how new and fragile this revival is. The notable exception was German-born Ayya Khema, who ordained at Hsi Lai Temple in Los Angeles in 1988. Other Theravada women ordained with her. However, unlike Ayya Khema, they lacked assistance and most were forced to disrobe, a sad but inevitable outcome when organized support is absent. Countless people are propelling the emergence of Theravada bhikkhunis at this time. Mahayana bhikshus and bhikshunis have played an essential role in sponsoring trainings and ordinations. Numerous compassionate bhikkhus have taken up the banner

awareness, and the reality such an understanding ushers in, can feel perilous. We may feel there is nothing to catch us should we fall. Fear and resistance are understandable reactions to the novel and untested.

Whatever conflicts and problems have happened in the past, we can choose to set them aside. Even better, throw them away entirely and begin anew. We invite everyone to join us in working toward the re-establishment of the Fourfold Assembly that the Buddha implemented.

Like a loving family where there are occasional squabbles and misunderstandings, family members never forget their common bonds. They forgive and resolve to forge even sturdier ties. The Dhamma joins us as a family, all of us cheering and encouraging each other as we paddle toward the far shore. ❖



Susan Pembroke

President, Alliance for Bhikkhunis

Noteworthy

Going Forth!

Samaneri Dipa has lived in the Ozarks with the eight precepts cumulatively now for more than a decade, leading a local meditation and sutta study group. She ordained as a novice at Bhavana Society in 1999, where she trained with Bhante Gunaratana for several years. Inspired by the arising of the Theravada Bhikkhuni Sangha in the United States, last summer she visited Bodhi House and Aranya Bodhi Hermitage in Northern California, deciding to go forth again. In December 2009 Samaneri Dipa received the samaneri pabbaja with Venerable Gunasari Bhikkhuni at Ma-hapajapati Women's Monastery in Yucca Valley, Southern California.



Photo © Brenda Batke-Hirschmann



Thai Samaneri Nissara was raised and educated abroad and in the USA. She recently returned to Thailand to rediscover her heritage, and while there wrote several articles on Ajahn Brahm that appeared in the Bangkok Post prior to the bhikkhuni ordinations in Australia in October 2009. She was very helpful to the Alliance for Bhikkhunis (AfB) during last year's tour of Thailand, and in the making of the AfB's as-yet-unreleased documentary of the re-arising of the ancient Thai Bhikkhuni Sangha in modern times. While making the documentary, AfB president Susan Pembroke visited respected Thai bhikkhuni Venerable Ajahn Nandayani at Nirodharam, the women's monastery that she founded in Chiang

Mai. It is there that Nissara went forth as a samaneri in 2009, at first planning to stay only for Vassa but now indefinitely.

2011 Sakyadhita Conference in Singapore

Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women is pleased to announce that the 12th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women will be held in Singapore from June 12 to 18, 2011, with a temple tour beginning on June 19. Next year's conference theme is 'Leading to Liberation' and proposed panels and workshops include Leading Buddhist Women, Warming Up: Buddhist Women & Global Sustainability, The Place of Scholarship: Buddhist Women as Intellectuals, The Diversity Question: Are All Western



Photo © Sakyadhita International

Buddhists White & Straight?, Buddhist Feminist Leadership Training, Buddhist Women & Hierarchy, Cooperation: Laywomen & Nuns, The Question of Lineage: Women's Perspectives, Buddhist Economics: Strategies for Funding the Dharma, Conflict Transformation, and much more.

2010 Outstanding Women in Buddhism Awards

On March 5, 2010 in Bangkok, Thailand, eleven women from six countries were honored with the Outstanding Women in Buddhism Award. The award

has been held in Thailand annually since 2002. It coincides with the United Nations International Women's Day and is part of an international women's movement calling for change and celebrating the acts of courage and determination by women in the history of Buddhism.

The 2010 recipients include Bhikkhuni Dhamma Vijjani of Thailand, Bhiksuni Dr. Shi Zhiru of Singapore, Bhiksuni Ming Yu of Taiwan, Bhiksuni Dr. Karuna Dharma of the USA, Bhiksuni Dr. Tashi Choedron of Malaysia, Dr. Varaporn Chamsanit of Thailand, Maechee Aree Kieatthubthew of Thailand, Mrs. Sato of Japan, Professor Nartruedee Dendoung of Thailand, Supaporn Asavachaichan of Thailand, and Vanerath Sornprasit of Thailand.

Please visit the Outstanding Women in Buddhism Awards website to learn more about the awards and nomination process, and to read about this year's recipients.

Monastic Steward Sought...

At Great Determination Hermitage, Ohio. This is an excellent opportunity for someone seeking solitude and simplicity. Conditions are primitive: heating with wood or kerosene, water drawn from a cistern or brought from town, minimal electricity for lights, and a small refrigerator and hot plate.



Photo © Ven. Madika

A winter storm can make the roads impassable for 2-3 days. A monthly dona-

tion is requested to cover maintenance. Preference will be given to those seeking spiritual development, who are wishing to abide by the 5 precepts. The Hermitage will be available from October 2010 thru to mid-April, 2011. Longer or shorter stays are negotiable. For more information please visit [Great Determination Hermitage](#). *Text contributed by Ven. Madika Bhikkhuni.*

AfB Seeking Volunteers

The [Alliance for Bhikkhunis](#) (AfB) is entering into an exciting period of change. Positive development and increased volunteer involvement is helping us to move towards growth and expansion. We are currently seeking an Intermediate Web Developer and a Grant Writer. If you'd like to benefit your own career development and work with other dedicated people in supporting and nourishing the worldwide Theravada Bhikkhuni Sangha and the fourfold sangha, then please [click here](#) to learn more about the positions or to apply for them.

Ven. Sobhana Bhikkhuni Moves West

[Aranya Bodhi Awakening Forest Hermitage](#) is on the way to becoming a comfortable year-round setting for Buddhist monastic women to live in a quiet forest environment... to practice solitary meditation... to receive alms food offered in faith... to discuss the Dhamma... and to be part of a democratically organized sangha

in accord with the ancient monastic code. Effective July 1, 2010 Ayya Sobhana will become the first full-time resident (and prioress) of Aranya Bodhi, and a full-time co-leader of the hermitage project. She has been a student of Bhante Gunaratana

since 1989, served on the Board of Directors of the [Bhavana Society](#) during the 1990s, and took novice ordination at the Bhavana Society in 2003; her full ordination was at Dambulla, Sri Lanka, in 2006.

Graciously, Ayya Sobhana's mentor, Bhante Gunaratana, has fully blessed and encouraged

Ven. Sobhana Bhikkhuni's participation

in Aranya Bodhi Hermitage, and has given her formal independence—meaning that she is competent to independently practice and to serve the Dhamma. The Bhikkhuni Sangha is very appreciative of Bhante Gunaratana's unstinting outreach to women over many years. He has announced his support for bhikkhunis to establish their own independent centers, and Bhavana Society will donate a starter library of Dhamma books to the Aranya Bodhi Hermitage. Bhante Gunaratana has pledged his ongoing support: to participate in women's full ordination when invited to do so; to visit Aranya Bodhi to teach or lead retreats; to continue as an Senior Advisor to the North American Bhikkhuni Association; and to invite qualified monastic women to lead public retreats at the Bhavana Society.



Photo © Bhavana Society

Sakyadhita Flourishes in North America

Sakyadhita Canada is the Canadian branch of Sakyadhita International. It was established in fall 2009 and offers a way to connect Buddhist women and men across the country and around the world for the purpose of mutual support, networking, and sharing of information. To learn more or to get involved, visit the [Sakyadhita Canada website](#), or email president Shirley Jayanta Johannesen (sakyadhitacanada@gmail.com).

You are welcomed and invited to join in the founding of Sakyadhita USA, the North American branch of Sakyadhita ('Daughters of the Buddha') International, the international Buddhist women's organization. If you'd like to contribute or be involved, please visit the [Sakyadhita USA website](#), or email Charlotte Collins (charlottecollins@linkline.com) of the organizing committee.

Lumbini at Risk

The rapid and uncontrolled growth of heavy industry along the Lumbini Road Corridor is currently threatening the existence of Lumbini—the birth place of the Buddha and a UNESCO World Heritage site. The Lumbini Environment Protection Alliance is working towards removing all industrial activity within a 15km radius of Lumbini by petitioning the Nepalese Prime Minister and Environment Officer, and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in Nepal. If you wish to learn more or sign the petition, please [visit this website](#).



UN Day of Vesak

The International Council of United Nations Day of Vesak (ICUNDV) has decided that the 2010 7th United Nations Day of Vesak celebrations will be held in Thailand from May 23 – 25, 2010. The event, an international conference of Buddhist leaders, scholars, and organizations, will be co-hosted by Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU) of Thailand and Inner Trip Reiyukai International (ITRI) of Japan.



Photo © Ven. Sobhana

2010 Vassa in California

During the 2010 Vassa (annual rains retreat) a small group of bhikkhunis, samaneris, and sincere monastic life aspirants will gather together as Sangha on the land at Aranya Bodhi Awakening Forest Hermitage near Jenner, California.

There is still a great deal of work that needs to be done in order to prepare the site for inhabitation, including building two outhouses and outdoor shower enclosures, and continuing work on the road, waterworks, kitchen, trailers and yurt. If you would like to help get the Hermitage ready for the upcoming Vassa by offering labor or dana, please contact Jill Rayna (dharmacreeksangha@gmail.com) or Sara Sacksteder (saraca@earthlink.net).

Ancient Buddhist Treasure Rediscovered

After being lost for many years, then languishing buried under a mound of earth, the Sanghamitta Stupa has been found and re-opened. This stupa is the very first place in the world to be rediscovered where the remains of our enlightened Buddhist foremothers are enshrined.



Photo © Ven. Tathaaloaka, Theri

The stupa of the venerable Mahapajapati Gotami, Theri in Vesali as

mentioned in Buddhist texts has yet to be identified. *Text contributed by Ven. Tathaaloaka Bhikkhuni, Theri.*

Ven. Kusuma Bhikkhuni Currently on USA Tour

During the month of May, Ven. Kusuma Bhikkhuni is traveling throughout the USA teaching meditation and giving Dhamma talks. Recently she spent a week at Mahapajapati Monastery with Ven. Gunasari Bhikkhuni in Yucca Valley, California. From there, she travelled to

Colorado to teach at Rocky Mountain Insight in Colorado Springs, and on to Minnesota.

Ayya Kusuma, MA, Ph.D, is a fully ordained Sri Lankan bhikkhuni who has pioneered the re-establishment of the Theravada Bhikkhuni Sangha in her country. In 1996, she became the first woman in nearly 1,000 years of Sri Lankan history to don the robes of a bhikkhuni.

Recalling the struggle to gain recognition for the bhikkhuni movement, she has said, “The bhikkhuni higher ordination was taboo. Women who entered the dasa sil matha (ten precept nun) movement had no income, no education, no sanghika dana, and no sanghika property; they lead a hard life and were not well regarded by a society that had long lost the tradition of Bhikkhuni Order.” Today, there are over 1,000 bhikkhunis and more than 4,000 dasa sil matha iun Sri Lanka. There are over 40 bhikkhunis with university degrees, and several have completed MA’s.

To read an interview with Ven. Kusuma Bhikkhuni, and to learn more about the Ayya Khema International Buddhist Meditation Center in Sri Lanka (named in honor of the late Ayya Khema, and which can accommodate up to twenty meditators at a time—lay women and men are welcome), please [click here](#).

Ven. Madika Bhikkhuni Facilitating Rebirth of Dhamma Dena

Ruth Denison, founder of [Dhamma Dena Retreat Center](#) in Joshua Tree, California, began reaching out to the Bhikkhuni Sangha ten years ago with a vision of creating a combined lay and monastic community for women. In May of 2007, Ruth Denison donated Samadhi House (a 7-bedroom retreat house) to the Bhikk-



Photo © Nisansala Karunaratne

huni Sangha. Ven. Madika Bhikkhuni, abbess of Great Determination Hermitage in Ohio, has now been appointed as the new director of Dhamma Dena and Samadhi House, and will assist Ruth Denison as she transitions into retirement. The Bhikkhuni Sangha, and the lay community at Dhamma Dena, have endorsed the new leadership. In addition, a proposal for female monastics to informally rotate (on long or short visits) between Dhamma Dena and other North American bhikkhuni centers was greeted with enthusiasm by both lay and monastic sanghas alike.

With this appointment, Ruth Denison continues to make history. Dhamma Dena will be primarily—but not exclusively—for women, and training at the center will emphasize practical Buddha-Dhamma. Individualized and personal training will be available to all female lay and monastic visitors who come for retreat or residency.

Ven. Madika Bhikkhuni and Samaneri Dhammatara will reside at Dhamma Dena during the fall, and in Ohio during the summer months. A land steward is currently being sought for Great Determination during the winter months—for more details please see page 6 in this issue.

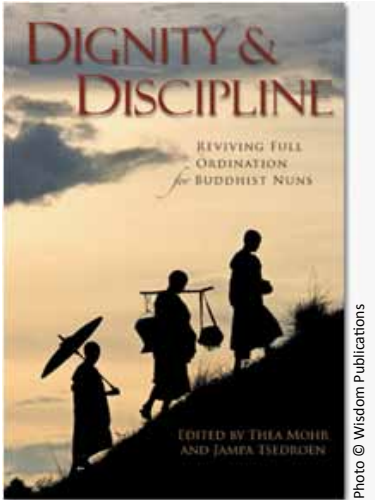


Photo © Brenda Batke-Hirschmann

Online Resources for Buddhist Studies and Readings

Wondering what that Pali word means? Scribd.com has a new site with free access to scholarly Buddhist texts and the Pali-English dictionary in digital format. The site is called Evam Me Sutam (“Thus Have I Heard”) and can be [accessed here](#). ❖

Books in Brief



When the Buddha established his community over twenty-five centuries ago, he did so upon a foundation of radical equality among lay and monastic women

and men. And indeed, the earliest Buddhist scriptures celebrate the teachings and inspiring influence of path-blazing female renunciants.

Nonetheless, through much of the Buddhist world, the order of nuns has disappeared or was never transmitted at all.

Edited by Ven. Jampa Tsedroen and Thea Mohr, *Dignity and Discipline: Reviving Full Ordination for Buddhist Nuns* represents a watershed moment in Buddhist history, as the Dalai Lama, together with scholars and monastics from around the world, present powerful cases, grounded in both scripture and a profound appeal to human dignity, that the order of Buddhist nuns can—and should—be fully restored.

A compilation of presentations from [The First International Congress on Buddhist Women's Role in the Sangha](#), held at the University of Hamburg in July 2007 at the request of H.H. the Dalai Lama, contributors include respected scholars such as Dhammananda Bhikkhunī, Bhikkhu Sujato, Bhikkhu Bodhi, Lobsang Dechen, Thubten Chodron, Karma Lekshe Tsomo, Bhikkhu Anālayo, and many more.

Dignity and Discipline is published by Wisdom Publications, ISBN-10: 0861715888 and ISBN-13: 978-0861715886, and is [available for purchase now](#). ❖

Abstract: The Four Assemblies and the Foundation of the Order of Nuns

By Bhikkhu Anālayo

According to the account of the foundation of the order of nuns, found with some variations in the different Vinayas preserved in Chinese, Pali, Sanskrit and Tibetan, the Buddha was quite hesitant to permit women to go forth and was persuaded by his monk disciple and attendant Ananda to do so only after repeated pleading. Not only was the Buddha unwilling to institute the order of nuns, but he supposedly even made the prediction that this step would cause his teaching to last for a period of only five hundred years.

This hesitation and prediction have had and still have a rather negative impact on the way the order of nuns is perceived and thus form one of the contributing factors that make it so difficult to establish an order of nuns in those traditions where the bhiksuni ordination does not at present exist.

A close inspection of the account of the foundation of the order of nuns brings to light several inconsistencies. As already noticed by other scholars, the eight special rules that according to this account were laid down as a pre-condition for the founding of the order of nuns presuppose an already existing bhiksuni-sangha, so that, in the form in which they have come down to us, these eight rules could only have been formulated at a time when nuns were already in existence. Some canonical passages do in fact refer to the ehi bhikkuni type of ordination for nuns, indicating that in the earliest stages of the history of the Buddhist order nuns were ordained with this simple formula, instead of the procedure referred to in the eight special rules.

Another problem is a chronological one, a problem that to my knowledge so far has not been noticed by other scholars. According to what can be gleaned from the relevant sources, the foundation of the order of nuns would have taken place in the 5th or 6th year of the Buddha's ministry. A closer examination of the canonical sources brings to light that at this early point of time Ananda still had to become the Buddha's attendant, in fact he still had to ordain. This makes it impossible for him to act as an intermediary in the way his role is depicted in the different Vinayas.

In addition to these internal inconsistencies, the account of the foundation of the order of nuns also does not concord with what can be gleaned from other canonical discourses regarding

the Buddha's attitude towards the order of nuns and the role the bhikkhuni-sangha played in early Buddhism.

Particularly noteworthy is a passage found in the Chinese, Pali, Sanskrit and Tibetan versions of the *Mahaparinirvana-sutra*, which makes it clear that right after his awakening the Buddha must already have decided to found the order of nuns, since according to this passage he told Mara that he would not pass away until his nun disciples were well established and trained. This passage directly contradicts the hesitancy to establish the order of nuns that the above Vinaya accounts attribute to the Buddha.

The *Mahaparinirvana-sutra* not the only such instance, in fact quite a number of discourses make it clear that the order of nuns, as one of the four assemblies, was an integral part of early Buddhism. The *Mahavacchagotta-sutta* of the Pali Canon and its *Madhyama-agama* parallel, for example, make a point of highlighting that the existence of accomplished practitioners in each of these four assemblies is what makes the Buddha's teaching "complete" in every respect. These and other instances make it clear that, without an order of nuns, the transmission of the Dharma is incomplete and an essential aspect of its inner life is missing. In view of such passages, preserved by different early Buddhist schools, it becomes evident that the account of the foundation of the order of nuns does not only suffer from internal inconsistencies, but also stands in direct contradiction to other canonical passages.

Besides, the prediction given in this account, unlike several other predictions attributed to the Buddha in various sutras, did not come true. From archaeological evidence we know that even in the 3rd and 4th century nuns were active participants in Indian Buddhism, so that they, and with them the Dharma, were still flourishing far beyond the five-hundred years' period envisaged in the Vinayas.

In sum, in view of a predication that did not come true and a hesitance that is directly contradicted by other canonical sources, it seems more probable that the Buddha was positive about the foundation of the order of nuns and that the Vinaya account of the foundation of the order of nuns, due to some transmission problem, does not accurately reflect the situation.

In contrast to the negative impression created by the account of the foundation of the order of nuns in the different Vinayas, the testimony of other canonical sources indicates that for the continuation and growth of the Dharma each of the four assemblies is an essential requirement. From this it would follow that every effort should be made to ensure that by establishing of an order of nuns in each of the different Buddhist traditions the ideal conditions for the growth and spread of the Dharma in the modern world are being provided. ❖



Soma (Bhikkhuni-Samyutta: Discourses of the Ancient Nuns)

Setting at Savatthi. Then, in the morning, the bhikkhuni Soma dressed and, taking bowl and robe, entered Savatthi for alms.¹ When she had walked for alms in Savatthi and had returned from her alms round, after her meal she went to the Blind Men's Grove for the day's abiding. Having plunged into the Blind Men's Grove, she sat down at the foot of a tree for the day's abiding.

Then Māra the Evil One, desiring to arouse fear, trepidation, and terror in the bhikkhuni Soma, desiring to make her fall away from concentration, approached her and addressed her in verse:

4. "That state so hard to achieve
Which is to be attained by the seers,
Can't be attained by a woman
With her two-fingered wisdom."²

Then it occurred to the bhikkhuni Soma: "Now who is this that recited the verse — a human being or a non-human being?" Then it occurred to her: "This is Māra the Evil One, who has recited the verse desiring to arouse fear, trepidation, and terror in me, desiring to make me fall away from concentration."

Then the bhikkhuni Soma, having understood, "This is Māra the Evil One," replied to him in verses:

5. "What does womanhood matter at all
When the mind is concentrated well,
When knowledge flows on steadily
As one sees correctly into Dhamma."³

6. One to whom it might occur,
'I'm a woman' or 'I'm a man'
Or 'I'm anything at all' —
Is fit for Māra to address."⁴

Then Māra the Evil One, realizing, "The bhikkhuni Soma knows me," sad and disappointed, disappeared right there. ❖

Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi. © 1997-2010 Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy.

1. Therīgāthā Atthakatha 66 identifies her as the daughter of King Bimbisara's chaplain. The three verses here are also at Therīgāthā 60-62, also ascribed to Soma.
2. Samyutta Nikaya Atthakatha *That state (thana): arahantship. With her two-fingered wisdom (dvangulapaññāya): with limited wisdom (parittapaññāya); or else this is said of women because they cut the thread while holding the cotton ball between two fingers. Samyutta Nikaya Tika and Therīgāthā Atthakatha 67 offer a different explanation: "From childhood on they are always determining whether the rice is cooked by pressing the grains in the pot between two fingers. Therefore, because of the feebleness of their wisdom (acquired with two fingers), they are said to have 'two-fingered wisdom.'" It should be noted that it is Māra the Evil One who voices this ancient bias.*
3. Samyutta Nikaya Atthakatha: *When knowledge flows on steadily (ñānamhi vattamanamhi): while the knowledge of the attainment of fruition is occurring (phalassanapattirāne pavattamane). As one sees correctly into Dhamma (samma dhammam vipassato): seeing into the Dhamma of the four truths, or into the five aggregates which form the object of insight in the preliminary phase of practice. Samyutta Nikaya Atthakatha explains in terms of the knowledge of fruition attainment because Soma, being already an arahant, would have been dwelling in the concentration of fruition.*
4. One entertains such thoughts on account of craving, conceit, and views.

Welcome Good Branch, You Are Not Unwelcome

By Anonymous

In the letter* that resulted from the December 2009 Western Abbots' Meeting (WAM), a lovely simile was offered of their lineage as "a gnarled and deeply rooted oak" which has weathered vicissitudes due to its lack of flimsiness. Change to such a great entity comes only slowly, they explained.

The ancient, historic Sri Maha bodhi tree of Sri Lanka comes to mind. Despite its extraordinary age of 2,300 years and its religious potency and rightly exalted status, the Sri Maha Bodhi tree is not enormous as one might expect. It remains simple and slender, not large. The trunk once consisted of two large branches that forked in opposite directions, as though balancing each other. When one great branch fell and died, it received an elaborate funeral and cremation.

Today the white-washed shorn stump of the missing branch remains prominently in view. Missing its other half, the living branch looks imbalanced as it leans at a low angle. It is propped upon iron girders for support.

If a new living shoot were to miraculously appear upon the smooth stump of the revered Sri Maha Bodhi tree's missing branch, how would the beloved tree's diligent caretakers

respond? They surely would be supportive! The new growth's progress would bring new energy to the whole tree. They would give all due care to the tender emerging leaves and twigs to assist in continued development; they would help ensure its continued survival. They certainly would not act as an enemy to the tender twigs and leaves of the re-emerging branch, by chopping it away with an axe, or destroying it with poison, or covering it with a blanket for it to wither away without light. They would protect it with their lives.

The gnarled, old tree of the lineage of the Thai Forest Tradition is missing half of its bequeathed trunks: the Bhikkhuni Sangha established by the Buddha. The glaring absence of half of its wholeness leaves the remaining Bhikkhu Sangha (and lay supporters, too) sadly imbalanced in numerous ways.

It seems the guardians of this lovely old Bhikkhu Sangha, upon seeing any sign of new growth developing on the old stump where there was once a Bhikkhuni Sangha, destroy it using an axe, or by using poison, or by covering it with a blanket so that it is denied light.

"Using an axe" means using influence with the lawmakers and law enforcement to cause the State to exercise its power to punish or harass women who attempt to ordain and any bhikkhu who tries to help them.

"Using poison" means spreading falsehoods regarding the potential to revive the female order.

Opponents of a Bhikkhuni Sangha in Theravada Buddhism have, for the past 900 years, continued to make numerous false claims. Yet in the Canon, there is only support to be found:

- In the "Maha Parinibbana Sutta," the Buddha stated it had been his plan from the beginning to create a fourfold Sangha (DN.16);
- With each new bhikkhu rule and bhikkhuni rule, the Buddha gave the same ten reasons for that rule, always for the recipients' ultimate welfare;
- "I allow you, O Bhikkhus, to ordain women" (CV.IX); and when he instructed bhikkhus to leave Vassa residence to help if a woman wants to go forth or fully ordain even if not asked for and all the more if invited (MV.III);
- "Welcome to you, good lady; you are not unwelcome!" (Thig.337);
- "I allow you, O Monks, to teach Vinaya to women." (CV.X.8)

In their letter, the bhikkhus of the WAM express confidence that observers will understand their limitations. They say that the status quo of keeping harmony with the Thai community by

sacrificing the cause of bhikkhunis—thus avoiding the wound of a potential split—prevents compromising “the spiritual welfare of all women and men, lay and monastic, that are a part of this lineage of Dhamma practice.” They do not see that hundreds of their female lay disciples would, in the right conditions, readily ordain as bhikkhunis for the sake of liberation. Remaining out of harmony with the Vinaya regarding women’s ordination wounds more deeply, affecting everyone’s welfare.



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Let us hope that the bhikkhunis of today and tomorrow will be able to count upon all conscientious members of the Bhikkhu Sangha to give all the support that the Buddha expected them to give to bhikkhunis. The Bhikkhu Sangha never had the option of simply ignoring bhikkhunis; they are forbidden even to recite their Patimokkha without first stating that a teaching arrangement has been made for the sake of their fully-ordained sisters. The Buddha established many lovely traditions from which we all may continue to benefit, like the refreshing shade of a gracefully balanced bodhi tree. ❖

The author of this article wishes to remain anonymous.

Edited by Marcia Pimentel.

*The WAM letter of December 11, 2009 is [available here](#).

Proposed Bhikkhuni Publications Series

The vision is for a series of high quality, free distribution, publications about bhikkhunis and women in Buddhism to support the revival of the Theravada Bhikkhuni Sangha, and to inspire and bring joy to people everywhere.

We hope to do this by: bringing stories and examples of wise, inspiring, compassionate and courageous buddhist women into everyday awareness; making the early history and contemporary landscape of women in Buddhism common knowledge; and to nurture a deep sense of connection and ‘at-homeness’ for women within the textual traditions and historical unfolding of Buddhism.

We would also like draw inspiration from the bhikkhuni Vinaya, both for women who have a monastic calling, and for those who would like to deepen their understanding of the nature of this training. We hope that by becoming more aware of the past precedents of the lives of women within the Theravada Buddhism, women (and men) will be able to more clearly identify the value and relevance of what the Buddha taught, in their own lives, right now.

Bhikkhunis Past and Present

- Early bhikkhuni history.
- The contemporary Theravada bhikkhuni landscape.
- A collection of essays and personal reflections about bhikkhunis from the fourfold assembly.

Inspiration from Bhikkhunis

- A collection of stories, inspiring images and myths about women from the early Buddhist literature (these can take many forms: art, personal reflections, fictional re-constructions, poetry, essays, etc.).
- Audio compilations of Dhamma talks.
- Collections of inspiring writing from 20th century bhikkhunis
- Re-translation of the Therigatha.
- Essays on the Therigatha and on the bhikkhuni apadana.

Bhikkhuni Vinaya

- A critical examination of the textual tradition and approaches to it, including essays on the garudhammas, sanghadisesa 3, sikkhamana training.
- A publication celebrating monastic and lay styles of Dhamma practice, which respects the integrity and beauty of the interdependent modes of practice, and reflects on the mutual obligations, expectations and relationships.

Bhikkhuni Resources

- A parallel to “The Bhikkhus Guide” handbook.
- Any other ideas of media that people might be inspired to contribute.

This series is still in its formative stages. Ideas, feedback, and contributions (editing, writing, researching, artwork, audio-visual etc.) are most welcome.

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Buddhist Discrimination Against Women in Modern Burma

By Saccavadi Bricker

I present this information based on my experience as a female Burmese Buddhist mendicant nun in the Theravada tradition for twenty-two years, from 1986 to 2008. I ordained as a Buddhist nun in Sri Lanka in 2003. Upon my return to Burma in 2005 to visit my dying father, I was thrown into prison, in the capital city of Rangoon, for being ordained as a nun. I was detained in the prison for seventy-six days, from May 27 to August 10, 2005.

My release was based only upon my willingness to unconditionally apologize for ordaining as a female monk. After issuing a formal apology to my captors, I was released from prison, taken directly to Yangon Airport, and immediately sent back to Sri Lanka.

Today, at the age of forty-three, I see and understand the world and nature, life and death, religion and politics. I have the clarity to understand that the information I present here—my story—is an important part of the history of Burmese tilashins/silashins (Buddhist female monks). Even though going to prison was difficult, I now also recognize that Burmese Buddhists needed to see female monks to realize that Buddhism is a religion that allows equal rights and equal opportunities.

Neither Buddhism, a practice of transforming oneself with love, compassion, and wisdom, nor the Buddha, an ideal description of man enjoying life without harming oneself or others, helped me appeal to those monks who had the authority to imprison me. I came to know deeply that these monks did not truly understand that Buddhism is about the practice of love, compassion, and wisdom, even though they all said that they understood.

Who were they? They were mainly the State Executive Buddhist Monks of the Union of Burma (Myanmar), who served in the year 2002 to 2005—the forty-seven senior monks selected from the nationwide States and Divisions.

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Saccavadi at the home she shares with her husband in California, photographed on April 21, 2010.

Becoming a Mendicant

I was unaware that Buddhist discrimination against women existed in Burma until I became a Buddhist mendicant at the age of twenty-one years old.

I began going on retreats after mother passed away. During the retreats, I heard many stories about ancient Buddhist saints and their practices, and how they used their practice to overcome negative forces. Venerable Pannyajota, the monk who gave the dhamma talks at these retreats, was abbot of a monastery named Duta and ran a nunnery named Mani. The nunnery was located just over a mile away from the monastery, deep in the forests of southern Burma.

In his Dhamma talks, Venerable Pannyajota emphasized the goodness of living in robes not only for oneself, but also for

others, including deceased relatives! I felt guilty about not having much opportunity to care for my mother while she was ill, and believed that by becoming a nun it would help both of our future rebirths.

I decided to renounce just like the Buddha did, to live a life in robes and with bowl. I continued university for two more years in order to complete my B.A. degree. After my final exams, I took a train to get to Ven. Pannyajota's monastery, where he ordained me with the help of several of his thilashins. At the time I did not think to ask him why we were not fully ordained bhikkhunis like the bhikkhunis of ancient Buddhist stories, but I noticed immediately that discrimination against women was very entrenched within the male Buddhist mendicant society in Burma. I felt very sad about this, but wanted to ordain for the benefit and well-being of my mother, myself, and all beings.

After several weeks in robes, I joined three other new thilashins in following Ven. Pannyajota's on retreats to small towns and villages throughout the Irrawaddy Delta. After a couple of retreats, he dropped us off at a nunnery named Dipa, which stood next to a small monastery where the resident abbot was about fifty years old. The entire site was an ancient Buddhist ruin converted into a make-shift residence. The nunnery was a sequence of ramshackle wooden huts, with large gaps in the wall boards and thatched roofs that had been attached to the side of the monastery. The nuns lived together in one of the huts, even during the winter when cold and wind seeped through the walls and roof. It was here also that we were to learn the texts for chanting the daily prayers.

We told Ven. Pannyajota that we only wanted to meditate and did not wish to learn the texts. He replied that we would not enjoy meditating all the time and that there would soon come a time when we become bored with meditation. He stated that the Pali texts would help to cheer us up and motivate us, so we began to study the texts.

Daily Life at Dipa

We got up at 4 a.m. each morning and walked across a small field to get to the room where we—the abbot and twelve nuns—sat, prayed and meditated together.

Typically, breakfast was eaten at 5 a.m., and was followed by chores, studying texts, chanting and meditating. At 10:30 a.m. we had lunch together in the dining hall, one of the few brick buildings. With lunch, we had finished with our food for the day and would not eat again until dawn the next morning. The thilashins would drink only water after midday, and early on suffered greatly from hunger during the evening and at night. We were afraid that we'd experience this suffering for the rest of our lives, but after one month, the hunger did not trouble us anymore! I was amazed that my body could live with so little food. Meals for both breakfast and lunch were very simple, and usually included rice, fish sauce, and beans or vegetables.

There was no electricity, and water had to be fetched from a well for drinking, cooking, bathing, and for use in the outhouse. During retreats we did not need to busy ourselves with preparing and cooking food, but in the nunnery we had to take care of many daily duties, including cooking full meals for about fifteen thilashins. Our cooking duties included chopping and carrying wood for cooking, building the fire for cooking, carrying water from the well, and removing many small rocks from the raw rice. We cooked the rice in a big pot and took great care to make sure it didn't burn on the bottom. We cut veggies for use in curries, made our own fish sauce, and carried all the food to the dining hall to serve to the thilashins. Afterwards, the nuns washed all the serving platters, utensils and dishes.

We walked on alms rounds together, each nun carrying a large tray on her head with another small tray inside it. The farmers gave us raw rice and money which was received first in the small tray, then transferred to the larger tray. Very few new nuns had experience carrying a tray in this manner and more often than not, the trays fell off of our heads. We could only watch in dismay as the precious raw rice grains scattered across the ground, feeling saddened because this meant that we'd have less food that night, and also because we felt badly for the hard-working farmers who had shared their rice with us. During the rainy season, nearly everything collected on alms rounds became water-logged, or simply blew away in the heavy winds.

We were never taught about why Theravada Buddhist nuns had to keep the eight precepts, that is: (1) not killing, (2) not stealing, (3) not telling lies, (4) not having sex in any form, (5) not taking intoxicants, (6) not having meals after midday, (7) not dancing, not singing, not playing music, not watching entertainments, not using perfumes, cosmetics, lipsticks, not reciting idle charms and poems, and (8) not sitting on luxurious seats or beds. But we strictly followed these eight precepts without knowing why we were asked to do so. We prayed each day for the generous villagers and farmers, for our families and for our fellow sisters and brothers in Dhamma—and for everybody, every creature, to be well and happy.

Return to Mani

After about three months at Dipa nunnery, all of the thilashins were sent back to Mani nunnery. I lived and trained there for seven years, until I received the Dhamma-acariya (teacher of Dhamma) designation. We were taught the Pali Canon and Buddhist texts by the monks at the monastery. There were about eighty resident monks and novices at the monastery.

Mani nunnery was once an old monastery, too. Ven. Pannyajota inherited it from a monk who passed away, and converted it into a nunnery. Ven. Pannyajota's was a talented speaker, and excelled at giving public Dhamma talks. He gave talks to very large crowds during his retreats, with an emphasis on the

goodness of the Buddha, and the practices of ancient male and female Buddhist renunciates. He wanted to fill his new nunnery with young nuns from middle class families, and very soon there were approximately fifty young ladies in residence.

All of the nuns were virgins and most were very young, ranging in age from thirteen to thirty-two. We lived together in a long hall with no privacy. Each nun was assigned a two foot wide personal space along the wall of the hall, in which to put her small box of robes and books. We could store few books in such a small space and therefore borrowed most textbooks from our small library. The space was designated for both for sleeping and studying, and during the three months of the rainy season we lived in this space nearly continuously. In summer and winter, when the weather was more hospitable, most of the nuns studied and slept outside the hall under the trees.

Again there was no electricity, and water for drinking, cooking and other uses was hauled from an open well. Most of the nuns sat in the dark at night without kerosene lamps or candles, memorizing what they learned in the daytime. Some of the nuns had memorized long discourses from the Pali Canon, and took part in religious exams after the night prayer ended at 6 p.m.

Once a week, very early in the morning, we would leave the nunnery and walk to the village for alms rounds. We walked in procession with each nun holding a deep bowl into which the villagers would place rice, money, onions, garlic, and small packets of indigenous herbs. Some boys and men, usually relatives of the local nuns, helped us by carrying larger bags and baskets.

The diligent practice and strong beliefs about the goodness of living in mendicants' robes meant that the nuns rarely complained or commented upon the food, shelter, lack of medical care, and generally poor living conditions. During the first few years after becoming nuns, most of the women were still quite healthy, but after approximately six years, virtually every nun was weak and sometimes became ill.

Once a week during the three months of the rainy season, the villagers cooked curries and gave it to all Buddhist mendicants in the village—we were grateful for such nutritious treats, and saved as much curry as we could for the next several days; however, repeatedly reheating the curries often made us ill. Yet we continued to mindfully practice and serve, believing that we would receive a most fortunate rebirth if we kept the precepts, learned the Buddha-Dhamma, and carefully followed the instructions given to us by the monks.

The Deception

Ven. Pannyajota ordained us not as fully ordained bhikkhunis (the traditional female monastic form created by the Buddha), but as female mendicants of modern Burmese Buddhism—silashins or thilashins. After the nunnery had been



Photo © Brenda Batke-Hirschmann

filled with tilashins, the emphasis of Ven. Pannyajota's talks changed from the benefits of ordaining to subjects such as generosity and preserving the Buddha's teachings.

Every year after the rains retreat, a great ceremony was held at Duta monastery. During this gathering, all of the monks in the province came from neighboring villages to perform rites and rituals. The villagers attended the ceremony and brought offerings such as sandals, flowers, food, and robes.

Two large loud speakers were pointed towards the village. The villagers could hear the ceremony, which included a Dhamma talk and questions and answers from the monks. During the ceremony I heard these words: "Now is the time for all male monks to cleanse their own misdeeds by performing this ceremony." He then continued, "There are no female monks here today because their kind died out many centuries ago. The sangha of nuns can never be revived because women are unable to keep the precepts."

We, the nuns, had always diligently and gratefully kept our precepts. We had served the monks, each another, and the villagers with gratitude and with open hearts. We loved the Buddha, the Dhamma, the sangha with every cell in our being. We had meditated for years, memorized and studied many of the discourses, learned Pali, and embraced the Buddha-

Dhamma with sincerity and diligence. And on that day, we had brought flowers to the monastery; we had cleaned, swept, moped, and lovingly decorated the sima (the sacred building in which ceremonies were held).

We were shocked and confused when we heard the monks say that we did not exist. The villagers could also hear the words of the monks clearly. I was surprised by what I had heard, and immediately felt that something was terribly wrong with the ceremony because I knew that we, the nuns, were here, and that we were as capable as monks in keeping the precepts, as virtuous and dedicated Buddha-Dhamma practitioners, and as compassionate and loving beings.

Each year a small ceremony was held to give monks, novices, and nuns certificates for passing various Pali exams. All of the nuns at Mani and Dipa had studied hard and passed the nationwide exams in top positions. Our names were broadcast on radio and on television, and Ven. Pannyajota was very pleased, stating that his decision to convert the monastery to a nunnery was the right one.

We had heard stories about how Ven. Pannyajota encountered difficulties while establishing the nunnery because the head villagers strongly opposed the idea of female renunciates and had stopped giving him alms. Later, they apologized to him at the railway station when Ven. Pannyajota was about to leave the village for good. Ven. Pannyajota had vowed to become a Buddha in his final rebirth, and believed that all monks, novices and nuns would become arahats (non-returners). It was exciting for all of the monastics at his monastery to share in this belief, and it motivated us to practice diligently.

In our nunnery, there were about five devout elder nuns in the position of looking after the young nuns. But most of the elder nuns were ill much of the time, and wanted to do more meditation and fewer exams or Canon studies. The young nuns continued meditating and studying, and passing the exams every year. We were growing up, and our practices were maturing and deepening, too.

All nuns, including the elder nuns, were told by the monks that no matter their age or number of Vassas (rains retreats),

We were shocked and confused when we heard the monks say that we, the nuns, did not exist.

During the ceremony, the village men took care of handing out the certificates to the nuns, who usually received them before the monk received theirs. The man handing out the certificates called the name of the first nun without telling her where to sit in order to receive the document. The hall had a platform only slightly higher than the floor, and when the nun approached the platform, the man suddenly pulled away the only empty chair left on the stage. He then dragged out a thin, torn, dusty mat for the nun to sit upon. Fortunately, each nun always kept with her a small sitting cloth. The first nun peacefully laid her sitting cloth on the mat to receive her certificate for higher exams with honors, and the other nuns followed suit. I could see that the monks and novices were watching the nuns with compassion in their eyes. After the nuns received their certificates the villager brought the chair back out onto the stage for the novices and monks. He then called out the name of a ten year old novice, who sat on the chair to receive his certificate.

they were to always bow to any male monk even if he was a five year old novice in robes for less than a day. The male monks and novices were told never to bow to nuns under any circumstance. Further, the nuns were informed that they were not to perform rites and rituals during Vassa. Following the advice of the monks, young nuns were to bow to old nuns even if the old nuns had been only recently ordained.

Male monks of the Burmese Theravada tradition are adamant that “lay people and nuns should bow down to monks because monks undertake more precepts” (227 precepts). However, in the Bhikkhunī Pāṭimokkha (bhikkhuni monastic code) there are 311 precepts—84 more than those of male monks! By their own reasoning, then it seems that those male monks would have to bow to bhikkhunis for undertaking more precepts. However, since Theravada bhikkhunis are currently not recognized in Burma, the argument is unfortunately moot.

On the Mani property there was a big pineapple field and many fruit trees whose fruit, when sold, helped to raise money

for renovating the old nunnery. While the numbers of newly ordained elder nuns were rapidly increasing in our nunnery, the population of teacher monks was also increasing at the neighboring monastery, with approximately one hundred and twenty resident monks and seven teacher monks. Many of the elder nuns looking out for the young nuns were also very devoted to supporting male monks and novices. They would ask younger nuns to peel pineapples and cut them into small pieces, which were then given to the monks. We peeled them and cut them until our fingers were bleeding from the acid, then we put the pineapple pieces into large metal pots and carried them just over a mile to the neighboring monastery. There was never any pineapple offered to or leftover for the nuns.



Photo © Brenda Batke-Hirschmann

Saccavadi documents her experience as a Theravada bhikkhuni. Photographed on April 21, 2010.

Corrupt Burmese Buddhism

In Burma, Buddhism has survived even through the many generations who have suffered wars between ancient Burmese kings, ethnic wars between various tribes, and world wars. After Burma's independence from the British, the Burmese government adopted Buddhist laws in an effort to protect and sustain the Theravada Buddhist tradition. While these laws helped to protect sincere monks and nuns as they went on alms rounds, by ensuring that they weren't arrested as beggars, essentially these laws were created to prevent corrupt monks and nuns from degrading the robes.

Abject poverty has shaped Buddhism in Burma, especially during the 1980's. In Burma, Buddhism also became a religion that fully discriminates against women. In the 80's and 90's, the majority of monks gave public Dhamma talks stating that the female body is born as the result of bad kamma, thought,

speech and action, and past rebirths. They stated that because of the menstrual cycle, women were more emotional than men, were weak and carried very many corruptions, and were unable to undertake and keep monastic precepts. In short, women were deemed unfit for monastic life, while men were viewed as ideal candidates. It was publicly stated that female renunciates—the Bhikkhuni Sangha—disappeared not too long after the Buddha's parinibbana because of “the problems of being women.” In their public talks, some monks also went as far as to add cruel anecdotes that denigrated women.

In 1980, the Burmese government instituted a Ministry of Religious Affairs, a Department of Religious Affairs, and a Director General was appointed to lead the two organizations, which consisted of a group of forty-seven monks selected from across the nation. These monks held the rank of State Executive Monk, and under them sub-groups of monks were assembled as State, Provincial, and Village Executive Monks. Their responsibilities included lesser duties such as dealing with disputes over ownership of monasteries, and larger duties such as translation and interpretation of the Pali Canon. At this time there were several renowned monks who were arrested for having many wives. Some were arrested for being drunk, others for gambling, and still others for engaging in sexual relations.

The ‘Practice of Rites’ (Repeated Ordinations) was highly popular by 1994 and renowned monks were often ordained many times within a one month period—basically whenever lay Buddhists were willing to sponsor the expense of an ordination. The ordinations were generally performed by six monks—sometimes more—and when the monks exited the sima (the sacred ceremony) building, lay people were standing in a long line outside to put money, gifts, herbs, and other offerings into their alms bowls. The monks proclaimed that the sima had cleansed away their misdeeds and made them arahats or Buddhist ‘saints’. Since it is believed that giving to arahats is of immense benefit to the one who is giving, the dana offering line-ups were long.

It is also critical to note that there were a number of sincere monks who refused government gifts including items such as money, rice, oil, candles, robes, umbrellas, and sandals. They refused this support because they were aware that the offerings were a result of corruption and wished no part of it. Many of the sincerely practising monks who refused government support were arrested for causing ‘disharmony’ with the (corrupt) Buddhist monks, subsequently receiving minimum three year sentences in remote prisons. One of the monks sentenced to jail was a highly respected and educated monk who had received the highest noble Buddhist title of Tipitakadharadhammabhadhagarika (‘Treasurer of the House of Dhamma’: one who has memorized nearly all three baskets of the Pali Canon). Other monks fled, travelling abroad and waiting things out until it felt safe enough to return to Burma. During this intense period of



The beautiful altar on Saccavadi's front porch welcomes visitors.

corruption, both Buddhist mendicants and lay people were equally vulnerable to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and it was difficult for them to help or support each other.

In this same time frame, a renowned monk of an ethnic Burmese people called the Paohh tribe had lived in a cave and meditated there in isolation for many years. His name was Samannya (Thamannya) Sayadaw, and he had ordained approximately one hundred male novices at the same time. They were ordained for no more than three days when the Ministry of Religious Affairs heard about it, and requested that the Director General of the Department of Religious Affairs send a delegation to request that Samannya Sayadaw not do this again. Samannya Sayadaw was forced to sign a statement admitting that his ordination procedure was invalid. He signed it, and did not do it again.

While many monks lived simple lives, contented and satisfied with little, keeping their precepts, going on alms rounds each day, meditating and studying the Pali Canon, other monks were trying to achieve fame and fortune by vastly expanding their monasteries and filling them with luxuries. There was an enormous gap between rich and poor Buddhist monks and nuns. In the mid-90's, there were ca. 500,000 Buddhist monks and novices and ca. 45,000 Buddhist tilashin nuns in Burma. Many lay Buddhists were extremely poor while many monks were extremely wealthy and living in luxury.

The State Executive Monks were not rich themselves, and seemed unaware that there was a growing demand for change; at the time many Buddhists voiced a preference for both the simplicity of traditional Buddhist practice and for traditional Buddhist bhikkhuni ordination. The lower status of Buddhist nuns had had a harmful effect on lay women in Burma in general. There had been a failed attempt to revive the Burmese Theravada Bhikkhuni Sangha in the 1930's. The Buddhist monk Adiccavamsa had written a book entitled '*Bhikkhuni Sasano Padesa*' ('The Criteria for Ordaining Bhikkhunis'). This book outraged Burmese Buddhists and led to Adiccavamsa's expulsion from the sangha. Adiccavamsa again attempted to bring a discussion about bhikkhuni ordination into the public view by publishing a new book entitled *Bhikkhuni Ayeypun: Buddhist Problems in Reviving the Bhikkhuni Sangha*. However, Adiccavamsa was again unable to convince the Burmese Buddhists that this was not wrong view and soon after publishing the second book, he disrobed. There were no further attempts at reviving the Burmese Bhikkhuni Sangha until the year 2002.

Arrest and Imprisonment

I had been living in Sri Lanka, as a tilashin, since the end of 1998. In 2001, I was informed about the ordination of the first Thai samaneri (female novice), a dedicated Theravada

practitioner who ordained in Sri Lanka. In 2002, I learned about an upcoming ordination opportunity that might give me the chance to ordained as a Theravada bhikkhuni. I consulted with the elder Burmese monks living in a Burmese monastery in Sri Lanka, called Makutarama Monastery, asking them if they knew anything about these upcoming ordinations. The elder monks told me, “You are an enemy of Theravada Buddhism. You have wrong view. You won’t be accepted as a samaneri or bhikkhuni, and you will only become a hermit of other religions because you have wrong view. It would be better if you got married and had five children rather than ordain.” The elder monks then travelled immediately to the Burmese Embassy in Sri Lanka and attempted to prevent the ordination from taking place. They also sent a letter to the State Executive Monks of Burma via the embassy, telling them of “my plan to ordain,” instead of the fact that I had only discussed with them what might be happening in Sri Lanka with the other planned ordinations.

The Consul General of the Burmese Embassy phoned me and informed me that he wished to see me at the embassy. I was astonished when I realized that the elder monks at Makutarama had informed the State Executive Monks and embassy officials. Immediately concerned that I would be ordered back to Burma, I decided to ordain instead as a samaneri, which would be far less threatening to the monks than a fully ordained bhikkhuni. Yet there remained a longing to wear bhikkhuni robes, this being the only vehicle for female renunciates that had been created by the Buddha himself. Knowing this, the robes of the Burmese tilashin/silashin that I had been wearing for sixteen years made me feel less confident in the legitimacy of my ordination.

And thus my file was opened with the State Executive Monks in Burma in 2002. I informed them of my decision to ordain as a samaneri and waited for their reaction. To my surprise, the Ministry of Religious Affairs did not strongly oppose samaneri ordination. This, in turn, helped encourage me to proceed with full ordination as a bhikkhuni in 2003. However, after my ordination in Sri Lanka, I was informed that the State Executive Monks wished to arrest me and had police standing by at the Rangoon airport. Fortunately, an opportunity arose to travel to Malaysia instead of returning to Burma.

Towards the end of 2004, I spoke with my father—who had by then ordained as a monk—by phone. He told me that he was terminally ill and that he wished to see me. I took the decision to return to Burma to be with him and to care for him. It seemed like an opportune time to visit my father, since the Department of Religious Affairs was engaged planning for the International Buddhist Conference, to be held in Rangoon in early 2005. There existed also the hope that this conference might help to open the door to re-establishing the Bhikkhuni Sangha in Burma. So I returned to the country of my birth—my home—and shortly after the death of my father was

imprisoned in capital city of Rangoon for being a bhikkhuni. I was detained in prison for seventy-six days, from May 27 to August 10, 2005. Further information about my arrest and imprisonment are currently [available online](#), and will soon be available in an upcoming article entitled ‘*Living as a Buddhist Monk/Nun*’. Subsequent to my arrest, the Burmese government published two books on the case, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs enacted laws making Burmese bhikkhunis illegal. These books are currently being translated into English.ⁱ

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In the desert near Yucca Valley, California. Photographed on April 21, 2010.

Last Words

Religion is man-made: wise and loving beings make Buddhist ideology useful in life, but ignorant people make it treacherous. No being shall have another chance to abuse me in the name of religion. I shall enjoy my life, appreciating the finest qualities of Buddhism, and I shall die knowing that no being has the right to abuse or punish another by appointing themselves the proprietor or adjudicator of Buddha-Dhamma. ❖

Saccavadi was born in Burma in 1965. She received a BA in Burmese Literature at Rangoon University in 1986 and in the same year was ordained as a thilashin. After earning an MA in Buddhism at Kelaniya University in 2000, she ordained as a samaneri in Sri Lanka in 2002. In 2003, Saccavadi and Ven. Gunasari Bhikkhuni became the first two Burmese women in the modern era to receive the dual higher ordination (*bhikkhuni upasampada*) in Sri Lanka.



ⁱ “Bhikkhuni Vinichaya, Decision that Female Burmese Monks of Theravada Buddhism in Modern Burma are Illegal”, first published in 2004, Publications of The Department of Religious Affairs, Kabha Aye Street, Yangon, Myanmar, by U Nyont Maung, Director of the Department of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Union of Myanmar; and “Bhikkhuni bhava abhava vinichaya, Decision that Female Burmese Monks of Theravada Buddhism in Modern Myanmar are Criminals,” first published in 2006, Publications of The Department of Religious Affairs, Kabha Aye Street, Yangon, Myanmar, by U Zar Ni Win, Director of the Department of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Union of Myanmar.



'Take It or Leave It' and the Ground Between

By Thanissara Mary Weinberg

In just over six months, the Thai Forest Sangha of Ajahn Chah forged two distinct approaches to the placement of nuns within the order. The first was the imposition of the 5 Pointsⁱ on the siladharaⁱⁱ nuns and the second was the Perth bhikkhuni ordinations. The bhikkhuni ordinations led to Ajahn Brahmⁱⁱⁱ being expelled from the Forest Sangha; his status as preceptor was revoked and his monastery, Wat Bodhinyana, was delisted as an associated branch.

Both the administration of the 5 Points and the bhikkhuni ordinations were done in an atmosphere of secrecy. It seems that secrecy was held for different intentions. In the case of the 5 Points, the use of force was undeniable. The siladhara nuns were led to understand that without acquiescence, they would no longer be welcome to stay within the community of the [Ajahn Chah] Forest Sangha, and that without their assent, no further siladhara ordinations would be conducted. That the inclusion of the 5 Points in the most recent siladhara ordination was a surprise to most nuns shows how little they have been involved in decisions that affect their training and life in the community.

In the case of the October 2009 Perth ordinations, the strategy of secrecy (although there was a public invitation issued prior to the ceremony) was seemingly done to protect the procedure from being prevented by conservative forces within the male monastic hierarchy. Controversy erupted, in any case, as some senior monks objected that the decision was outside due process and without consensus of the Elders. It is regrettable that there appeared to be no wider consultation from Ajahn Brahm with the Elder Council. However, at the same time that the Elders said they were preparing to talk about bhikkhuni ordination at the December 2009 Western Abbots' Meeting (WAM), they were simultaneously forging the 5 Points, which

effectively undermine any possibility of bhikkhuni ordination. In the face of such a crazy-making dynamic—and given the increasing imperative for gender equity in Australia—it seems Ajahn Brahm decided to act before the WAM blocked any possibility of an Australian-based bhikkhuni ordination.

Careful attention to the recording of the subsequent meeting at Wat Pa Pong^{iv}, in which the motion to expel Ajahn Brahm was passed, left some listeners puzzled. It seemed that Ajahn Liem, the abbot of Wat Pa Pong, was initially willing to ‘let it be’ if Ajahn Brahm did not ordain any more bhikkhunis—a request to which Ajahn Brahm readily agreed. However, ‘letting it be’ didn’t appear to be an option for those who pushed further for his expulsion. Many listeners were left wondering if the upset of a few monks really justified cutting asunder a large support base of those who feel an affinity with the Forest Sangha. Was there any consideration for those who now have to negotiate the odd terrain of divided loyalties? For many fourfold sangha members, the severity of this action seemed completely out of proportion to the simple beauty of enabling bhikkhuni ordination. Sadly, any distress expressed by lay supporters has fallen on deaf ears; it seems their perspective is irrelevant to the Elders.

at the edges— if not completely blown apart. A concerned outpouring of disappointment was presented at the WAM in the form of a petition of nearly 3,000 signatures, letters, scholastic representation and respectful feedback. A request by lay supporters and monastics who were not involved in these decisions was made to the Elders to consider revoking the 5 Points and reinstating Ajahn Brahm. A request was also conveyed for a more open forum for dialogue regarding furthering gender equity within the order. This collective response was an expression of dismay, but also based on concern that the precedent established by the Buddha, which encouraged feedback within the fourfold assembly, be maintained.

The response from the Western Elder Council was to close ranks and publish a party line justification for the decisions they undertook, thereby shutting down possibilities for open and authentic public communication. For concerned fourfold sangha members, the response seemed high-handed and insensitive. Subsequently in interviews and in public talks, Ajahn Sumedho—who initiated the momentum for the 5 Points along with a few of his close advisors—made it plain that he had no interest in engaging Western democratic values that

At one time it would have been unthinkable to challenge Church power or hierarchy. To speak out was heresy and the Church was swift to condemn or sentence to hell those who did. As Western Buddhists we like to think of ourselves as more sophisticated than this.

But are we?

The Perth ordination and the 5 Points, and the repercussions of both, catalyzed seismic shifts within the Forest Sangha which cumulatively broke the spell of its own infallibility. At warp speed, lay supporters were initiated into a sharp learning curve regarding complex points of Vinaya^v, bhikkhuni ordination procedures, the garudhammas^{vi}, historical misogynistic tendencies, Thai sangha politics, gender dynamics and a host of other related topics posted on blogs, Facebook and web sites. Many found their idealized versions of monasticism fraying

aim to defend and support human rights and gender equity. He expressed the view that “such considerations are outside of the Dhamma.” In doing so, he placed the problem squarely with distorted Western notions of equality, as well as with “strident feminists”— despite the fact that the petition was supported by many Asians and men, including monks. His reply didn’t take into account the Buddha’s clear intention to enable bhikkhuni ordination, as well as due process of consensus within the monastic community itself. Overall, the public response from



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the Bhikkhu Elder Council lacked acknowledgement that there was any problem within. Essentially, it is a habitual default to any probing of the power dynamic within the community: ‘you can take it or leave it.’

What are the implications when a religious community defines its own terms without due consideration of the context it operates within? In terms of a human dynamic, many of the petitioners wondered why it was so difficult to simply acknowledge the feedback (at the very least) and perhaps even inch toward recognition that the concern, if not the detail, be considered. It is not as if the feedback came from the extreme fringe (even moderate supporters who ventured a critique found themselves labelled as “demanding feminists”), but from responsible and devoted practitioners who collectively represented a considerable voice of seasoned experience. It simply wounded the heart to see faithful and dedicated supporters acknowledging their indebtedness for the opportunity to practice and receive teachings as part of the Forest Sangha, yet resigning from administrative jobs or quietly leaving—some under a cloud of criticism—with little acknowledgement for their years of service. To bring concerns into public view is not to

diminish the value of monastic life, nor the gratitude for what is offered, but to address genuine disquiet regarding the integrity of how power is wielded.

So what happens for those who feel unable to subscribe to a ‘take it or leave it’ strategy and who feel there is no interest in their concerns? And what happens when there is public denial of any problem?

At the moment we watch the Catholic Church wrestle their conscience with secrets kept in a history of abuse. If there had been no public outcry, would the hierarchy of the Church carry on business as usual? There is much to learn from this situation for emerging Buddhist institutions in the West. What happens to religious institutions when they become impervious to secular law, or deaf to the concerns of those marginalized from a power dynamic? The religious language of the Church has chosen to frame a priest’s abuse of 200+ deaf boys^{vii} under his care as a ‘sin’, rather than as a ‘crime against human rights.’ How we frame a problem conditions the outcome. A sin can be dissolved in a secret confessional box, while a crime needs to be fully acknowledged in the public light of day and amends undertaken. At one time it would have been unthinkable to challenge Church power or hierarchy. To speak out was heresy and the Church was swift to condemn or sentence to hell those who did. As Western Buddhists we like to think of ourselves as more sophisticated than this. But are we?

As the siladhara struggled to find a way to digest the impact of the 5 Points, not only were they asked to keep silent, it also became clear that it was neither safe nor comfortable to speak out. This code of silence has generated a culture of denial in regard to the undermining impact the 5 Points have had on the siladhara and their community. What happens in a culture of secrecy and denial when fear shuts down open and authentic inquiry and dialogue?

One of the 5 Points, apparently drawn from the earlier eight garudhammas (which themselves are of questionable legitimacy^{viii}), maintains that while nuns must invite feedback from the monks, there is no forum for a reciprocal invitation wherein nuns can offer monks feedback. Even less welcome is feedback from the lay community. Since the Vinaya itself was shaped via a process of feedback—much of it given directly to the Buddha by the lay community—it is this vital principle of dialogue that enables the health and safety of the fourfold assembly, while maintaining sensitivity to the context it lives within. Mutual feedback isn’t a Western invention: it was in operation right from the birth of the Buddhist monastic sangha, and it is a relational skill that finds no discomfort within the domain of the feminine.

At the heart of this crisis within the Forest Sangha—the fulcrum around which all else swirls—is the issue of the democratization of Awakening; in other words, how the power structure has contracted and become a defence against, rather than

inclusive of, the feminine. The feminine is not merely comprised of women per se: the feminine represents the capacity to engage in a relationally-based process of consensus, as opposed to patriarchy, which confers power through hierarchy and 'chosen sons'. If small groups of non-elected Elders claim the right to make all the decisions, while also devaluing the input of nuns, lay people and their surrounding monastic community, then a more mature co-created field of Awakening is thwarted. Instead of a dynamic sangha field that is deeply inclusive of lay and ordained female and male practitioners, and in which authentic communication is encouraged, the tendency towards fear, domination, mistrust and competitiveness becomes accentuated. A culture of monologue takes precedent, and depth listening, a further attribute of the feminine, is lost.

Also lost is the consensus-based grassroots structure that was originally intended as the foundation of sangha. To listen, rather than dominate, is so badly needed in our times when all that we love about this earth, and the precious life it enables, is in danger of being utterly lost for future generations. For thousands of years, human consciousness has been shepherded by a patriarchal imperative that has sought control and dominion over all natural resources. We now face the culminating conclusion of this consciousness, which is the real possibility of the destruction of our fragile ecosystem.

In response, the archetypal feminine is rising, as in no other time in his-story, in defence of the very earth herself. The feminine within both men and women—but particularly in women—finds itself less tolerant to collusion. More than ever, women feel the imperative to speak their deeper truth. It is in this context we see increased interest of proper placement of nuns, in particular the reinstatement of bhikkhuni ordination within Buddhist monasticism. It is also within this context that the 5 Points landed so hard on the siladhara nuns.

Siladhara ordination evolved over a period of thirty years of Western women's presence within the Forest Sangha. As an ordination vehicle, it was 'put together' to enable training for women wishing to live as alms mendicants in the West. While it has served well in the past, it is an ambivalent ordination within Theravada Buddhism. Sri Lanka resolved ordination ambivalence and the placement of female renunciates by reinstating full bhikkhuni ordination. There are now nearly 1,000 fully ordained Sri Lankan Theravada bhikkhunis. Yet I remember that the early 1980's, Western women who had ordained as bhikkhunis were expelled from Sri Lanka and threatened with imprisonment. If a conservative country that has been the keeper of Theravada from the earliest days of Buddhism can bring this about, then surely it is possible for Theravada within the West to forge a more visionary approach.

The 5 Points tap into the painful inheritance of misogyny within Buddhism and work directly against a fuller expression of Awakening through female incarnation. For some,

living under the 5 Points shadow is untenable. The 5 Points are crippling. Even in absentia of a dual community, where the internalization of the energetic dynamic of these points is not so obvious, they can insidiously shift reference for spiritual authority from an inner confidence to that of male religious authority.

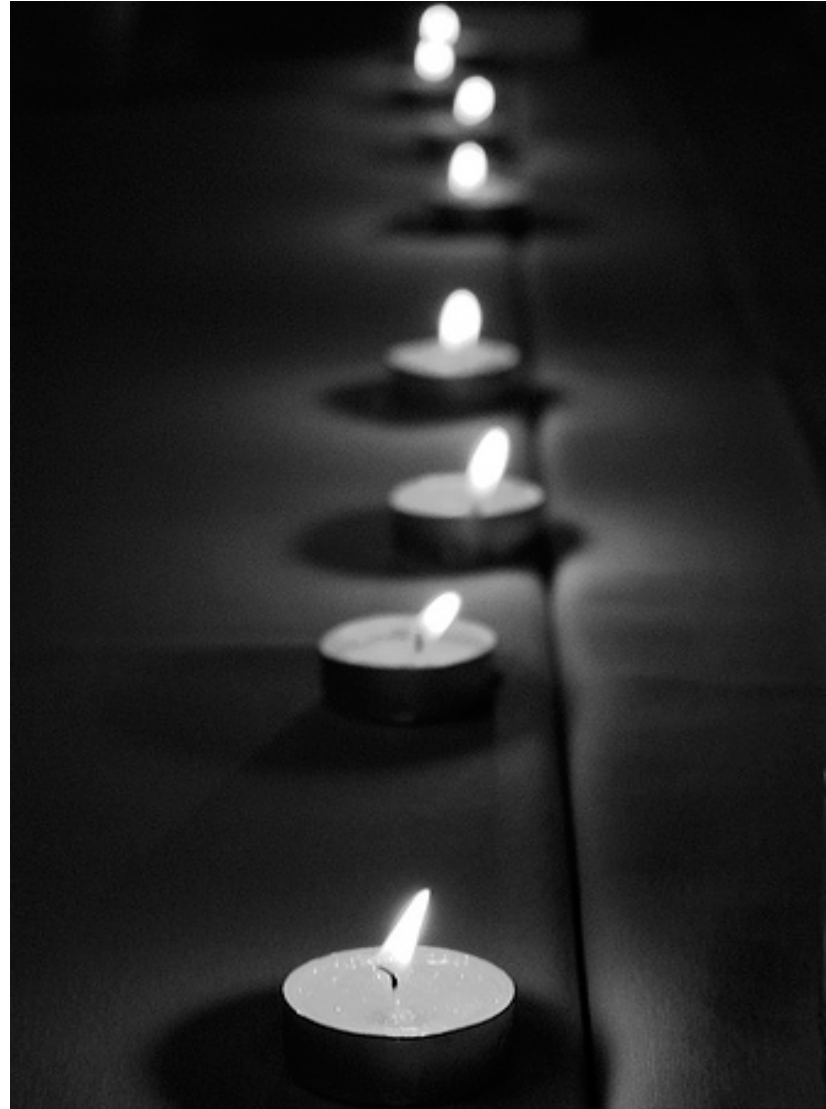


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For centuries, major religions have mostly disregarded the spiritual authority of the feminine. This sets the stage for a unique journey that lay and ordained women undergo in the face of such powerful patriarchal shaping, particularly with the inheritance of a nearly invisible lineage of female practitioners within 2,550 years of Buddhist transmission. It is a journey to claim an inner authenticity and confidence that is rooted in—and emerges from—the feminine. This is different than the authority that emerges from internalizing the power dynamic of patriarchy, which may generate an inner dissonance for woman practitioners.

When women internalize the hierarchical power dynamic that patriarchy encourages—done at the expense of their deeper nourishment from within the feminine—the need for affirmation, due to the inner hollowness that is felt, can be relentless.

If there is no real understanding of this effect, women can become competitive and damaging to their subordinates and find themselves betraying their sisters in order to win favor with men who exert power over them. While the reclamation of the feminine is a painstaking journey for women, it is ultimately a journey that men also need to undertake in order to mature their Awakening. Indeed it is far too simplistic to say that women are the poor victims and men are perpetrators: some men are much more grounded in the feminine than some women.

Ultimately, both men and women are wounded by patriarchy. I will explore this territory further for an upcoming anthology, to be published in 2011. But suffice to say that overall, it simply feels deeply inappropriate within the imperative of our time to unnecessarily legislate the perpetuation of centuries of conditioning which confers authority onto the masculine at the expense of Awakening within the feminine—an Awakening that was maturing into a coherent, strong, healthy and vibrant nuns' community in the UK.

The community today now seems to be significantly altered from what it was nearly one year ago. In August 2009, the siladhara nuns were summoned into a meeting at Amaravati Monastery, which they assumed was merely a casual get-together. Instead, they were delivered the 5 Points, which most of them experienced as shattering. The shock—also palpable to many Amaravati lay supporters and friends—was felt by the nuns as a full body blow. The Siladhara area group of exceedingly strong and adept practitioners, who have proved capable of weathering great inner and outer hardship. My own understanding is that the shock wasn't due to an inability to practice with these conditions, or any for that matter; rather, it was due to the deeply embodied knowing—a knowing that doesn't easily find words—that the demanded acquiescence was not only a betrayal to the Awakening feminine within themselves, but also within consciousness itself. During this process an injunction of confidentiality was placed upon the siladharas, leaving no recourse for any other authority or supporter to help negotiate their position.

Without the protection of placement within the larger movement of Buddhism which bhikkhuni ordination offers, a siladhara nun's training is susceptible to additions and subtractions whenever it suits an Elder bhikkhu council or a preceptor. Is it then the case that such a council or preceptor eclipses the siladharas' own sense of lineage to the Buddha? And is it really only the business of a small group of bhikkhus to adjust or add to their training, including imposing injunctions that undermine the very conditions required for bhikkhuni ordination? Is it not

also of interest for lay and monastic supporters who wonder what the implications are for Siladhara Order in the future? Do the unilateral actions of the Elders not invite all Theravada Buddhists to acquiesce? It seems that without the checks and balances that community consensus provides, force becomes the modus operandi and a lack of discernment gains traction. A culture based on undue use of power, insensitivity to context, and reluctance to dialogue can only generate a false and dangerous reality.

Gender inequality within Buddhist monasticism is often maintained through the argument that the only place of true equality is enlightenment. Life is simply unfair, and no amount of tinkering with the conditions of the world will resolve its underlying dukkha^x so better to aim for enlightenment. While this perspective is ultimately true, the reality is that we do not live in ultimates. We live in a relative, relational reality where actions have consequences. For example, in the apartheid regime in South Africa, the gross distortion of human rights due to racial discrimination was defended by numerous religious bodies as morally justified. Blacks were simply understood to be inferior to whites. Upon that premise, an entitled racial group created a servant class of over 40 million people. Apartheid could only be sustained through the use of brute force and through the constant inner and outer affirmation of the superiority of one class of people over another.

As someone who has lived and worked in South Africa since 1994, it was disturbing to be told by a very prominent Elder bhikkhu that 'nuns can't really do it', meaning they can't really practice or get enlightened. While I don't think this is a view shared by the majority of monks, within the Ajahn Chah Thai Forest tradition there is an insidious and pervasive sense that women aren't really taken seriously as vessels of Awakening. What happens if these views are held, even unconsciously, by those who shape sangha policy? Any legislation that places one group of people—whether by gender or race—as inferior to another is bound to have dire psychological consequences. The 5 Points legislate a tendency that reinforces the sense of 'less than.' If a thirty Vassa^x nun has to wait until a one Vassa monk decides whether to invite her to give a Dhamma talk or lead a blessing chant, the cumulative result has to be that the worth, importance and voice of a seasoned, mature nun is less valuable than a novice monk.

The continuing objectification of 'the other' as 'less than' over a period of years justifies a distortion of power, and in such an atmosphere it is challenging to maintain healthy community. In an environment such as this, the propagation of absolutes applied to all relative levels of concern can easily confound and negate the tender inner voice through which conscience communicates. It becomes harder and harder to hear inner authenticity, to be honest, and to trust. Eventually people say less and less about what they truly feel, and they learn

question the very accuracy of their own perceptions. Instead, what is told over and over by those in power becomes the norm, and what is authentically felt becomes denied. It creates a spell of sorts, which no one can break.

As practitioners, however, we must ‘let go’ and move on. Though there is public acknowledgement of the territory between ‘either stay on these terms, or leave’, the disquiet is mainly whispered about behind closed doors. It takes courage to speak out in the face of such considerable opposition. It takes courage to point to the ‘irrational’ roots of discrimination. It is not easy to request dialogue in the face of an authority that uses legal and spiritual arguments to build a defensive wall. In such a culture, those who do speak out tend to be marginalized, demonized or shamed.

This was the case with a siladhara at Chithurst Monastery who signed the petition. The petition was printed out by monks and her name was circled in red and pinned on the door of the nuns’ room in the monastery. An act of bullying, foolishness—boyishness even, almost something one could dismiss as a result of the reactivity around the petition. Yet it clearly revealed a mind set. There was no respect given a senior nun who was trying to find a way to express her concern at decisions she was not invited into, but that powerfully shaped her life. The same was true of the male monastics who found themselves consequently bullied, sanctioned and ostracized after signing the petition. Given that there was no place of safety offered within the communal process to raise objection, those who did sign the public petition were responding the best they could in accordance with their conscience.

Even more insidious is the inner dissonance that happens when a communal culture lacks openness. When an inner sense of conscience (and increasingly gender equity is a matter of conscience) is overridden by a teaching that suggests conscience is not in accord with the Dhamma, then there is the potential for something quite sickly to emerge.

Fortunately, as with any disease, there are symptoms which alert us: leaders who become unaccountable and unreachable; ends that are justified by any means deemed necessary by leaders; leaders who induce feelings of shame and guilt in order to influence and control members; group membership that involves cutting of ties with outsiders who may bring up awkward questions; questioning, doubt, and dissent is discouraged or even punished; the group becomes elitist and an ‘us versus them’ mentality dominates which brings it into conflict with the surrounding culture. As Buddhist traditions with powerful leaders at their head become established as Western institutions, they can be susceptible to projecting themselves as infallible. But the maturity of both a person and an institution is measured in part by its willingness to receive critique. In the same way religious teachings can offer valuable insights for society, considered critique from lay society is an important way

of maintaining checks and balances for religious institutions. There can be no harm in finding forums that enable a respectful exchange and a deeper listening to the context within which the Dhamma is being placed.

Is it really the case that perceived ‘Western demands for gender equality, individual rights and social justice fall outside the practice of Dhamma-Vinaya’? Numerous examples within the Suttas show that the monastic order was influenced by the surrounding culture it was birthed within. Buddhism has always been an evolving dynamic, rather than a static tradition. Its transmission from one culture to another has allowed for influence from the milieu it finds itself within. The Buddha himself set a precedent for adaptability by using the everyday conversational language of the time, which was Magadhi (closely related to Pali) rather than the language of those who held religious power, which was Sanskrit. The encounter of Buddhism with the West has met with influences from democracy (which includes lively debate and inquiry), engaged social action, psychology and feminism, all within the context of the diminishing influence of hierarchy in society. These influences have interfaced with the transmission of Dhamma to generate a vigorous dialogue, which one would hope can remain open and responsive.

While it is true to say that it is possible to practice in any situation, and that placement doesn’t matter, it is also the truth that the displacement of nuns, over a period of centuries, has made their history invisible—and has thwarted the potential for strong female leadership. What struck many of us numb was that thirty years evolution of the nuns in the UK, which had enabled a more shared caucus and ground for consideration in regards to bhikkhuni ordination, was utterly neglected by the imposition of the 5 Points.

A phrase that has been going through my mind regarding all these recent developments within the Forest Sangha is ‘the burden of denial’. Western psychology explains that difficult emotions that are dismissed or disowned in the name of transcendence tend to get projected onto others. What we cannot bear to feel ourselves, we require others to hold for us. Of course it is not a conscious transaction, since those who project and those who internalize projection hardly know it is happening. We project not only our shadow material, but also our enlightenment potential.

Sometimes it is easier to hand our power over than to tolerate owning it ourselves. When we lose the middle ground of every day human interaction which keeps us more real, we become ideals, archetypes and fantasies to ourselves and each other. When monasticism is used to dehumanize, to inflate ourselves, or to distance ourselves from authentic contact, then the ‘field of relationship’ becomes rife for projection.



As a young nun at a formal morning work meeting, I was quietly minding my own business when the abbot came into the meeting. He was clearly upset as he had just disrobed a monk. I didn't have any particular problem with the monk disrobing, I was just observant of the fact that he was now sitting in lay clothes. However the abbot was clearly very angry, and yet was pretending that everything was okay. Suddenly, a wave of energy hit me with considerable force. I literally felt it roll across the room from the abbot to me. I found myself consumed with so much grief and upset that I had to leave the meeting. Afterwards I wept for two solid hours. It was so clear to me that it wasn't my energy—I just happened to have been a vehicle for displaced grief and anger (and for my trouble, I was seen as an emotional nun). This was the first time that I clearly understood the principle of projection, though at that time I didn't have the framework for understanding or naming it. Of course I have also projected a lot onto others, which is always embarrassing to acknowledge. Then again, we all have. It is not a surprise to many of us Westerners to know that while we might be adept at meditation, we can also be psychologically wounded with questionable emotional maturity.

Over the years, monastics in the European Union have relied on non-Buddhist methods for facilitating their inner growth and for supporting the development of the community.

Their practices have included approaches such as therapy, and also drawing from other lineages and spiritual practices. The truth is that for the most part, the observance of Vinaya and the practice of meditation has not been enough to heal psychological wounds or meet the deeper human need for connection and love. To acknowledge this gives a fuller picture of how complex the lived process of Awakening actually is. It is a disservice to not communicate a more accurate picture of how much healing and integration of the personal and communal is needed for us as Westerners.

A leap to the ultimate does not necessarily enable an increase of compassionate holding or community well-being. The reality is that the ideal of letting go is often very far from an integrated living of it. Letting go can easily become avoidance. As practitioners, we need to discern true transcendence from a premature 'non-attachment' that masks the fear and denial of complex emotional feelings which are evoked in human relationship. When dharma practice is used to disassociate from authentic human interaction which happens best within a level playing field, then distortions appear.

Buddhist monastic traditions seem to have a real difficulty in finding a level playing field in regard to their relationship to women. A fascinating read, which didn't gain much traction in the Buddhist world—perhaps due to some of its controversial content—is the work of June Campbell, who was translator and

consort of Kalu Rinpoche. Needless to say while her translation work was public, her sexual liaisons with the great master were secret! Years later, as an avowed non-Buddhist, she wrote of her experience in the book ‘Traveller in Space, In Search of Female Identity in Tibetan Buddhism’^{xi}. Her perspective is that rinpoches—taken from their mothers at a young age—may have very distorted images of women. Women were deified,

Elizabeth Day (former siladhara Sister Cintamani) illustrates how the removal of denial has literally changed cultural attitudes to the imbalance of power between men and women:

“In Australia there has been a slow but steady cultural shift in recent decades in the way that ‘domestic abuse’ – now called intimate partner violence – is framed and addressed. The interpretation of violence has broadened to include psychologically

What would it look like to relocate the ‘problem’ of bhikkhuni ordination and gender equity within Buddhism, to where it really belongs?

The ‘problem’ doesn’t belong with women who want to ordain. The ‘problem’ belongs with those who fear women’s full participation.

used as sexual consorts, or expected to be hand maidens. In other words, flesh and blood women who share decisions, power and can criticise as well as support, love and consult, were not available to them. Perhaps this distortion of relationship contributes to the difficulty in Tibetan Buddhist monasticism of allowing Tibetan nuns equal access to resources, full ordination and equal empowerment within the lineages. Within Buddhist monasticism—the most enlightened teachings and practices on the planet—are we really destined to replicate relationships between men and women that are deeply archaic and that perpetrate these painful distortions? Or can insight into emptiness, which allows us to transcend all gender distinction, inform and help illuminate more skilful relationships? After all, we are continually in relationship with others, whether we like it or not. Even arahantship does not abdicate us from the need to respond within this world. Neither does it abdicate us from the consequences of actions within the world of relationship.

It is ironic that in spite of the great desire to keep the 5 Points and the Perth ordination secret, the absolute opposite happened. A public critique and an out pouring of debate was catalyzed. While the process was difficult and distressing, it contributed to reducing the burden of denial. This has been a journey that has taken us beyond ideals of enlightenment and into the all-too-painful and familiar territory of human complexities. Mostly, this public debate has happened around the elders of the Forest Sangha, but not directly with them. To talk more directly, within a fourfold assembly forum, there would need to be the recognition that there is a problem, and that this problem has caused much pain.

and financially controlling behaviors. Previously women were expected to take responsibility for the violence they experienced at the hands of their male partner. With much effort and insight, there has been a shift of emphasis toward requiring those men who use violence as a tool of control, not the women whom they abuse, to take responsibility for their actions. The approach now is to support abused women to remain in their homes, with protection in place, and to relocate the perpetrating man. But it has taken enormous effort to develop and legislate according to this deeper understanding of the abuse dynamic.

No one owns the ‘house’ of Buddhist monasticism. The renunciant path is our collective inheritance. It does not belong to the monks. It is not theirs to confer or withhold at whim. For how long will we allow women to be driven out of their monastic home rather than challenge the abuse of their freedom to practise fully within Buddhist monasticism? The persistence of gender inequity—within a broader cultural context that tolerates it less and less—threatens to bring the house down around us.

So we ask: what would it look like to relocate the ‘problem’ of bhikkhuni ordination and gender equity within Buddhism, to where it really belongs? The ‘problem’ doesn’t belong with women who want to ordain. The ‘problem’ belongs with those who fear women’s full participation.

The development of insight into this fear is crucial; it has the potential to release any stand-off over this issue. Such development requires robust personal enquiry, honest reflection, and the humility to recognize one’s own error. It is a struggle, no doubt. It also risks bringing us into contact with each other in all our complexity—our strengths and our vulnerabilities.

But the honest effort to enquire within—both by women as well as men—for the roots of fear of the feminine can constitute a heart opening that makes dialogue possible. However painful, overwhelming and challenging such a dialogue may be, surely it is a process we must have. The alternative is far worse: secrecy; nuns displaced or disrobed; monks who feel cut off from a more authentic engagement; ill-informed and idealizing, even sycophantic, lay followers.



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The need for personal inquiry is challenging enough, but ever more so when undertaken on a communal level. A good place to start—one which can help us move beyond a culture of denial—is the humble acknowledgment of the pain caused by gender inequity. While there is much for women to explore in terms of how to empower themselves and each other—particularly in the context of creating monastic communities that are independent from monks—the primary work of exploring misogyny in Buddhist monasticism is essential.

It is essential because it provides historical context for Westerners with regard to the complexity of what they have inherited, as they attempt to ground Buddhism within their contemporary cultures. It is essential because it helps everyone be released from the ball and chain of discrimination, which negatively impacts men as well as women. It is essential because it enables a healthy fourfold assembly forge a pathway that explores a great middle way between a ‘take it or leave it’ approach, and a way that encourages a culture of deeper listening into the perpetuation of psychological wounds. And it is essential because it acknowledges that an integrated Awakening

comes about through the journey of our humanity—not in spite of it.

In the Thai Forest monastic sangha, the marshal archetype of conquering ‘the kilesa’^{xii} has an ‘up and out of this world’ paradigm. I’m not sure it is working for what is needed in our time of global crisis. Ajahn Chah encouraged us by advising ‘Don’t be a Buddha or Bodhisattva. Be an earthworm’. What is needed in our times is to bring Awakening ‘down and through’ the mud of human relationship. Awakening could then be seen to have two dimensions or spheres which inter-penetrate. One is the transcendent dimension, which is realized as the static principle of Nibbana. The other is the dynamic aspect of Awakening, which seeks expression as it evolves through the forms of existence.

The middle way between “take it” and “leave it” is the rich and fertile inter connectedness we experience as relational beings. It is the ground for the integration of Awakening, and the ground from which a holistic vision can emerge, one rooted in transcendence yet free to cherish this poor and aching world.

April 15, 2010: I acknowledge and appreciate those sisters and brothers in the Dharma with whom I share the territory ‘in between’: your thoughts, concerns and perspectives mingle into this article. TMW ❖

Thanissara (Mary Weinberg) was one of the first women to ordain in the West in Ajahn Chah’s Forest Tradition, initially as a mae chee, then as a siladhara. She left the order after twelve years. Thanissara holds an MA in Buddhist Psychotherapy from Middlesex University, UK. She is director of Dharmagiri Hermitage in South Africa, and a facilitator for the community dharma leader program at Spirit Rock Meditation Center, USA.



ⁱ The 5 Points: 1. The structural relationship as indicated by the Vinaya of the bhikkhu sangha to the siladhara sangha is one of seniority, such as the most junior bhikkhu is senior to the most senior siladhara. As this relationship of seniority is defined over time it is not subject to change. 2. In line with this, in ritual situations where both bhikkhu and siladhara - such as giving anumodana (blessings to the lay community) and precepts - leading the chanting or giving a talk - is always presumed to rest with the senior bhikkhu present. He may in some cases invite a senior siladhara to lead. Yet if this is a regular invitation it does not imply a new standard of shared leadership. 3. The bhikkhu sangha will be responsible for the ordination the way Ajahn Sumedho has been in the past. The siladhara look to the bhikkhu sangha for ordination and guidance rather than exclusively Ajahn Sumedho. A candidate for siladhara should seek approval from the siladhara sangha and then receive acceptance by the bhikkhu sangha as represented by those bhikkhus who sit on the elder council. 4. The formal ritual of giving pavarana (invitation for feedback) by the siladhara sangha to the bhikkhu sangha should take place at the end of Vassa as it has in our communities traditionally: according to the structure of the Vinaya. 5. The siladhara training is considered to be a vehicle already suitable for the realization for liberation, and is respected as such within our tradition. It is offered as a complete training as it stands, and it is not a step to a different form, such as bhikkhuni ordination.

ⁱⁱ Siladhara: 10 precept ordination with an additional 120+ observations fashioned from the Bhikkhuni Pāṭimokkha.
ⁱⁱⁱ Ajahn Brahmavamsa (‘Ajahn Brahm’) was one of Ajahn Chah’s first Western disciples.
^{iv} Wat Nong Pah Pong: The ‘mother ship’ (head monastery) of Ajahn Chah’s ca. 20 branch monasteries in Thailand and the West.

^v Vinaya: Pāli word for the monastic code developed by the Buddha which guides the lives and conduct of the monastic sangha.

^{vi} Garudhammas: http://www.dhammadownload.com/index.php?title=8_Garudhammas

^{vii} After a New York Times story reported that Pope Benedict XVI (then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger) failed to defrock a priest who abused 200 deaf children in Wisconsin, the pope lashed out against the news media. “Faith,” he said, allows one not “to be intimidated by the petty gossip of dominant opinion.”

^{viii} For further discussion on the garudhammas: <http://groups.google.com/group/dhammadharini/web/non-historicity-of-the-eight-garudhammas?pli=1>

^{ix} Dukkha: Pāli word meaning suffering, unsatisfactoriness, dis-ease.

^x Vassa: Pāli word for the yearly 3 month ‘rains retreat’ observed by Theravada monastics.

^{xi} June Campbell, ISBN 0 485 11 494 1, 1996, Athlone Press.

^{xii} Kilesa: Pāli word for defilement.

Archetyping and the Language of Personhood in the Mātugāmasamyutta

By Marcia Pimentel

Because the Buddha is able to employ such linguistic designations as “person,” and “individual” without assuming corresponding substantial entities, he is called ‘skilled in expression’ (vohāra-kusala)... Skillfulness in the use of words is the ability to conform to conventions (sammuti), usages (vohāra), designations, (*paññati*) and turns of speech (nirutti) in common use in the world without being led astray by them. Hence in understanding the teaching of the Buddha one is advised not to adhere dogmatically to the mere superficial meanings of words.ⁱ

In the fourth book of the *Samyutta-nikāya*ⁱⁱ (‘The Book of the Six Sense Bases’), a curious text invites the reader to consider what and how the Fully Awakened One taught bhikkhus about lay women. The *Mātugāmasamyutta* (‘The Connected Discourses on Women’), stands out as a solitary chapter on the qualities of womenⁱⁱⁱ. Obvious relative clues, such as the inclusion within the *Salayatanavagga*, as well as the collection and the specific placement following the *Vedanasamyutta*

should note what biases and wounds we bring to the reading. For example, we should note our perceptions and states of mind. Additionally, we should try to understand the conventional language used by the Blessed One. We should note the absence of misogynist language, of taboos and prohibitions, of discrimination and anything incompatible with the conventional teaching of the unsurpassed-Teacher-of-gods-and-humans.

Of course the question of “what is the teaching and what is not,” is an active fountain of bhikkhuni and upasika dukkha. Current research into the stratification of the Pali Canon helps cast light on the origin of highly contradictory passages that at times might appear to be a schizophrenic attitude toward women. Given the history of stealthy discriminatory additions to the suttas post the Buddha’s parinibbana, the *Mātugāmasamyutta* may understandably appear toxic at a glance. A careful reading, however, shows that this is not the case.

Dressed in conventional wisdom, the *Mātugāmasamyutta* lays out a complete archotyping path for women leading to Nobility, just as it reinforces an identical goal for men. An archetype can be discerned in as far as it relates to the dynamic relational, non-sequential process of becoming from birth to death to birth. Because there is no fixed pattern and it is not subject to rigid definition, the term “archotyping” is coined here to give a more accurate portrayal of this process in light of the three characteristics of existence: anicca, dukkha and anatta. Archotyping is the arising of perfecting conditions in the effort directed at understanding and embodying the law of kamma. In this, the *Mātugāmasamyutta* shows women and men are equal and complementary.

We find this confirmed elsewhere in the Canon. In the *Samajivina Sutta: Living in Tune* (AN 4.55) for example, we

The five powers (for women in India at the time of the Buddha)... are identical to those of men. Authority is acquired by both men and women by the same avenues.

(‘The Connected Discourses on Feeling’) though undeniably important in contextualizing the discourses, are marks of the compilers and are not known to be specifically attributable to the Buddha.

There are a few helpful guidelines to assist one approaching this text with the intention of understanding. At the outset, we

find: “*Husband and wife, both of them having conviction, being responsive, being restrained, living by the Dhamma, addressing each other with loving words: they benefit in manifold ways. To them comes bliss. Their enemies are dejected when both are in tune in virtue. Having followed the Dhamma here in this world, both in tune in precepts and practices, they delight in the world*

of the devas, enjoying the pleasures they desire.”^{iv} (*emphasis mine*)

Additional support is found in the story of Nakulamata and Nakulapita: Nakulamata and Nakulapita were considered by the Buddha to be the most eminent among his lay-disciples due to their close companionship with each another (A i 26). They were also matched in their faith in the Buddha’s teaching, in their self-control, and in the affectionate way in which they spoke with one another (A ii 62; AN 4.55). A commentary (A i 400) asserts that for 500 births they had been parents or relatives of the Buddha, or more strictly speaking, of the Bodhisattva: “Him of the ten powers” is the term the commentary uses to avoid this awkwardness—and so in this life they treated him like a son. Nakulamata, as was the custom for brides, was taken to Nakulapita’s home and ever since that time (when he was still a mere lad and she a young girl), neither was aware of having transgressed against the other in thought nor in deed, and each expressed the longing to be together not only in the here and now but in a future state also. The Buddha reassures them on this point, and gives as his reason that both of them are on the same level in regard to their belief, their ethical conduct, and their generosity and wisdom (A ii 61f.; AN 4.55). In these respects, therefore, a woman may be the equal of a man.^v

Though he discusses woman and men in the *Mātugāmasamyutta*, the Buddha speaks on the basis of qualities, factors and powers. In the first section (‘Agreeable and Disagreeable’), the Buddha lists five factors and their opposites. “Bhikkhus, when a woman possesses five factors she is extremely disagreeable to a man. What five? She is not beautiful, not wealthy, not virtuous, she is lethargic and she does not beget children.” This is balanced by the five opposite factors which when possessed, a woman may be pleasing to a man: beauty, wealth, virtue, industry and fertility. The five factors are resulting effects: vipāka.^{vi}

Though historically much has been declared and prescribed about beauty, it is the result of living in patient forbearance with a lack of predisposition to anger: “This is the way that leads to beauty, that is to say, not to be angry or given to much rage; even when much is said, not to be furious, angry, ill-disposed or resentful, or to show ill-temper, hate or surliness.”^{vii}

Likewise wealth is the result of kamma. “This is the way that leads to riches, that is to say, to be a giver of food, drink, cloth, sandals, garlands, perfumes, unguents, bed, roof and lighting to monks and brahmins.”^{viii}

Likewise everything is the result of kamma:

“So, student, the way that leads to short life makes people short-lived, the way that leads to long life makes people long-lived; the way that leads to sickness makes people sick, the way that leads to health makes people healthy; the way that leads to ugliness makes people ugly, the way that leads to beauty makes people beautiful; the way that leads to insignificance makes people insignificant, the way that leads to influence makes

people influential; the way that leads to poverty makes people poor, the way that leads to riches makes people rich; the way that leads to low birth makes people low-born, the way that leads to high birth makes people high-born; the way that leads to stupidity makes people stupid, the way that leads to wisdom makes people wise.”^{xi}



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Immediately following, in the second verse, *the Blessed One assigns these same five qualities to men*. In regard to men, the qualities remain identical as does their effect of being either pleasing or displeasing to women: the absence or presence of beauty, wealth, virtue, industry and fertility. These qualities, not as mere words or conventional designations but as the conditions, as effects caused by previous actions, are *identical for women and men alike*. The way to the wholesome qualities,—as is related to Anuruddha^x specifically in six verses, and to bhikkhus in general in the remaining fourteen verses by the Buddha—is the keeping of the five precepts for lay persons: the abandonment of unskillful actions of body, speech and mind.

However removed we are from the India of the Buddha's time, it is helpful to note that these five qualities are still applicable today with only minor variation. Fertility, in the West, may be replaced by a host of symmetrical mental qualities: a sense of humor, sensitivity toward others, good attitude, intelligence. In a basic sense, however all five qualities, remain largely unchanged for a majority of people in the world. And a majority of people—women and men alike—have a little of each quality with little perfection in our world and a great deal of distortion in their understanding.



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Because they are conventional, the verses have cultural limitations. For instance, “Bhikkhus,” the Buddha says, “there are five kinds of sufferings peculiar to women:” when young she “goes to live with her husband’s family.” In our age, and perhaps more specifically in the West, girls are not sent to live with their future husband’s family. In fact, to send a young girl out of her home in this way can be considered a criminal act.

The next three “sufferings”—menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth—are relative. Dangers of pregnancy and childbirth have been largely reduced by medical knowledge and the availability of timely advanced care. But as a woman who has given birth to two extraordinarily wonderful children—however painful the act of birthing was—I cannot consider menstruation, pregnancy or childbirth to be a fraction of the suffering of suffering’s potential in our world, affecting both men and women. In fact, if men had the choice of childbirth or being drafted into active duty, I believe the former would lose much of its drama.

Though some women suffer far more than others regarding menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth, there has always been far greater suffering in our world. They are sufferings unique to women only in as far as they do not occur to men, which does not imply they are punishments or that womanhood is a “lower” human rebirth. After labor ceases, the suffering of childbirth ceases; but the suffering of parenthood—unique to mothers and fathers—has begun for a lifetime.

The last suffering, “a woman is made to serve a man” is a conventional view which has fostered sinister interpretations throughout history and is much more difficult to understand than any other sentence in the discourses. For many today, it may serve as a useful concept to ponder, with a useful quality of discomfort; but the interpretations of this, and similar statements, throughout time have likely caused an exponential amount of suffering for girls and women. In our world, male physical strength has translated into male domination, which itself cannot escape the law of kamma. Since it is not permanent, it must be consistently reinforced. Since it is not inherent, it must be continually restated and reaffirmed. Since it is not satisfactory, it must be continually defended. While conspicuously absent from these discourses, men do have their own peculiar sufferings.

According to the Buddha, the five powers of a woman are beauty, wealth, sons, relatives, and virtue. It is said that a woman endowed with these five powers may “dwell with confidence as mistress of the house, get the better of her husband and keep him under her thumb” (S iv 246), but that if she is “lacking in these powers the family may not let her stay in the house, but may drive her forth and expel her” (S iv 248), a fate from which only the possession of moral habit could in theory save her.^{xi}

In contrast, the verse that corresponds to men for this section lists but one power: authority. When analyzed however, the five powers are the completion of the requisites for authority in India for women. And they are in fact the same for men. It is men who crave sons. Even without relatives, men could acquire authority, especially in India at the time of the Buddha.

The powers of beauty and wealth are discussed above as effects from causes. The fifth power, virtue, is also mentioned above, and it is the foundation for all of the other qualities: “Virtue,” Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi says, “is the cohesive force of society.”^{xiii} Authority is acquired by both men and women through the same avenues.

As for a family of supporting relations, there is not much difference for a man or a woman. The Buddha was himself an heir at birth, as was Rahula^{xiii}... as was Yasodhara.^{xiv} Yasodhara’s birthright—born to a Koliya king and queen who were the only other family equal to the Buddha’s Sakyan family—gave her the right to refuse to remarry, and to live in ease while raising her son without a husband. We don’t have far to imagine

that they were each very beautiful, very virtuous, very loved and protected and supported by relatives, very wealthy, and part of a long line of probably similarly qualified and empowered sons and daughters (Siddhartha and Yasodhara were cousins).

The last section of the *Mātugāmasamyutta*, on “growth,” ends with a supreme qualifier. “Bhikkhus,” the Buddha says, “growing in five areas of growth, a woman noble disciple grows with a noble growth and she acquires the essence, she acquires the best of this bodily existence right here... she acquires faith, virtue, learning, generosity and wisdom”. The ‘best’ of the bodily existence for a woman is the same as for a man: nobility. “Growth” nears the trajectory toward perfecting causes and effects on the female path. It is not the identical path as experienced culturally for men, yet both lead in an identical direction: the Middle Way.

For women, Yasodhara illustrates the pinnacle of the archetyping path leading to the transcendent Noble Eightfold Path. Because of our exclusive record-keeping, much of Yasodhara’s story is not clear. It is said that when the Boddhisattva left her, she followed his progress: “Lord, when my daughter-in-law heard that you were wearing yellow robes she also robed herself in yellow. When she heard you were taking one meal a day she did the same. When she heard that you had given up lofty couches, she lay on a low couch and when she heard that you had given up garland and scents she too gave them up. So virtuous is my daughter-in-law.”

Whether Yasodhara possessed every factor of enlightenment that Siddhartha possessed can be heatedly debated. As a bhikkhuni, she attained arahantship and had a following of thousands. While it is not difficult to understand that a woman is not able to become a Buddha (due entirely to cultural impediments), this cannot be considered “to have an impact on spiritual abilities.”^{xiv} It is on a purely conventional level that gender becomes an issue of limitation in spiritual progress.

Though it might collide with modern sensibilities of equality that at times seem so unreachable not only externally but also internally, the *Mātugāmasamyutta* has described two organic pillars of society: woman and man. It is a collection of conventional teachings showing that while a woman’s path is not entirely identical to a man’s path, both paths are not altogether different since both lead to identical goals. It is an archetyping path at its very foundation, calling for virtue from the very beginning—and showing where lack of virtue leads. ❖



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ⁱ Karunadasa Y. *The Dhamma Theory: Philosophical Cornerstone of the Abhidhamma*. Buddhist Publication Society, 1996.
ⁱⁱ Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, Editor. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta-nikāya*. Wisdom Publications, 2nd edition, September 25, 2002.
ⁱⁱⁱ An ideal example of a type; quintessence... “archetype.” The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. 20 May. 2010. <Dictionary.com <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/archetype>>.
^v Horner, I.B. *Women in Early Buddhism*. <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/horner/wheel030.html>
^{vi} Horner, I.B. *Women in Early Buddhism*. <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/horner/wheel030.html>
^{vii} Vipāka: Pāli word meaning the fruition of Kamma.
^{viii} Ven. Nanamoli, Thera. Translator, *The Shorter Exposition of Kamma*. <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.135.nymo.html>
^{ix} Ven. Nanamoli, Thera. Translator, *The Shorter Exposition of Kamma*. <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.135.nymo.html>
^x Anuruddha was one of the five head disciples and a cousin of Gautama Buddha.
^{xi} Horner, I.B. *Women in Early Buddhism*. <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/horner/wheel030.html>
^{xii} Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, Dhamma talk at Cheng Yen Monastery.
^{xiii} Rahula, (born ca. 534 BC), was the only son of Siddhartha Gautama (Pāli Siddhattha Gotama), later known as the Buddha, and his wife Princess Yasodharā.
^{xiv} Princess Yasodharā is the wife of Prince Siddhartha, who later attained enlightenment and became Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism. Princess Yasodharā later entered the order of Buddhist nuns and attained Arahantship.
^{xv} Bhikkhu Anālayo. *The Bahudhātuka-sutta and its Parallels on Women’s Inabilities*. Printed in this issue of Present.

“The appearance of a variety of schools of Buddhism marked the entrance of dogmatism into Buddhism and dependence on authoritative interpretations. Today, different schools of thought have arisen in Buddhism due to the unquestioning acceptance of “authoritative” interpretations of the scripture. This new dogmatism goes against the non-dogmatic spirit of early Buddhism, and is therefore the beginning of degeneration. It is important to emphasize that this dependence on authorities and belief rather than on understanding for oneself, is to be regarded as a degeneration of Buddhist practice rather than progress. It is a natural human weakness to depend on others rather than to rely on oneself. But the aim of Buddhism is to overcome this weakness through the practice of Dhamma. Dependence on authority is inconsistent with Buddhist scripture.

*Use your own judgment.
Scripture is only an aid to thinking.”*

*Venerable Madewela Punnaji,
from the presentation “The Place of Scripture
in Buddhism and Its Relation to Doing Good”*

The Bahudhātuka-sutta and its Parallels on Women's Inabilities

By Anālayo Bhikkhu

The present article offers a comparative study of the *Bahudhātuka-sutta*, based on a translation of one of its parallels found in the *Madhyama-āgama* preserved in Chinese translation. The study focuses in particular on the dictum that a woman cannot be a Buddha, which is absent from the *Madhyama-āgama* version.

Introduction

According to early Buddhist thought, the ability to attain any of the four stages of awakening is independent of gender. An explicit endorsement of women's abilities to reach awakening can be found in a discourse in the *Samyutta-nikāya* and its counterparts in two *Samyukta-āgama* collections translated into Chinese, which allegorically refer to a set of wholesome qualities as a vehicle for approaching liberation. The three versions agree that by means of this vehicle the goal of liberation can be reached independent of whether the one who mounts the vehicle is a woman or a man.¹

Such a clear assertion of gender equality in the spiritual realm is remarkable in view of what appears to have been the prevalent attitude towards women and their religious potential in ancient India.² In another discourse in the *Samyutta-nikāya* and its parallels in the two *Samyukta-āgamas* already mentioned, Māra appears as an advocate of ancient Indian machismo in this respect.³ The three versions describe how Māra accosts a meditating nun and tries to unsettle her by suggesting that a woman's innate lack of wisdom renders her incapable of reaching realization.⁴ The nun is quick to give a fitting reply to this insinuation. After clarifying that gender is simply irrelevant, once the mind is concentrated, she tells Māra that with such talk he should better go to those who are still caught up in identifications with being a woman or being a man.⁵

In direct contrast to the prejudice voiced by Māra, according to a range of *Vinayas* the Buddha clearly affirmed women's ability to reach any of the four stages of awakening.⁶ Corroboration for this assertion can be found, for example, in a verse in the *Therīgāthā*, which records a group of thirty nuns declaring their successful attainment of final liberation.⁷ The *Mahāvaccagotta-sutta* and its parallels give even higher numbers, recording that over five-hundred nun disciples of the Buddha had reached full awakening.⁸ In sum, there can be little doubt that early Buddhism did consider women to be fully capable of attaining the highest level of liberation.

When it comes to the issue of being a Buddha, however, tradition takes the position that only a male is capable of fulfilling such a role. In the early discourses, the locus classicus for this position is the *Bahudhātuka-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya*, according to which a woman is incapable of occupying various positions, one of them being that of a Buddha.⁹ The *Bahudhātuka-sutta* has several parallels which show some variations in their presentation of these impossibilities. Of particular significance is a *Madhyama-āgama* parallel which does not mention any inability of women at all.

This *Madhyama-āgama* parallel to the *Bahudhātuka-sutta* was translated into Chinese by Gautama Saṅghadeva towards the end of the fourth century,¹⁰ apparently based on a Prākṛit original transmitted within the Sarvāstivāda tradition(s).¹¹ Besides this *Madhyama-āgama* discourse and the Pāli *Bahudhātuka-sutta*, other parallel versions are a discourse translated individually into Chinese;¹² a discourse preserved in Tibetan translation;¹³ a full *sūtra* quotation in the *Dharmaskandha* of the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, preserved in Chinese;¹⁴ and a full *sūtra* quotation in Śamathadeva's commentary on the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, preserved in Tibetan.¹⁵

In what follows, I will at first provide a full translation of the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel to the *Bahudhātuka-sutta*, followed by a comparative study of the various versions of this discourse. I deem such a full translation and detailed comparison to be required in order to place the exposition on the various inabilities

of a woman within context, enabling an assessment of the main thrust of the discourse as a whole and of tendencies at work in other parts of the discourse. Based on these two aspects, the absence of a treatment of what women are unable to achieve can be properly evaluated. Nevertheless, readers interested exclusively in the topic of women's inabilities may skip this part of the present article and directly turn to the discussion of "Women's Inabilities in the Parallel Versions of the *Bahudhātuka-sutta*" on page 41.

Translation¹⁶

The Discourse on Many Elements

1. Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was living in Sāvathī, in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's Park. At that time venerable Ānanda, who was seated alone in a tranquil place meditating and reflecting, had this thought in [his] mind: "All fears arise from foolishness, not from wisdom. All misfortunes, disasters, and worries arise from foolishness, not from wisdom."

Then, in the late afternoon, venerable Ānanda rose from sitting in meditation, went towards the Buddha, paid respect with [his] head at the Buddha's feet and, standing back to one side, said: "Blessed One, [while] I was alone in a tranquil place meditating and reflecting today, [I] had this thought in [my] mind: "All fears arise from foolishness, not from wisdom. All misfortunes, disasters, and worries arise from foolishness, not from wisdom."¹⁷

2. The Blessed One said: "So it is, Ānanda, so it is, Ānanda. All fears arise from foolishness, not from wisdom. All misfortunes, disasters, and worries arise from foolishness, not from wisdom.

Just as from a heap of reeds and grass a fire might start, [which] burns down a house or a roofed hall, in the same way all fears arise from foolishness, not from wisdom. All misfortunes, disasters, and worries arise from foolishness, not from wisdom.

Ānanda, if there were fears in past times, they all arose from foolishness, not from wisdom. All misfortunes, disasters, and worries [in past times] arose from foolishness, not from wisdom. Ānanda, if there will be fears in future times, they will all arise from foolishness, not from wisdom. All misfortunes, disasters and worries [in future times] will arise from foolishness, not from wisdom. [723b] Ānanda, if there are fears in present times, they all arise from foolishness, not from wisdom. All misfortunes, disasters and worries [in present times] arise from foolishness, not from wisdom.¹⁸

Hence, Ānanda, due to foolishness there is fear, [due to] wisdom there is no fear; [due to] foolishness there are misfortunes, disasters, and worries, [due to] wisdom there are no misfortunes, disasters or worries. Ānanda, whatever fears, misfortunes, disasters and worries there are, they all start off¹⁹ from foolishness, not from wisdom."²⁰

3. Then venerable Ānanda, who was [moved] to tears,²¹ held his folded hands towards the Buddha [in reverence] and said: "Blessed One, how is a monk foolish and not wise?"²²

The Blessed One replied: "Ānanda, if a monk does not know the elements, does not know the sense-spheres, does not know causes and conditions, and does not know what is possible and what is impossible. Ānanda, a monk like this is foolish and not wise."²³

Venerable Ānanda said: "Blessed One, a monk like this is [indeed] foolish and not wise. Blessed One, how is a monk wise and not foolish?"

The Blessed One replied: "Ānanda, if a monk knows the elements, knows the sense-spheres, knows causes and conditions, and knows what is possible and what is impossible. Ānanda, a monk like this is wise and not foolish."

4. Venerable Ānanda said: "Blessed One, a monk like this is [indeed] wise and not foolish. Blessed One, how does a monk know the elements?"

The Blessed One replied:²⁴ "Ānanda, suppose a monk sees eighteen elements and knows them according to reality, [namely]:

- the eye element, the form element, and the eye-consciousness element;
- the ear element, the sound element, and the ear-consciousness element;
- the nose element, the smell element, and the nose-consciousness element;
- the tongue element, the taste element, and the tongue-consciousness element;
- the body element, the tactile element, and the body-consciousness element;
- the mind element, the mind-object element, and the mind-consciousness element;

Ānanda, [a monk] sees these eighteen elements and knows them according to reality."²⁵

5-7. Again, Ānanda, [a monk] sees six elements and knows them according to reality, [namely]:

- the earth element;
- the water element;
- the fire element;
- the wind element;
- the space element;
- the consciousness element.

Ānanda, [a monk] sees these six elements and knows them according to reality.

Again, Ānanda, [a monk] sees six elements and knows them according to reality, [namely]:

- the element of sensual desire;
- the element of ill will;

- the element of cruelty;
- the element of absence of sensual desire;
- the element of absence of ill will;
- the element of absence of cruelty.

Ānanda, [a monk] sees these six elements and knows them according to reality.

Again, Ānanda, [a monk] sees six elements and knows them according to reality, [namely]:

- the element of pleasure;
- the element of pain;
- the element of [mental] joy;
- the element of [mental] sadness;
- the element of equanimity;
- the element of ignorance.

Ānanda, [a monk] sees these six elements and knows them according to reality.

Again, Ānanda, [a monk] sees four elements and knows them according to reality, [namely]:

- the element of feeling;
- the element of perception;
- the element of formations;
- the element of consciousness.²⁶

Ānanda, [a monk] sees these four elements and knows them according to reality.

8. Again, Ānanda, [a monk] sees three elements and knows them according to reality, [namely]:

- the sense-sphere element;
- the [fine-]material element;
- the immaterial element.

Ānanda, [a monk] sees these three elements and knows them according to reality. [723c]

Again, Ānanda, [a monk] sees three elements and knows them according to reality, [namely]:

- the material element;
- the immaterial element;
- the element of cessation.

Ānanda, [a monk] sees these three elements and knows them according to reality.²⁷

Again, Ānanda, [a monk] sees three elements and knows them according to reality, [namely]:

- the element of the past;
- the element of the future;
- the element of the present.

Ānanda, [a monk] sees these three elements and knows them according to reality.

Again, Ānanda, [a monk] sees three elements and knows them according to reality, [namely]:

- the superior element;
- the inferior element;
- the middling element.

Ānanda, [a monk] sees these three elements and knows them according to reality.²⁸

Again, Ānanda, [a monk] sees three elements and knows them according to reality, [namely]:

- the wholesome element;
- the unwholesome element;
- the undetermined element.

Ānanda, [a monk] sees these three elements and knows them according to reality.

Again, Ānanda, [a monk] sees three elements and knows them according to reality, [namely]:

- the element of the trainee;
- the element of the one beyond training;
- the element of the one who is neither a trainee nor beyond training.

Ānanda, [a monk] sees these three elements and knows them according to reality.

9. Again, Ānanda, [a monk] sees two elements and knows them according to reality, [namely]:

- the element with influxes;
- the element without influxes.

Ānanda, [a monk] sees these two elements and knows them according to reality.²⁹

Again, Ānanda, [a monk] sees two elements and knows them according to reality, [namely]:

- the conditioned element;
- the unconditioned element.

Ānanda, [a monk] sees these two elements and knows them according to reality.

Ānanda, [a monk] sees these sixty-two elements and knows them according to reality. Ānanda, like this a monk knows the elements.³⁰

10. Venerable Ānanda said: “Blessed One, like this a monk [indeed] knows the elements. Blessed One, how does a monk know the sense-spheres?”

The Blessed One replied: “Ānanda, suppose a monk sees the twelve sense-spheres and knows them according to reality, [namely]:

- the eye sense-sphere, and the form sense-sphere;
- the ear sense-sphere, and the sound sense-sphere;

- the nose sense-sphere, and the smell sense-sphere;
- the tongue sense-sphere, and the taste sense-sphere;
- the body sense-sphere, and the tactile sense-sphere;
- the mind sense-sphere, and the mind-object sense-sphere.

Ānanda, [a monk] sees these twelve sense-spheres and knows them according to reality. Ānanda, like this a monk knows the sense-spheres.”

11. Venerable Ānanda said: “Blessed One, like this a monk [indeed] knows the sense-spheres. How does a monk know causes and conditions?”

The Blessed One replied: “Ānanda, suppose a monk sees causes and conditions as well as what has arisen through causes and conditions and knows it according to reality, [namely]:

Dependent on this, that exists; [if] this does not exist, that does not exist; [if] this arises, that arises; [if] this ceases, that ceases. That is to say, conditioned by ignorance are formations ... up to ... conditioned by birth are old age and death; if ignorance ceases formation ceases ... up to ... [if] birth ceases old age and death ceases.

Ānanda, like this a monk knows causes and conditions.

12-18. Venerable Ānanda said: “Blessed One, like this a monk [indeed] knows causes and conditions. How does a monk know what is possible and what is impossible?”

The Blessed One replied: “Ānanda, suppose a monk sees what is possible as possible and knows it according to reality, and sees what is impossible as impossible and knows it according to reality.³¹

Ānanda, it is not possible that there could be two wheel-turning kings ruling in the world. [However], it is certainly possible that there could be one wheel-turning king ruling in the world. Ānanda, [724a] it is not possible that there could be two Tathāgatas in the world. [However], it is certainly possible that there could be one Tathāgata in the world.

Ānanda, it is not possible for a person [endowed] with a vision of the truth to intentionally kill his father or mother, kill an *arahant*, cause a schism in the community or, out of an evil mental disposition towards the Buddha, cause the Tathāgata’s blood to flow. [However], it is certainly possible for an ordinary worldling to intentionally kill his father or mother, kill an *arahant*, cause a schism in the community or, out of an evil mental disposition towards the Buddha, cause the Tathāgata’s blood to flow.³²

Ānanda, it is not possible for a person [endowed] with a vision of the truth to intentionally violate the moral precepts, reject the moral precepts and stop [practicing] the path. [However], it is certainly possible for an ordinary worldling to intentionally violate the moral precepts, reject the moral precepts and stop [practicing] the path.³³

It is [also] not possible for a person [endowed] with a vision of the truth to reject and abandon his own [dispensation] and search for someone to be honored among outsiders, search for a field of merit [among outsiders]. [However], it is certainly possible for an ordinary worldling to reject and abandon his own [dispensation] and search for someone to be honored among outsiders, search for a field of merit [among outsiders].

Ānanda, it is not possible for a person [endowed] with a vision of the truth to follow other recluses and Brahmins and declare: ‘Honorable ones, you see what can be seen and know what can be known.’ [However], it is certainly possible for an ordinary worldling to follow other recluses and Brahmins and declare: ‘Honorable ones, you see what can be seen and know what can be known.’

Ānanda, it is not possible for a person [endowed] with a vision of the truth to have faith in divination and inquire about auspicious and inauspicious [omens]. [However], it is certainly possible for an ordinary worldling to have faith in divination and inquire about auspicious and inauspicious [omens].

Ānanda, it is not possible for a person [endowed] with a vision of the truth to inquire about what is related to auspicious and inauspicious signs from other recluses or Brahmin diviners in order to see if there is some suffering or trouble [to be expected in the future], seeing it as being the truth. [However], it is certainly possible for an ordinary worldling to inquire about what is related to auspicious and inauspicious signs from other recluses or Brahmin diviners in order to see if there is some suffering or trouble [to be expected in the future], seeing it as being the truth. Ānanda, it is not possible for a person [endowed] with a vision of the truth to reject and abandon his own [dispensation] and, when extreme pains arise, tremendous pains that are not [at all] agreeable, not [at all] pleasurable, not [at all] longed for, not [at all] thought of, that lead up to the ending of life, to follow outsiders and search [for help] from some recluse or Brahmin who bears in mind a spell of one line, [or] a spell of two lines, three lines, four lines, many lines, [even] a spell of a hundred thousand lines, [with the thought]: ‘this will cause me to be freed from *dukkha*,’ searching in this way for *dukkha*, the arising of *dukkha*, the path [leading to liberation from] *dukkha*, and the cessation of *dukkha*. [However], it is certainly possible for an ordinary worldling to reject and abandon his own [dispensation] and to follow outsiders and search [for help] from some recluse or Brahmin who bears in mind a spell of one line, [or] a spell of two lines, three lines, four lines, many lines, [even] a spell of a hundred-thousand lines, [with the thought]: ‘this will cause me to be freed from *dukkha*,’ searching in this way for *dukkha*, the arising of *dukkha*, the path [leading to liberation from] *dukkha*, and the cessation of *dukkha*.

Ānanda, it is not possible for a person [endowed] with a vision of the truth to experience an eighth existence. [However], it is certainly possible for an ordinary worldling to experience an eighth existence.

Ānanda, it is not possible that, on account of evil conduct by body, speech, and mind [one] should, [724b] when the body breaks up at death, proceed towards a good destination and be born in a heavenly world. [However], it is certainly possible that, on account of evil conduct by body, speech, and mind [one] should, when the body breaks up at death, proceed towards an evil destination and be born in a hellish world.

Ānanda, it is not possible that, on account of pure conduct by body, speech, and mind [one] should, when the body breaks up at death, proceed towards an evil destination and be born in a hellish world. [However], it is certainly possible that on account of pure conduct by body, speech, and mind [one] should, when the body breaks up at death, proceed towards a good destination and be born in a heavenly world.

Ānanda, it is not possible that evil conduct by body, speech, and mind should have as its result the experience of pleasure. [However], it is certainly possible that evil conduct by body, speech, and mind should have as its result the experience of pain.

Ānanda, it is not possible that pure conduct by body, speech, and mind should have as its result the experience of pain. [However], it is certainly possible that pure conduct by body, speech, and mind should have as its result the experience of pleasure.

Ānanda, it is not possible to fully settle the mind in the four[-fold] establishing of mindfulness if the five hindrances that defile the mind and weaken wisdom are not overcome. [However], it is certainly possible to fully settle the mind in the four[-fold] establishing of mindfulness if the five hindrances that defile the mind and weaken wisdom are overcome.³⁴

Ānanda, it is not possible to aim at developing the seven factors of awakening if the five hindrances that defile the mind and weaken wisdom are not overcome, and if the mind is not fully settled in the four[-fold] establishing of mindfulness. [However], it is certainly possible to develop the seven factors of awakening if the five hindrances that defile the mind and weaken wisdom are overcome, and if the mind is fully settled in the four[-fold] establishing of mindfulness.

Ānanda, it is not possible to aim at attaining unsurpassable and complete awakening if the five hindrances that defile the mind and weaken wisdom are not overcome, if the mind is not fully settled in the four[-fold] establishing of mindfulness, and if the seven factors of awakening are not developed. [However], it is certainly possible to attain unsurpassable and complete awakening if the five hindrances that defile the mind and weaken wisdom are overcome, if the mind is fully settled in the four[-fold] establishing of mindfulness, and if the seven factors of awakening are developed.

Ānanda, it is not possible to eradicate and make an end of *dukkha* if the five hindrances that defile the mind and weaken wisdom are not overcome, if the mind is not fully settled in the four[-fold] establishing of mindfulness, if the seven factors of

awakening are not developed, and if unsurpassable and complete awakening is not attained. [However], it is certainly possible to eradicate and make an end of *dukkha* if the five hindrances that defile the mind and weaken wisdom are overcome, if the mind is fully settled in the four[-fold] establishing of mindfulness, if the seven factors of awakening are developed, and if unsurpassable and complete awakening is attained.

Ānanda, like this a monk knows what is possible and what is impossible.”

Venerable Ānanda said: “Blessed One, like this a monk [indeed] knows what is possible and what is impossible.” Then venerable Ānanda held his folded hands towards the Buddha [in reverence] and said: “Blessed One, what is the name of this discourse, how should we respectfully receive it and bear it in mind?”

The Blessed One said: “Ānanda, you should memorize this [discourse] as the Many Elements, [724c] the Dharma Element, the Element of the Deathless, the Many Drums, the Dharma Drum, the Drum of the Deathless, the Mirror of the Dharma, the Four Chapters. For this reason, call this discourse by the name ‘Many Elements.’”³⁵

The Buddha spoke like this. Venerable Ānanda and the monks heard what the Buddha said, were delighted and kept bearing it [in mind].

Comparison of the Parallel Versions of the *Bahudhātuka-sutta*

In what follows, I survey the more significant variations between the different versions of the present discourse in order to provide a background to my subsequent discussion of the inabilities of women. One such variation occurs in regard to the basic four-fold presentation of what is required in order to be reckoned wise. The *sūtra* quotations in the *Dharmaskandha* and in Śamathadeva’s commentary differ from the other versions in as much as they mention the aggregates as a fifth topic (see figure 1). While Śamathadeva’s commentary has the aggregates as the first item in its listing, followed by the four topics mentioned in all versions,³⁶ the *Dharmaskandha* instead lists the aggregates as its respective third (both instances are underlined in figure 1, to facilitate comparison).³⁷ The *sūtra* quotation in Śamathadeva’s commentary does not give an exposition to this topic, but only mentions it in its initial listing. The *Dharmaskandha*, however, does provide such an exposition.³⁸

Figure 1: Main Topics of the Exposition

Topics in the discourse versions:

- 1) elements
- 2) sense-spheres
- 3) dependent arising
- 4) impossibilities

Topics in Śamathadeva's commentary:

- 1) aggregates
- 2) elements
- 3) sense-spheres
- 4) dependent arising
- 5) impossibilities

Topics in the *Dharmaskandha*:

- 1) elements
- 2) sense-spheres
- 3) aggregates
- 4) dependent arising
- 5) impossibilities

These variations, together with the absence of any reference to the aggregates in the discourse versions, make it quite probable that this topic is a later addition. This impression is further confirmed by the circumstance that all versions speak of “four chapters” or “four turnings” as one of the possible titles of the discourse.³⁹ Thus it seems safe to conclude that the original exposition involved only four topics—the elements, the sense-spheres, dependent arising, and impossibilities—and did not include a reference to the aggregates or even an exposition of them as a fifth topic.

Substantial variations can also be found in relation to the exposition of the first of these four topics, the elements (see figure 2). The briefest treatment of this topic occurs in the Pāli discourse, which lists forty-one elements. These forty-one elements form the common core of the exposition in all versions. The individual translation additionally covers a set of four elements, three sets of three elements and one set of two elements, so that its listing presents fifty-six elements. These fifty-six elements recur in the other Chinese and Tibetan versions, which have another two additional sets of three elements, so that the listing in these total sixty-two elements. (In order to facilitate comparison, in figure 2 only the additional sets are given in full.)

Figure 2: Listing of Elements

Elements in the Pāli discourse (MN 115):

- 18 elements: the senses, their objects and the corresponding types of consciousness
- 6 elements: earth, water, fire, wind, space, consciousness
- 6 elements: pleasure, pain, joy, sadness, equanimity, ignorance
- 6 elements: sensual desire, renunciation, ill will, absence of ill will, cruelty, absence of cruelty
- 3 elements: sensual sphere, [fine-]material sphere, immaterial sphere
- 2 elements: conditioned, unconditioned

Elements in the individual translation (T 776):

- 18 elements
- 6 elements
- 6 elements
- 6 elements
- 4 elements: feeling, perception, formations, consciousness
- 3 elements
- 3 elements: inferior, middle, superior
- 3 elements: wholesome, unwholesome, undetermined
- 3 elements: trainee, beyond training, neither
- 2 elements: with influxes, without influxes
- 2 elements

Elements in the other versions:

- 18 elements
- 6 elements
- 6 elements
- 6 elements
- 4 elements
- 3 elements
- 3 elements: material, immaterial, cessation
- 3 elements: past, future, present
- 3 elements
- 3 elements
- 3 elements
- 2 elements
- 2 elements

In principle, such differences could have been caused by a loss of text or by an addition. A loss of text due to intentional omission seems improbable, as the elements not listed in the Pāli version are found in other Pāli discourses.⁴⁰ Hence there would have been no good reason for those who transmitted the *Bahudhātuka-sutta* to deliberately eliminate these elements from the exposition. The Pāli discourse also does not show any sign of accidental loss. In fact, this seems less probable because this would require two cases or stages of accident loss, causing a loss of six elements in the case of the individual translation and a loss of twenty-one elements during the transmission of the Pāli discourse.

This makes it more probable that the exposition on elements has gone through a gradual expansion instead, with the individual translation testifying to an intermediate stage between the exposition on forty-one elements, found in all versions, and the list of sixty-two elements. Such a gradual expansion would be a fairly natural occurrence during oral transmission, where a listing of elements could easily attract other textual items related to the same topic. The assumption of a textual expansion would also be in line with the above discussed case of five against four chief topics, where the aggregates can safely be considered an instance of later addition and thus testify to a tendency towards expansion.

While the presentation of the next two topics—the sense-spheres and dependent arising—is similar in the parallel versions, with the last topic of impossibilities considerable variations manifest again. The parallel versions concur that the simultaneous manifestation of two wheel-turning kings or two Tathāgatas is impossible.⁴¹ They similarly agree that wholesome conduct cannot have bad results or lead to rebirth in hell, just as it is impossible that unwholesome conduct could have pleasant results or lead to rebirth in heaven. The parallel versions also affirm unanimously that a stream-enterer is incapable of committing any of the five heinous crimes, which are to kill one’s mother, to kill one’s father, to kill an *arahant*, to create a schism, and to intentionally hurt a Buddha so as to cause his blood to flow.⁴² While the Pāli version lists these five heinous crimes as five impossibilities, the other versions present them together as a single impossibility (see figure 3).

Figure 3: Main Themes in the Exposition on Impossibilities

Mentioned in all versions:

- simultaneous arising of two wheel-turning kings or Tathāgatas
- evil conduct leads to good results/rebirth; good conduct leads to evil results/rebirth
- a stream-enterer commits five heinous crimes

Mentioned in all versions, but treated differently:

- further inabilities of a stream-enterer (see figure 4)

Mentioned only in some versions:

- awakening reached without overcoming the hindrances etc. (not in Pāli discourse)
- inabilities of women (not in *Madhyama-āgama* discourse, see figure 5)

Another point made in all versions is that stream-enterers will not have faith in outsiders or take an outsider as their teacher. The versions differ, however, as they treat this theme in different ways and also mention various other inabilities of a stream-enterer, which they present alternatively as a single impossibility, as three, as four or as seven impossibilities (see figure 4). These more detailed presentations cover various aspects of a stream-enterer’s firm confidence in his or her teacher, indicating that a stream-enterer is unable to give up the precepts or to consider outsiders to be a worthy field of merit or to be awakened. Nor would a stream-enterer believe in auspicious signs. Most versions indicate that a stream-enterer will not be reborn into an eighth existence. Some versions moreover mention a stream-enterer’s inability to intentionally kill a living being. The Pāli version stands alone in also indicating that a stream-enterer will not consider any formation (*sankhāra*) as permanent, satisfying, or a self.

Figure 4: Further Inabilities of a Stream-enterer

1 impossibility covering 2 aspects (individual translation):

- after violating monastic precepts slanders own teacher and takes outsider as teacher, searches liberation from outside teacher

1 impossibility covering 6 aspects (Śamathadeva’s commentary):

- intentionally kills living beings, gives up precepts, considers outsiders worthy, thinks outsiders are awakened, has faith in auspicious signs, experiences eighth existence

1 impossibility covering 7 aspects (Tibetan discourse):

- intentionally kills living beings, gives up precepts, considers outsiders worthy, takes outsiders as teacher, has faith in auspicious signs, thinks outsiders know truth, experiences eighth existence

3 impossibilities covering 6 aspects (*Dharmaskandha*):

- intentionally kills living beings
- gives up precepts
- seeks teacher or field of merit among outsiders, considers outsiders worthy, practices divination through auspicious signs, experiences eighth existence

4 impossibilities covering 4 aspects (Pāli discourse):

- regards formations as permanent
- regards formations as satisfying
- regards formations as self
- follows another teacher⁴³

7 impossibilities covering 7 aspects (*Madhyama-āgama* discourse):

- gives up precepts
- considers outsiders as perfected and a field of merit
- thinks outsiders know truth
- has faith in auspicious signs
- inquires about auspicious signs from outsiders
- searches way out of dukkha from outsiders
- experiences eighth existence

The variations found between the different versions in regard to types of impossibilities and in regard to the mode of presenting these make it quite probable that a gradual expansion has taken place. Though an accidental loss of text cannot be totally excluded, such an assumption seems highly improbable because a whole series of accidents would be required in order to arrive at the degree of diversity found between the parallel versions. Moreover, none of the items missing in some versions seem to be of such an unusual nature that one would suspect their omission to be intentional.

The same pattern becomes even more evident with other impossibilities mentioned only in some versions, which cover the requirements for reaching awakening and the inabilities of women (see above figure 3). In the case of the first of these two themes—the requirements for reaching awakening—the Pāli discourse is the only version which does not breach this theme. According to the other versions, the hindrances need to be overcome, mindfulness needs to be established and the awakening factors need to be developed. Each of these builds on the preceding and their conjoint undertaking is required for reaching awakening and therewith, as additionally mentioned in some version, making an end of *dukkha*.

In the case of the second theme—the inabilities of women—the *Madhyama-āgama* discourse is the only version that does not mention these. The other versions present this theme with some variations.

In regard to the differences and variations observed so far in the treatment of impossibilities, it is noteworthy that according to the **Mahāprajñāpāramitā-(upadeśa)-śāstra* (大智度論) the listing of impossibilities originally delivered by the Buddha in the present discourse was subsequently expanded.⁴⁴ As an example for this tendency, the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-(upadeśa)-śāstra* mentions the impossibility that a noble one—i.e. one who is at least a stream-enterer—could take an outsider as his or her teacher.⁴⁵ Given that this impossibility is found in all versions of the *Bahudhātuka-sutta*, the observation made in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-(upadeśa)-śāstra* appears to reflect a tendency at work already during the formation of the different versions of the present discourse.⁴⁶

Keeping in mind this tendency towards expansion, noted in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-(upadeśa)-śāstra* and found at work repeatedly throughout the different versions of the *Bahudhātuka-sutta* studied so far, we are now ready to examine more closely the theme of women's inabilities.

Women's Inabilities in the Parallel Versions of the *Bahudhātuka-sutta*

While the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel to the *Bahudhātuka-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya* does not take up the theme of what is impossible for women at all, the other versions of this discourse present the various inabilities of women as a single impossibility, as two or as five impossibilities (see figure 5). As regards content, a difference is that according to some versions a woman cannot be one of the four heavenly kings, while others instead indicate that she cannot be Māra. Another and rather significant difference is that, except for the Pāli version, the other versions also indicate that a woman cannot be a Paccekabuddha.

Figure 5: Impossibilities for Women

1 impossibility covering 6 aspects (individual translation):

- female wheel-turning king, female heavenly king,

female Sakka, female Brahmā, female Paccekabuddha, female Buddha

1 impossibility covering 6 aspects (Tibetan discourse):

- female wheel-turning king, female Sakka, female Brahmā, female Māra, female Paccekabuddha, female Buddha

1 impossibility covering 6 aspects (*Dharmaskandha*):

- female wheel-turning king, female Sakka, female Māra, female Brahmā, female Paccekabuddha, female Buddha

2 impossibilities covering 6 aspects (Śamathadeva's commentary):

- female wheel-turning king
- female heavenly king, female Sakka, female Brahmā, female Paccekabuddha, female Buddha

5 impossibilities (Pāli discourse):

- female Buddha
- female wheel-turning king
- female Sakka
- female Māra
- female Brahmā

When evaluating the implications of these impossibilities, it needs to be kept in mind that in a patriarchal society like ancient India the idea of a female wheel-turning king would have been unthinkable. Similarly, it would have been out of the question for ancient Indians to conceive that a female Sakka, a female heavenly king, or a female Brahmā could be reigning in their respective heavenly worlds.⁴⁷ The same reasoning would also apply to Māra, who according to the Pāli commentarial tradition occupied a position similar to a king or a prince in the highest heaven of the sense-sphere realm.⁴⁸

The point behind the above mentioned impossibilities is that a woman cannot fulfill these functions in the present. Though she could become any of these in the future, as long as she is a female she cannot perform the function of any of these rulers since to assume these leadership positions would, from the perspective of ancient Indian patriarchal society, require being a male.⁴⁹

This would also explain why Buddhist tradition holds that someone about to become a Buddha will not take birth as a woman. To do so, at least in a patriarchal society like ancient Indian, would make it more difficult to successfully execute the role of being a Buddha, as people would have less respect for a female teacher. A parallel reasoning seems to underlie the circumstance that Buddhas are born in families from the warrior or Brahmin class (*varṇa*).⁵⁰ This specification appears to be based on the same logic, since for a Buddha to be born in a low class

would make it unnecessarily difficult to be sufficiently respected as a teacher.⁵¹ Thus these specifications on the gender or the social class of a Buddha are an adaptation to ancient Indian society. They do not imply that gender or social class have a bearing on spiritual ability.⁵²

Here it needs also to be taken into account that the presentation in the *Bahudhātuka-sutta* and its parallels still stems from a period in the development of Buddhist thought when the idea of aspiring to Buddhahood had not yet become a general option. As pointed out by Kajiyama (64), “the dictum that a woman cannot become a Buddha ... did not have a target to which it could have been directed,” since at that time “no one, neither man nor woman, aspired to Buddhahood.”⁵³ In sum, then, the inability of a woman to assume the position of a ruler on earth, a ruler in various heavenly realms, or a ruler in the field of Dharma reflects leadership conceptions in ancient India.

From this perspective, one might wonder whether the inabilities of women stipulated in the *Bahudhātuka-sutta* would be relevant in a society where female leadership is a common feature. Just as Buddhas would not need to come from the Brahmin or warrior castes in a society whose class hierarchy does not put those castes at its apex, a Buddha’s gender might not need to be male in a society where gender equality is a generally accepted fact.⁵⁴

Be that as it may, in contrast to these inabilities related to leadership positions, to speak of the impossibility of a female Paccekabuddha would imply equating womanhood with lesser spiritual abilities. A Paccekabuddha does not act as a teacher, so that there would be no need to take into account the preferences of ancient Indian patriarchal society. The question of becoming a Paccekabuddha is thus solely a question of spiritual ability, as a Paccekabuddha has to accomplish the difficult task of reaching awakening without the guidance of a teacher. Hence to consider it impossible for a female to be a Paccekabuddha amounts to proposing that a woman by dint of her gender is incapable of the degree of spiritual ability required for realizing awakening without the guidance of a teacher. That this is indeed the implication of this particular impossibility becomes evident in the individual translation, which contrasts this inability of a woman to the case of a man, who by dint of merit and wisdom can become a Paccekabuddha.⁵⁵ In short, a woman lacks the merit and wisdom required for this feat.

The *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-(upadeśa)-śāstra* goes a step further: in a passage presented as a *sūtra* quotation from the Discourse on Many Elements, this work proclaims that a woman can reach liberation only with the help of a man.⁵⁶ That is, from the perspective of this passage even for becoming an *arahant* a woman will need help by a male. At this point, the degradation of the spiritual abilities of women has become fully manifest. In view of this evident tendency to devalue the abilities of women, it is quite significant that the *Madhyama-āgama* version does

not mention any of the inabilities of women. An accidental loss of such a passage seems less probable in view of the recurrent tendency towards gradual expansion that appears to be at work in regard to other topics in all versions. A deliberate deletion of such a treatment is similarly improbable, since the five inabilities of a woman are listed in another *Madhyama-āgama* discourse.⁵⁷

This discourse is one of several canonical records of the Buddha permitting women to go forth as nuns, following a request by Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and an intervention in her favor by Ānanda. The five inabilities of women are also mentioned in a version of the same event in the Mahīśāsaka Vinaya,⁵⁸ whereas they are absent from accounts of this event in the Vinayas of the Dharmaguptaka, “Haimavata”(?), Mahāsāṃghika, (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda and Theravāda traditions.⁵⁹ As the passage on the inabilities of women occurs at different junctions in the Mahīśāsaka Vinaya and in the *Madhyama-āgama* discourse, it seems probable that this topic is not an original part of the account of the foundation of the order of nuns;⁶⁰ similar to the above discussed case where two out of six versions of the Discourse on Many Elements have a reference to the aggregates that occurs at different junctions in these two versions (see figure 1), where other indications confirm that this reference is a later addition.

Returning to the *Bahudhātuka-sutta* and its parallels, when considered against the background of the purpose of the whole discourse, the theme of what a woman cannot achieve appears to be quite irrelevant. The different versions agree that the Buddha gave his disciple Ānanda an exposition on essential aspects of the Dharma that are required for the development of wisdom. That the development of wisdom requires insight into the elements, the sense-spheres and dependent arising is quite straightforward. The same could also be said for insight into the karmic consequences of wholesome and unwholesome deeds, or for knowledge about certain qualities of a stream-enterer. Such items would still be in line with the general canonical conception of wisdom, which stands for a type of insight and understanding that leads to liberation,⁶¹ not for a mere accumulation of various and perhaps irrelevant facts.

In contrast, to know if a wheel-turning king, a heavenly king, a Sakka, a Māra, a Brahmā, a Paccekabuddha or a Buddha can be female would be of little relevance to Ānanda, who was living at a time when the ruling positions in the various heavens were held to have been already occupied by males, and when the one male who according to tradition could have become a wheel-turning king had already become a Buddha instead. Given that all of these positions were either already occupied by males or else rendered impossible because of the existence of a Buddha, and given moreover that as a stream-enterer Ānanda would not have had any reason to aspire to become any of these,⁶² it would be difficult to conceive of any practical relevance that knowledge of gender restrictions for occupying these positions could have had for Ānanda.⁶³

In sum, since an accidental loss or an intentional omission of an exposition on the inabilities of women in the *Madhyama-āgama* discourse seems improbable, the most straightforward conclusion would be that the theme of women's inability is a later addition to the exposition on impossibilities in the different versions of the Discourse on Many Elements. Thus in this respect the *Madhyama-āgama* version quite probably testifies to an early stage, when the theme of what women cannot achieve had not yet become part of the discourse.

As part of the general tendency to expand on various impossibilities, however, this theme must have soon enough made its way into various versions of the discourse.⁶⁴ Whereas the inability of a woman to be a Buddha can still be seen as an expression of leadership conceptions held in ancient Indian patriarchal society, once her ability to be a Paccekabuddha becomes part of the listing of impossibilities, the implications are clearly a diminishing of the spiritual abilities of women. This tendency can safely be assumed to stand in contrast to the original teachings of early Buddhism, where—as far as the texts allow us to judge—gender was not considered to have an impact on spiritual abilities. ❖



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Abbreviations

AN	<i>Āṅguttara-nikāya</i>
B ^c	Burmese edition
C ^c	Ceylonese edition
D	Derge edition
DĀ	<i>Dīrgha-āgama</i> (T 1)
DN	<i>Dīrgha-nikāya</i>
EĀ	<i>Ekottarika-āgama</i> (T 125)
E ^c	PTS edition
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i> (T 26)
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
Ps	<i>Papañcasūdanī</i>
Q	Peking edition
SĀ	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 99)
SĀ ²	'other' <i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 100)
S ^c	Siamese edition
SN	<i>Samyutta-nikāya</i>
T	Taishō (CBETA)
Thī	<i>Therīgāthā</i>
Vin	<i>Vinaya</i>

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¹ SN 1.46 at SN I 33,11: "woman or man, by means of this vehicle draw close to Nibbāna," *itthiyā purisassa vā, sa ve etena yānena, nibbānasseva santike* (C^c reads *nibbāṇasseva*); SĀ 587 at T II 156a22: "a sublime vehicle like this, mounted by a man or a woman, will emerge out of the thicket of birth and death, leading to the attainment of the peaceful state," 如是之妙乘, 男女之所乘, 出生死叢林, 逮得安樂處; SĀ 171² at T II 437a24: "men as well as women, are able to mount this vehicle, will certainly discard name-and-form, become dispassionate and eradicate birth and death," 男子若女人, 能乘是乘者, 必捨棄名色, 離欲斷生死.

² Jaini (*Gender* 1) notes that the Digambara Jains "vehemently have insisted that one cannot attain mokṣa, emancipation of a soul from the cycles of birth and death (*samsāra*), as a female." Though the formation of the Digambara sect postdates the period of early Buddhism, this position is nevertheless noteworthy in the light of the indication given in the *Jinacaritra* that nuns consistently outnumbered monks throughout Jain history (*Jinacaritra* 134f, 161f, 176f and 214f counts 14.000 monks against 36.000 nuns under Mahāvīra; 16.000 monks against 38.000 nuns under Parśva; 18.000 monks against 40.000 nuns under Ariṣṭanemi; and 84.000 monks against 300.000 nuns under Ṛṣabha; cf. Jacobi (66,5, 69,18, 71,22 and 75,18). Independent of the historical value of such figures, they do point to the eminent position nuns were believed to have held in the Jain monastic order since the most ancient times. That a whole section of the Jain tradition should eventually come to affirm that women are incapable of reaching liberation shows, as pointed out by Jaini (*Gender* 23), that "the prejudice against the female sex must have been deep-rooted in the popular mind." For a study of Digambara nuns cf. Shāntā (630-683).

³ Rajapakse (13 note 14) comments that "it is interesting to note that the doubts in question are raised by Māra, the mythic-symbolic focus of evil in Buddhism, who thus assumes the role of a 'male chauvinist' in this setting. Māra generally functions ... as an opponent of goodness and spirituality."

⁴ SN 5.2 at SN I 129,14: "what is to be attained by seers ... that a woman with her two finger wisdom cannot attain," *yaṃ taṃ isīhi pattabbam ... na taṃ dvāṅgulapaññāya, sakkā pap-potum itthiyā* (following the new E^c edition 1998: 283,11). SĀ 1199 at T II 326b1: "the state wherein seers dwell, this state is very difficult to attain, one with a two finger's wisdom is unable to attain that state," 仙人所住處, 是處甚難得, 非彼二指智, 能得到彼處. SĀ² 215 at T II 454a5: "what is attained by seers, that state is difficult to reach, with your despicable and defiled wisdom you will not attain a state like that," 仙聖之所得, 斯處難階及, 非汝鄙穢智, 獲得如是處. The reference to a woman's "two finger wisdom" in SN 5.2 and SĀ 1199 may have been a popular saying, as it recurs in a different context in the *Mahāvastu* in Senart (3: 391,19 and 392,13); cf. also Kloppenborg (154) for an examination of the Pāli commentarial gloss on this imagery, which explains that the reference is to women's practice of checking if rice has been sufficiently cooked by taking a grain of rice and pressing it between two fingers. Abeynayake (3) comments that "what is reiterated is nothing but the condemnation that the society had towards women during this period." Harvey (359) notes that "this passage in some way parallels that of Māra's tempting of Gotama just prior to his enlightenment. In Somā's case, specious doubts arise concerning a woman's ability to attain spiritual states, but she conquers them by seeing the irrelevance of gender."

⁵ SN 5.2 at SN I 129,23: "what does womanhood matter, [once] the mind is well concentrated? ... one to whom it would occur that 'I am a woman' or 'I am a man' ... [only] to such a one it is fit for Māra to speak [like this]"; *itthibhāvo kiṃ kayirā, cittamhi susamāhite ... yassa nūna siyā evaṃ, itthāhaṃ puriso 'tī vā ... taṃ Māro vattum arahati* (S^c reads *itthibhāvo and itthiham*). SĀ 1199 at T II 326b6: "[once] the mind has entered a [concentrative] attainment, what has a female [bodily] appearance to do with that? If knowledge has already arisen, the unsurpassable Dharma will be reached. [But] if the mind has not reached complete separation from the perception of 'man' or 'woman', then such a one will speak like you, Māra. You should go and speak to such a one"; 心入於正受, 女形復何為, 智或若生已, 逮得無上法, 若於男女想, 心不得俱離, 彼即隨魔, 汝應往語彼. SĀ² 215 at T II 454a9: "the characteristics of a woman have nothing to do with it, only the mind develops concentrative absorption and contemplates with vision the supreme Dharma. One who has the perception of a 'man' or a 'woman', may say to a woman that she can achieve nothing in the Dharma. [But] if one has no perception of a 'man' or a 'woman', how could such distinctions arise?"; 女相無所作, 唯意修禪定, 觀見於上法, 若有男女相, 可於女人, 於法無所能, 若無男女相, 云何生分別. (where my rendering assumes the last two instances of 相 to be an error for 想, a frequent error in the *Āgamas*, cf. Anālayo "Comparative" 48-49). The protagonist of the present verses appears to have been a remarkable nun with outstanding abilities, as according to the *Avadānaśataka*, Speyer 22.4 (cf. also the *Karmaśataka* in Skilling "Eṣā" 146), she had committed the entire code of rules to memory after a single hearing. Horner (165) comments "that a woman could be represented as making such an utterance is a proof that the old life of Hinduism in which women were regarded merely as child-bearers and as commodities was, if not suffering a decline, at least not passing entirely unquestioned."

⁶ This is reported in the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 923a24; in what according to Lamotte (*Histoire* 212) could be the Haimavata *Vinaya*, T 1463 at T XXIV 803b10; in the Mahāsāṃghika *Vinaya*, Roth 13,5; in the Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 185c17; and in the Theravāda *Vinaya*, Vin II 254,33 (cf. also AN 8.51 at AN IV 276,10). According to a parallel to this account in the (Mūla-)sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1451 at T XXIV 350b15, it was the Buddha's fostermother who made this point, where the circumstance that the Buddha did not reject her assertion of women's abilities gives the impression that here, too, such abilities are at least implicitly affirmed. The same holds true for a Sarvāstivāda parallel, MĀ 116 at T I 605a13.

⁷ Thī 120: "in the last watch of the night they destroyed the mass of ignorance," *rattiyā pacchime yāme tamokkhandham padālayum* (B^c: *tamokkhandham*), followed by indicating at Thī 121 that this was accomplished by a group of thirty elder nuns.

⁸ MN 73 at MN I 490,24: "Vaccha, not merely one hundred, not two hundred, not three hundred, not four hundred, not five hundred, but far more nuns who are my disciples dwell by having realized here and now through their own direct knowledge the influx-free deliverance of the mind and deliverance by wisdom, being established in it through the destruction of the influxes," *na kho, Vaccha, ekam yeva satam na dve satāni na tīni satāni na cattāri satāni na pañca satāni, atha kho bhiiyo va yā bhikkhuniyo mama sāvika āsavānaṃ khayā anāsavam cetovimuttim paññāvimuttim diṭṭheva dhamme sayam abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja viharanti*. SĀ 964 at T II 246c14: "not only one, two, three nuns, (up to) five hundred, there are many [more] nuns in this Dharma and discipline who have destroyed all influxes (up to) and will not experience further existences"; 不但一, 二, 三比丘尼, 乃至五百, 有眾多比丘尼, 於此法律, 盡諸有漏乃至不受 後有; and SĀ² 198 at T II 446b13: "in the Dharma I teach, there are not [only] one, two, three, (up to) five hundred, but many [more] nuns than that who have attained this state," 我教法中, 比丘尼等得斯法者, 非一二三乃至五百, 其數眾多, where "this state" refers to the earlier mentioned "attaining deliverance of the mind and deliverance by wisdom," 心得解, 慧得解; cf. also T 1482 at T XXIV 963b17.

⁹ MN 115 at MN III 65,24: "it is impossible, it cannot come to be that a woman should be an arahant who is a *Sammāsambuddha*," *aṭṭhānam etaṃ anavakāso yaṃ itthi araham assa sammāsambuddha* (B^c, C^e and S^c: *itthi*). The same position is also taken in AN 1.15 at AN I 28,9, a discourse of which no parallel appears to be known. Such absence of a parallel does not necessarily imply lateness, as lack of a counterpart could also be due to the dynamics of transmission, cf. Anālayo "Chinese" 7-9.

¹⁰ MĀ 181 at T I 723a10-724c3.

¹¹ On the language of the Indic original used for translating the *Madhyama-āgama* cf. Bapat (5), Enomoto ("Āgamas" 20), and von Hinüber (250); on the school affiliation cf. Enomoto ("Sarvāstivāda"), Lü (242), Mayeda (98), Minh Chau (27), and Waldschmidt (136).

¹² T 776 at T XVII 712b14-714a1, entitled "Discourse Spoken by the Buddha on the Fourfold Dharma Instruction," 佛四品法門經, a title reconstructed by Nanjio (219) as *Buddhabhāṣita-caturvarga-dharmaparyāya-sūtra*, which according to the information given in the Taishō edition would have been translated by Fāxián, 法賢.

¹³ D (297) *mdo sde sha* 297a2-301b2 or Q (963) *mdo lu* 325b3-330b1, entitled *khamṣ mang po pa'i mdo*, which thus similar to MN 115 and MĀ 181 takes the "many elements" as its title, though in its reference to the Indic original it has these two words in the reverse sequence, *D mdo sde sha* 297a2 or Q *lu* 325b3: *rgya gar skad du dhā tu ba hu ta ka sū tra*. Skilling (Kanjur 772) notes several editions whose title corresponds to the sequence of the Pāli title and suggests that "*dhātubahutaka* must be a reconstruction." For my work on this discourse I am greatly indebted to Peter Skilling, who kindly allowed me to consult his unpublished translation and edition of the Tibetan discourse. It is a rare gift to be associating with an eminent scholar of such broadminded generosity, especially when it comes to sharing his own unpublished work.

¹⁴ This *sūtra* quotation comes at the outset of chapter 20 on "many elements" in T 1537 at T XXVI 501b25-502c18.

¹⁵ D (4094) *mngon pa ju* 28b2-33b4 or Q (5595) *tu* 31b1-36b6, which gives the title as *khamṣ mang po pa'i mdo*, "the Discourse on Many Elements."

¹⁶ In order to facilitate comparing my translation with the English translation of the *Bahudhātuka-sutta* in Nānamoli (925-30), I adopt the same paragraph numbering as used by Nānamoli. For the same reason, I also use Pāli terminology (except for such anglicized terms as Dharma and Nirvana), without thereby intending to take a position on the original language of the *Madhyama-āgama*.

¹⁷ MN 115 at MN III 61,9 begins directly with the Buddha broaching this subject, without reporting that a corresponding thought had occurred to Ānanda. The other versions agree with MĀ 181.

¹⁸ MN 115 does not take up the fears of the past and the future. The other versions agree with MĀ 181.

¹⁹ MĀ 181 at T I 723b6: 可得, for which Hirakawa (235) gives as possible equivalents *prā-Örabh* and *sam-ā-Örabh*.

²⁰ At this point in MN 115 at MN III 61,25, the Buddha encourages his disciples to train themselves with the thought "we shall become wise ones and inquirers," *paññitā bhavissāma vimaṃsakā* (S^e only reads *paññitā bhavissāma*, without *vimaṃsakā*), an injunction that underlines the practical import of the subsequent exposition.

²¹ Such a reaction by Ānanda is not mentioned in the other versions.

²² In MN 115 at MN III 62,2 Ānanda asks directly about how a monk can be reckoned a wise one, without broaching the complementary topic of being reckoned a foolish one. The other versions agree with MĀ 181.

²³ The *sūtra* quotation in Śamathadeva's commentary and the *Dharmaskandha* add to this fourfold listing the aggregates as a fifth item, which D *mngon pa ju* 29b1 or Q *tu* 32b1 lists as its first, whereas in T 1537 at T XXVI 501c11 they occur in the third place, see figure 1. The *Dharmaskandha* also gives an exposition of this topic by listing the five aggregates, T 1537 at T XXVI 502a13, an exposition without counterpart in the *sūtra* quotation in Śamathadeva's commentary.

²⁴ Several of the elements listed here are not found in MN 115, see figure 2.

²⁵ At this point in MN 115, and after each of the sets of elements listed subsequently, Ānanda asks the Buddha if there could be another way how a monk can be reckoned as skilled in the elements, e.g., MN III 62,19: *siyā pana, bhante, añño pi pariyaṃ yathā dhātukusalo bhikkhū'ti alaṃ vacanāya*. Thus in MN 115 the different sets of elements are alternative options, whereas MĀ 181 gives the impression as if all sets of elements need to be known.

²⁶ This set of four elements is not found in MN 115, though it occurs in the other versions.

²⁷ The present triad of elements (material/immaterial/cessation) and the next triad (past/future/present) are absent from MN 115 and T 776.

²⁸ The present triad of elements (superior/inferior/middle) and the next two triads (wholesome/unwholesome/undetermined and trainee/beyond training/neither) are absent from MN 115, but occur in the other versions.

²⁹ The present pair of elements (with influxes/without influxes) is absent from MN 115, but occurs in the other versions.

³⁰ A final count of all elements is not found in any of the parallels, so that MĀ 181 is the only version that specifies the overall number of elements. A count of sixty-two elements is associated with the present discourse in other sources, however, e.g., in the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, T 1545 at T XXVII 367c4: 多界經中界差別有六十二, (cf. also Buddhavarman's *Vibhāṣā* translation, T 1546 at T XXVIII 279b24); or in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, Abh-k 1:28 in Pradhan 18,7: *Bahudhātuke'pi dvāṣaṣṭirdhātavo deśitāh* (with its Chinese counterparts in T 1558 at T XXIX 6c2 and in T 1559 at T XXIX 166c24); cf. also T 1552 at T XXVIII 874a6 and T 1828 at T XLII 657b17.

³¹ The listings of impossibilities show considerable variations in the different versions, see figure 3.

³² The contrast here is between the 見諦人 and the 凡夫人, counterparts to the *diṭṭhisampanna puggala* and the *puṭhujjana* mentioned in the corresponding section in MN 115 at MN III 64,29. The former of these two is at least a stream-enterer, so that the impossibilities listed here contrast a member of the community of noble ones to a worldlyling.

³³ The present and the subsequent impossibilities, up to the impossibility that a person endowed with view could be reborn into an eighth existence, have as their counterpart in MN 115 at MN III 65,11 a single impossibility, according to which a person endowed with view will not designate another teacher [as his teacher], *aññaṃ sattaraṃ uddiseyya*, see figure 4.

³⁴ The present and the following impossibilities are without a counterpart in MN 115, though they have counterparts in the other versions.

³⁵ Four of these titles, the "Many Elements," the "Drum of the Deathless," the "Mirror of the Dharma," and the "Four Chapters" occur also in nearly all of the other versions, cf. MN 115 at MN III 67,29: *bahudhātuko ... catuparivaṭṭo ... dhammādaso ... amatadundubhi*; T 776 at T XVII 713c27: 四品 法門 ... 法鏡 ... 甘露鼓 ... 多界; D *mdo sde sha* 301a7 or Q *lu* 330a8: *le'u bzhi pa ... chos kyi me long ... bdud rtsi'i rnga bo che* (thereby qualifying the drum of the deathless as "great") ... *khamṣ mang po*; T 1537 at T XXVI 502c17: 四轉 ... 大法鏡 (qualifying the mirror of the Dharma as "great") ... 甘露鼓 ... 多界; D *mngon pa ju* 33b3 or Q *tu* 36b5: *le'u bzhi pa ... chos kyi me long ... bdud rtsi lnga* (speaking of a "five[-fold] deathless" instead of the "drum of the deathless") ... *khamṣ mang po*. MN 115 at MN III

67,30 also mentions the “Unsurpassable Victory in Battle,” *anuttaro saṅgāmajayo*, a title not found in the other versions. The same title recurs in a listing of five alternative titles for the *Brahmajāla-sutta*, DN 1 at DN I 46,25, where it is also absent from the Chinese and Tibetan counterparts, cf. DĀ 21 at T I 94a12, T 21 at T I 270c20, and Weller (64,33).

³⁶ D *mngon pa ju* 29b1 or Q *tu* 32b1: *phung po*.

³⁷ T 1537 at T XXVI 501c11: 蘊.

³⁸ T 1537 at T XXVI 502a13: “A wise one who knows and sees the five aggregates as they really are is skilled in the aggregates. That is to say, he knows and sees the aggregate of form, the aggregate of feeling, the aggregate of perception, the aggregate of formations, and the aggregate of consciousness as they really are. This is reckoned a wise one who is skilled in the aggregates.” 智者於五蘊如實知見，是蘊善巧，謂如實知見 色蘊，受蘊，想蘊，行蘊，識蘊，是名智者於蘊善巧。

³⁹ MN 115 at MN III 67,29: *catuparivaṭṭa*; T 776 at T XVII 713c27: 四品法門; D *mdo sde sha* 301a7 or Q *lu* 330a8: *le’u bzhi pa*; T 1537 at T XXVI 502c17: 四轉; D *mngon pa ju* 33b3 or Q *tu* 36b5: *le’u bzhi pa*.

⁴⁰ The four elements occur in an analysis of deeper levels of concentration into its constituent elements under the heading of the four mental aggregates given in MN 64 at MN I 436,21+29. The additional element triplets recur in DN 33 at DN III 215,20+22, DN III 216,16, DN III 217,24, and DN III 218,1, which has the triplet material, immaterial, and cessation as its entry 3:14; what is inferior, middle, and superior as its entry 3:15; past, future, and present as its entry 3:24; wholesome, unwholesome, and indeterminate formations as its entry 3:35; and the trainee, the one beyond training, and the one who is neither as its entry 3:36. The distinction between what is with influxes and what is without the influxes is applied in DN 28 at DN III 112,7 to supernormal powers; in MN 117 at MN III 72,6 to the factors of the noble eightfold path; in AN 2.7 at AN I 81,1 to happiness; and in AN 10.133 at AN V 275,20 to the ten courses of action.

⁴¹ The *sūtra* quotations in the *Dharmaskandha* and in Śamathadeva’s commentary agree with MĀ 181 in mentioning the two wheel-turning kings first, T 1537 at T XXVI 502b12 and D *mngon pa ju* 32a1 or Q *tu* 35a2. The other versions mention them in second place, MN 115 at MN III 65,20, T 776 at T XVII 713b18, and D *mdo sde sha* 300a7 or Q *lu* 329a5.

⁴² While in the listing in MN 115 at MN III 65,3, shedding the blood of a Tathāgata precedes schism; T 776 at T XVII 713b27, D *mdo sde sha* 300b3 or Q *lu* 329a8, T 1537 at T XXVI 502b21, and D *mngon pa ju* 32a6 or Q *tu* 35a8 agree with MĀ 181 at T I 724a3 in adopting the opposite sequence. On this type of variation cf. also Silk (254-55).

⁴³ The first three constitute the first to third impossibilities in MN 115 at MN III 64,16, while the impossibility of following another teacher comes as the ninth impossibility at MN III 65,10.

⁴⁴ T 1509 at T XXV 237a28 explains that the “possibilities and impossibilities like these [mentioned before] were declared by the Buddha himself in the Discourse on Many Elements. Based on what the Buddha had said, the treatise masters further expanded by declaring [more] possibilities and impossibilities,” 如是等，是處不是處，《多性經》中佛口自，諸論議師輩，依是佛語，更廣是處不是處，cf. Lamotte (*Le Traité* 1525): “toutes ces possibilités et impossibilités, le Buddha les a exposées de sa bouche dans le *To-sing king* (Bahudhātukasūtra), mais les docteurs (*upadeśācārya*), s’appuyant sur la parole du Buddha, ont encore développé au long ces possibilités et impossibilités.”

⁴⁵ T 1509 at T XXV 237b1: refers to the impossibility “that noble ones seek out a heterodox teacher;” 若諸賢聖求外道師; cf. Lamotte (*Le Traité* 1525): “que les saints (*ārya*) recherchent des maîtres hérétiques.”

⁴⁶ Lamotte (*Le Traité* 1525 note 1) suggests that this would be intending the authors of the *Abhidharma* in particular, “le *Traité* a sans doute en vue les auteurs d’*Abhidharma* qui on considérablement augmenté la liste des possibilités et impossibilités dressée par le Buddha.” This is certainly the case, but the same tendency towards expanding the theme of impossibilities seems to make itself felt already in the *Bahudhātuka-sutta* and its discourse parallels.

⁴⁷ Ps IV 123,11 explains that in the present context the reference is to Mahābrahmā, i.e. a Brahmā who reigns in the Brahmā world; in fact the individual translation, T 776 at T XVII 713b22, speaks explicitly of the Heavenly King Mahābrahmā in this context, 大梵天王; and the *Dharmaskandha*, T 1537 at T XXVI 502b17, speaks of King Brahmā, 梵王. The Pāli commentary explains that the suggestion in MN 115 at MN III 66,8 that a man can become a Brahmā should not be taken literally, as Brahmās are genderless, but should be understood only in the sense that the outer appearance of a Brahmā resembles a man more than a woman.

⁴⁸ According to Ps I 34,2, Māra lives in the *Paranimittavasavattidevaloka* governing his own following like a rebel prince in the border region of a kingdom, *attano parisāya issariyam pavattento rajjapaccante dāmarikarājaputto viya vasati*.

⁴⁹ Barnes (114) comments on the impossibilities for women that “this theory excluded women from leadership.” As Sharma (74) points out, at least in the case of Māra this would not have been an issue, as given the negative role Māra plays in Buddhist texts, “the denial of Marahood can hardly be an embarrassment.”

⁵⁰ This can be seen in the listing of former Buddhas given in DN 14 at DN II 2,28; DĀ 1 at T I 2a16; T 2 at T I 150b1; T 4 at T I 159b21; EĀ 48.4 at T II 790b14 and their Sanskrit fragment counterparts frag. S 360 folio 115 verso in Fukita (4). The *Mahāvastu*, Senart (2: 1,3) points out that “bodhisattvas are born in two types of families, warrior families or Brahmin families,” *dvīhi kulehi bodhisattvā jāyanti, kṣatriyakule vā brāhmaṇakule vā*. Rahula (186) sums up: “if the Buddha is to hail from a backward family, nobody would care for what he preaches and hence an Enlightened One is always to be born in the highest caste of the day.” Wawrytko (286) explains that “prevailing social conditions prompted the Buddha to choose a high caste for his incarnation ... presumably the same practical considerations would have militated against an incarnation in the female gender within ancient Indian society.”

⁵¹ According to the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, Gnoli (36,13), the future Buddha chose to be reborn in a warrior family since the warriors were more respected than Brahmins, and his decision on where to be born was taken in order to avoid an objectionable type of birth, *mā me syur atonidānaṃ pare vakkārāḥ ‘bodhisattvena garhaṇīyāyāṃ jātau pratisandhir grhīta’ iti*. A related position can be found in the Jain tradition, as according to the *Jinacaritra* (17) in Jacobi (38,9) future *arahants* or wheel-turning kings will avoid taking birth in a low womb or even in a Brahmin womb.

⁵² Here it needs to be pointed out that this inability does not imply, as assumed by An (11), that women are not capable of reaching liberation and be *arahants*, it only concerns the question of being a Buddha.

⁵³ Romberg (164) notes that once “the aim was no longer to become an Arhat, but to become Buddha ... this shift made, in fact, the situation for women worse, because a doctrinal foundation was laid for the necessity of changing the sex before being able to become enlightened.” In fact the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* explains that a woman will not realize the awakening of a Buddha because already an advanced bodhisattva has left behind womanhood for good and will not be reborn again as a female, Wogihara (94,3): *na ca strī anuttarāṃ samyaksaṃbodhim abhisambudhyate. tat kasya hetoḥ? tathā hi bodhisattvaḥ prathamasyaiva kalpāsaṃkhyeyasyātyayāt strībhāvāṃ vijāhāti bodhimaṇḍaṇīśadanam upādāya na punar jātu strī bhavati*; cf. also Paul (212 note 7). Harrison (78) concludes that “women ... are generally represented in such an unfavourable light as to vitiate any notion of the Mahāyāna as a movement for sexual equality. Compared with the situation in the Pāli Canon, in which women are at least as capable as men of attaining the highest goal, arhatship, the position of women in Mahāyāna has hardly changed for the better.”

⁵⁴ A problem with this suggestion would be one of the thirty-two marks with which according to tradition the Buddha was endowed, namely the concealed nature of his genitals, cf. e.g., MN 91 at MN II 136,17: *kosohitavatthaguyho*, referred to in its parallels MĀ 161 at T I 686b16 and T 76 at T I 883c26 as 陰馬藏. Hae-ju (131) comments that the idea of women’s inability to become a Buddha “may have stemmed from the idea of the Buddha’s unique sexual mark. Even though his sexual organ is concealed, the mark is characterized as male”, cf. also Kajiyama (65). The standard description of the significance of these thirty-two marks, cf. e.g., MN 91 at MN II 134,16 and its parallels MĀ 161 at T I 685a23, and T 76 at T I 883c2, states that one who has these will definitely become either a wheel-turning king or a Buddha. In several discourses, Brahmins investigate the Buddha’s possession of the thirty-two marks and, once they find out that he possesses all of them and have been told by him that he claims to be a Buddha, they come to the conclusion that his claim must be true. Thus possession of the thirty-two marks serves to certify a claim to Buddhahood in the eyes of contemporary Brahmins. However, the standard descriptions of the significance of these marks neither explicitly state nor necessarily imply that to become a wheel-turning king or a Buddha one must invariably be endowed with these marks (though this may well be the way later tradition interprets these passages). It only states the future prospect of one who has them. Thus what this dictum implies for one who does not have all thirty-two marks would be that such a person’s claim to be a Buddha would fail to arouse confidence in Brahmins who believe in the significance of these marks. In the discourses, the situation of someone claiming to be a Buddha without possessing all thirty-two marks does not arise, as whenever the possession of these marks is under scrutiny, the object of such investigations is invariably Gotama Buddha. Nevertheless, a significant indication can be found in the *Mahāpadāna-sutta*, which makes a point of not including the possession of the thirty-two marks among what is the rule, *dhammatā*, for all Buddhas. Whereas the *Mahāpadāna-sutta* consistently introduces various qualities of the infant bodhisattva Vipassī as *dhammatā eṣā*, and thus specifies their possession as something that is invariably the case for any Buddha-to-be, when the discourse turns to his thirty-two marks, DN 14 at DN II 16,1, the phrase *dhammatā eṣā* is no longer used. The same is the case for its *Dirgha-āgama* parallel, where the recurrent reference to an “unchanging principle for all Buddhas,” 諸佛常法, is no longer used when the description turns to the thirty-two marks, DĀ 1 at T I 4c20. Not all parallel versions agree in this respect, as judging from fragment 143.2 in Fukita (71) the Sanskrit parallel did use the expression *dhammatā* at the outset of its description of bodhisattva Vipassī’s possession of the thirty-two marks; while another parallel, T 2 at T I 152b13, does not use such a specification even in its description of his other qualities. In sum, at least from the perspective of the *Mahāpadāna-sutta* and its

Dirgha-āgama parallel, the possibility that someone could be a Buddha without being in the possession of all of the thirty-two marks does not seem to be categorically ruled out.

⁵⁵ T 776 at T XVII 713b23 indicates that what is impossible for women is instead possible in the case of “a son of a good family who is endowed with the marks of a great man and adorned with merit and wisdom,” 善男子，具大人相，福慧莊嚴。

⁵⁶ T 1509 at T XXV 237a19: “if a woman attains the liberation of Nirvana, it is in dependence on a male that she attains it; it does not happen that she attains the path on her own,” 若女人得解涅槃，亦因男子得，無有自然得道，cf. also Lamotte (*Le Traité* 1524): “si une femme obtient la délivrance (*vimukti*), le Nirvāna, c’est grâce à un mâle qu’elle l’obtient. Il est impossible qu’elle obtienne la Bodhi par elle-même (*svatah*).”

⁵⁷ MĀ 116 at T I 607b10: “a woman cannot attain five objectives. That a woman should become a Tathāgata, free from attachment, rightly awakened; a wheel-turning king; Sakka, ruler of gods; King Māra; or Great Brahmā, that is impossible,” 女人不得行五事，若女人作如來，無所著，等正覺，及轉輪王，天帝釋，魔王，大梵天者，終無是處。A statement of the same type can also be found in the in many respects closely parallel account in T 61 at T I 858a1: “it is impossible and cannot come to be, a woman cannot at all attain five objectives: she cannot become a Tathāgata, free from attachment, rightly awakened; or a wheel-turning king; she cannot become Sakka; she cannot become Māra; and she cannot become Brahmā, [all] that is impossible,” 無有是處不可容女人，終不得五事，不得成如來無所著等正覺，及轉輪王，不得為釋，不得為魔，不得為梵，無有是處。

⁵⁸ T 1421 at T XXII 186a12: “a woman has five obstructions, she cannot become Sakka, the ruler of gods, or the Heavenly King Māra, or the Heavenly King Brahmā, or a noble wheel-turning king or a king of the Dharma in the three realms,” 女人有五礙，不得作天帝釋，魔天王，梵天王，轉輪聖王，三界法王。The five impossibilities are also mentioned in EĀ 43.2 at T II 757c24, where they serve to explain why a woman cannot be given a prediction of future Buddha-hood. This passage thus shows a stage of development comparable to the extract from the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* quote above in note 53. A counterpart to the tale in EĀ 43.2 can be found in an apocryphal Pāli *jātaka* ed. in Jaini (“Padīpadānājātaka”), cf. also Gombrich (70) on a version of this tale in a Sinhala prose work composed in the 15th century. The occurrence of this tale in the *Ekottarika-āgama* is one of several passages indicating the integration of comparatively late elements into this discourse collection, cf. in more detail Anālayo (“Zeng”).

⁵⁹ Dharmaguptaka Vinaya T 1428 at T XXII 922c-923c, the “Haimavata”(?) Vinaya, T 1463 at T XXIV 803a-c, the Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya, Roth (4-21), the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda Vinaya, T 1451 at T XXIV 350b-351c, and the Theravāda Vinaya, Vin II 253-256 (= AN 8.51 at AN IV 274-279); cf. also the survey in Heirman (282).

⁶⁰ In the Mahīśāsaka Vinaya, T 1421 at T XXII 186a12, the inabilities of women stand at the beginning of several passages that describe the negative repercussions of allowing women to go forth. In MĀ 116 at T I 607b10 (and in its close parallel T 61 at T I 858a1), women’s inabilities come at the end of a comparable series of passages on the detrimental consequences of permitting women to ordain.

⁶¹ MN 43 at MN I 293,36 indicates that the purpose of wisdom is to develop “direct knowledge,” “penetrative knowledge,” and “abandoning,” *paññā ... abhiññatthā pariññatthā pahānatthā*; its parallel MĀ 211 at T I 790c22 similarly explains that wisdom has the purpose of leading to “disenchantment,” to “dispassion,” and to a “vision in accordance with reality,” 智慧者有厭義，無欲義，見如真義。

⁶² SN 22.83 at SN III 106,3 and its parallel SĀ 261 at T II 66b3 record how Ānanda became a stream-enterer, which Vin II 183,21 indicates to have happened soon after his ordination.

⁶³ Pérez-remón (357) note 48 comments regarding the impossibilities of two Buddhas or two wheel-turning kings arising simultaneously and the impossibilities of women: “these impossibilities and their corresponding possibilities are introduced in between the other impossibilities and possibilities regarding moral matters, interrupting the enumeration of things morally possible or impossible, a fact that might indicate their later interpolation.”

⁶⁴ Kajiyama (58) concludes that, regarding the listing of inabilities of women, “it is most likely that the dictum did not exist when the Buddhist Order maintained one and the same tradition, but that it was created after the Order was divided into many schools and was inserted into sūtras of various schools.” However, the suggestion by Kajiyama (70) that “the dictum that a woman is incapable of becoming a Buddha arose probably in the first century B.C.” may be putting things at too late a time.

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Uppalavanna (Bhikkhuni-Samyutta: Discourses of the Ancient Nuns)
Setting at Savatthi. Then, in the morning, the bhikkhuni Uppalavanna dressed... she stood at the foot of a sala tree in full flower.¹

Then Māra the Evil One, desiring to arouse fear, trepidation, and terror in the bhikkhuni Uppalavanna, desiring to make her fall away from concentration, approached her and addressed her in verse:

14. "Having gone to a sala tree with flowering top,
You stand at its foot all alone, bhikkhuni.
There is none whose beauty can rival your own:
Foolish girl, have you no fear of rogues?"²

Then it occurred to the bhikkhuni Uppalavanna: "Now who is this...? This is Māra the Evil One... desiring to make me fall away from concentration."

Then the bhikkhuni Uppalavanna, having understood, "This is Māra the Evil One," replied to him in verses:

15. "Though a hundred thousand rogues
Just like you might come here,
I stir not a hair, I feel no terror;
Even alone, Māra, I don't fear you."³

16. I can make myself disappear
Or I can enter inside your belly.
I can stand between your eyebrows
Yet you won't catch a glimpse of me.

17. I am the master of my own mind,
The bases of power are well developed;
I am freed from every kind of bondage,
Therefore I don't fear you, friend."⁴

Then Māra the Evil One, realizing, "The bhikkhuni Uppalavanna knows me," sad and disappointed, disappeared right there. ❖

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1. She was the foremost among the bhikkhunis in the exercise of supernormal powers (*iddhi*), to which she testifies in her verses below. Vv.14-17 correspond to Thi 230-33, but with significant differences. Thi 234 is identical with v.3, here ascribed to Alavika.

2. Pada c: *Na c'atthi te dutiya vannadhātu*. I translate freely in accordance with the gloss of Samyutta Nikaya Atthakatha: "There is no second beauty element like your beauty element; there is no other bhikkhuni similar to you." A pun on the bhikkhuni's name is probably intended. Therīgāthā Atthakatha includes an additional pada between padas c and d of the other eds, which seems a scribal error, as it is identical with pada b of the next verse, where it belongs.

3. Samyutta Nikaya Atthakatha explains padas ab as if they meant: "Though a hundred thousand rogues might come here, they would be treated just like you in that they would get no intimacy or affection." I translate, however, in accordance with the apparent sense, which also can claim support from Therīgāthā Atthakatha's gloss on Therīgāthā 231.

4. The *iddhipada*, "bases of power," are the supporting conditions for the exercise of the *iddhi* or supernormal powers described in the previous verse.

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Once, while Mahánāga was begging alms at Nakulanagara, he saw a nun and offered her a meal. As she had no bowl, he gave her his, with the food ready in it. After she had eaten and washed the bowl, she gave it back to him saying, “Henceforth there will be no fatigue for you when begging for alms.” Thereafter the Elder was never given alms worth less than a kahāpana. The nun was an arahant.

DhSA.399