

First International Bhikkhuni
Day

September 17, 2011

What is a bhikkhuni/bhiksuni?

A bhikkhuni (Pali) or bhikshuni (Sanskrit) is a fully-ordained female Buddhist monastic. A bhikkhu is a male monastic.

Both bhikkhus and bhikkhunis are ordained by receiving the Vinaya, the text defining monastic discipline.

Bhikkhunis are also referred to as female monks. Their Patimokkha has 311 rules. The bhikkhu Patimokkha has 227 rules. Bhikkhuni Vinaya Pitaka is found in the first division of the Tipitaka. The Sutta Pitaka and the Abhidhamma Pitaka comprise the other two parts or "baskets" of the Tipitaka. The Theravada Bhikkhuni Patimokkha governs bhikkhuni conduct, contains training precepts, and procedural rules for resolving conflicts. The Buddha referred to his teaching as the Dhamma-Vinaya, the teachings and discipline or training.

The Buddha said: “I will not pass away...until I have bhikkhu disciples...bhikkhuni disciples...layman disciples... laywoman disciples who are accomplished, disciplined, skilled, learned, expert in the Dhamma.”

From the Mahaparinibbana Sutta.

This group of bhikkhunis, bhikkhus, upsasikas, and upasaka is also referred to as the fourfold assembly (or four-fold sangha.)



Mural of Fourfold Assembly at Wat Pho, Bangkok, Thailand

The bhikkhunis are to the right of the Buddha. Below them are the upasikas, female lay practitioners. Left of the Buddha are bhikkhus. Beneath them are the upasaka, male lay practitioners. This quote is taken from the Mahaparanibbana Sutta.

Fifty-two Bhikkhunis,
Wat Thepthida-aram
“Monastery of the
Heavenly Daughter,”
the Bhikkhuni Vihara,
Bangkok



Many Enlightened Bhikkhunis



**The Thirteen
Great Arahant
Bhikkhuni
Disciples, mural
in Wat Pho,
Bangkok,
Thailand**

The Buddha extolled the attainments of the many enlightened bhikkhunis in his Assembly. As the Buddha had two chief male disciples, Sariputta and Moggallana, he likewise had two foremost female monks, bhikkhunis, Uppalavanna and Khema. The presence and accomplishments of bhikkhunis made his Sasana established and his purpose in teaching complete. Bhikkhuni Khema was renowned for her teaching ability. (See the Khema Sutta, SN 44.1)

By the time of
Emperor Asoka
(304-232 BCE), a
convert to
Buddhism, the
orders of bhikkhus
and bhikkhunis
were well
established in
India.

One of the many
pillars erected by
Emperor Asoka



The Bhikkhuni Sangha in Sri Lanka

Emperor Asoka sent
his son and
daughter to Sri
Lanka in the 3rd
century BCE to
spread Buddhism.



Arahanta Bhikkhuni Sanghamitta, Asoka's daughter, arrived from India with a Bo Tree cutting, welcomed by King Kelaniya. Bhikkhuni Sanghamitta ordained Queen Anula, a woman in the king's court, among many other women. Emperor Asoka also sent missionary bhikkhus and bhikkhunis into the region now known as Southeast Asia. Centuries ago scholars believe there were many bhikkhunis in Thailand.

Bhikkhuni Sangha Spreads to China

In 429 CE, Sri Lankan Bhikkhuni Devasara traveled to China with a group of bhikkhunis to establish a bhikkhuni sangha there.



In 429 CE, Bhikkhuni Devasara, a Sri Lankan nun, took a cutting from the Sri Lanka tree grown from a cutting from the Indian Bodhi Tree and traveled to China with a group of bhikkhunis to establish a bhikkhuni sangha there. These Sri Lankan bhikkhunis gave higher ordination to more than 300 Chinese nuns at a monastery in Nanjing. A second group followed in 433 CE.



Sri Lankan Bhikkhunis Establish Unbroken Bhikkhuni Lineage

China's bhikkhuni lineage has continued to the present day in an unbroken upasampada (ordination) lineage. This lineage eventually spread to Taiwan, Korea, and Vietnam.

There are now thousands of Taiwanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Chinese bhikkhunis. This unbroken lineage became very important about 1500 years later, as we shall see, when the Mahayana bhikkhunis from these orders were able to help their Theravada sisters revive their Sangha.

Disappearance of the Bhikkhuni Sangha in India and Sri Lanka

Between the 11th and 14th centuries CE both the Bhikkhu and Bhikkhuni Sanghas died out in India and Sri Lanka due to invasions, war, and famine.



Sanghamitta Shrine, Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

Ayya Tathaaloka's Note: Not long afterward, at the request of the new Sri Lankan king, the Sri Lankan Bhikkhu Sangha was reestablished with the help of bhikkhus from nearby countries. At that time, it was recorded that there were still bhikkhunis, of another order, in Northern Burma. Because they were a different order than the order of the Bhikkhu Sangha that was chosen for re-importation and adoption at that time in Sri Lanka, the choice was made, by the then political and religious leaders, not to re-import the Bhikkhuni Sangha ordination lineage.



Ayutthaya Historic Park, the ancient Thai Capital

- The Bhikkhu Sangha revived multiple times.
- The Bhikkhuni Sangha was not revived.
- In 1928, the Thai Bhikkhu Sangha decreed that the bhikkhuni lineage had died out and could not be revived.

The Bhikkhu Sangha, however, was revived multiple times when the Bhikkhu Sangha in one country re-established and ordained bhikkhus in neighboring countries. Sadly, this phenomena did not happen for Southeast Asian women desiring ordination. In 1928, the Thai Bhikkhu Sangha issued a decree that the bhikkhunis lineage had died out and could not be revived. Even though there is considerable evidence disputing the unbroken lineage, Thai bhikkhus to this day are prohibited from ordaining women. As recently as the late 1990's, there were no bhikkhunis in Sri Lanka or Thailand

Mahayana Bhikkhunis Help Revive Theravada Bhikkhuni Sangha

- 1500 years ago Sri Lankan bhikkhunis traveled to China to bring Buddhism and ordain bhikkhunis. The bhikkhuni ordinations spread to Korea and Taiwan.
- In the 20th century, in appreciation for that gift, the Mahayana bhikkhunis helped their Theravada sisters reestablish their sangha.

Thanks to their Mahayana sisters and supportive monks, there are now over 1000 bhikkhunis in Sri Lanka and about 50 bhikkhunis or samaneris in Thailand. Most Thai women travel to Sri Lanka to ordain.

Significant Recent Events in the
Revival of the Theravada
Bhikkhuni Sangha



1988 –Five Sri Lankan ten-precept nuns (including Ayya Khema) were ordained at Hsi Lai Monastery in Los Angeles by Taiwanese bhikkhus and bhikkhunis.

Notes:

1988 - A group of Sri Lankan ten-precept nuns ordained at His Lai Monastery in Hacienda Heights, Southern California. That group also included Ayya Khema, Ven Dharmapali (the first American bhikkhuni - now disrobed) and the first Nepalese Theravada bhikkhuni in modern times, Ven Dhammawati. Sadly, without support, this bhikkhuni order didn't last.

Ayya Khema

(b. Berlin 1923 – d. Buddhahaus, 1997)



- 1979 first Western woman to ordain as a Theravada samaneri .
- 1987 co-organized the first international conference of Buddhist nuns, resulting in the founding of Sakyadhita.
- First Buddhist nun to address the U.N. in N.Y. in 1987.
- 1988 fully ordained in the Los Angeles Chinese temple Hsi Lai (Taiwanese).

The inspiration for the creation of the Alliance for Bhikkhunis

Born to Jewish parents, sent to Scotland as a teen during WWII, joined her parents in Shanghai where she was later interned in a concentration camp. She later immigrated to US, married and had children. She traveled to Asia with her second husband where she learned about meditation and later began to teach meditation in US and Europe. In 1979 she ordained as a nun in Sri Lanka, where she was active in restoring full ordination for women and setting up many training centers for nuns. Ordained as a samaneri by Ven. Narada Thera in Colombo. Double platform ordination. Two hundred and fifty Chinese nuns, fifty monks, and twelve Western nuns ordained at that ceremony.

Mahayana ordination almost identical to Thai ordination ceremony

“In all the Mahayana schools whether in Tibet, China, Korea, or Vietnam, they follow mostly a Dharmagupta Vinaya. Dharmagupta is one of the Theravada sects.”



Ajahn Brahm

Australian Abbot Ajahn Brahm has been a great supporter of bhikkhuni ordination. In an interview on AFB's site, found in the Library, he said, "One of the biggest myths is that bhikkhunis under the Mahayana tradition is somehow separated from the Theravada. But the truth of the matter is, there is no such thing as a Mahayana Vinaya. In all the Mahayana schools whether in Tibet, China, Korea, or Vietnam, they follow mostly a Dharmagupta Vinaya. Dharmagupta is one of the Theravada sects. If you see an ordination ceremony in Taiwan – I saw a video of one that was recently conducted - you'd see the similarity. I had a copy of the chanting. It was almost identical with the ordination ceremony which is done say in Wat Bovorn here in Bangkok .”

Theravada Bhikkhuni reestablished in Sri Lanka.



- 1996 – The Korean Bhikkhu Sangha and Sri Lankan monks sponsored another bhikkhuni ordination for 10 Sri Lankan dasasilmatas in Sarnath, India.

1996 – A second wave of ordinations occurred in 1996 – Sakyadhita, along with S Korea & Sri Lankan monks organized and sponsored the first International higher ordination in Sarnath, India (officially reestablishing the Sri Lankan Bhikkhuni Sangha.)

Established by the Ven. Bhikkuni Kusuma
Ayya Khema International Buddhist Mandir



Bhikkhuni Kusuma was one of ten Sri Lankan women who ordained in 1996 in Sarnath, India. Prior to this ordination, there were no bhikkhunis in Sri Lanka. Now there are about 1000.

Ven. Bhikkhuni Kusuma MA. PhD. has pioneered the re-establishment the Theravada Bhikkhuni Sangha in Sri Lanka. She has taken upon herself the task of carrying on the efforts of her mentor, Ayya Khema, in establishing the 'Ayya Khema International Buddhist Mandir. This center will offer the study of the suttas and Abhidhamma, Pali chanting, meditation and English instructions. Navugala Bhikkhuni Aramaya (not pictured here) is an example of a Sri Lankan bhikkhuni monastery in disrepair and in need of replacement.

Bhikkhuni Ordinations Continue Around the World

- 1997 –IBMC (International Buddhist Meditation Center) in Los Angeles Theravada women from Sri Lanka, Nepal and USA were fully ordained (including Ayya Tathaaloka)



Ven. Dr. Karuna Dharma shared the role of Uppajaya with Ven. Dr. Havanpola Ratanasara.

1997 - International full ordination at IBMC (International Buddhist Meditation Center) in Los Angeles in which Theravada women from Sri Lanka, Nepal and USA are fully ordained as bhikkhunis by Bhante Ratanasara and Ven Karuna Dharma. (Ayya Tathaaloka was fully ordained here then.)

1998 - International full ordination sponsored by Fo Kwang Shan in Bodhgaya, India. This event reestablished the Indian Theravada Bhikkhuni Sangha and also established the now prestigious and leading Dambulla Bhikkhuni Sangha.

2003 - first bhikkhuni higher ordinations in modern times on Sri Lankan soil (in which American Ayya Sudhamma, and Burmese Ayya Gunasari as well as Thailand's Venerable Dhammananda were fully ordained). Ayya Gunasari was the first Burmese and Ven. Dhammananda the first Thai woman to be fully ordained as a Theravada bhikkhuni in modern times. Ayya Sudhamma has the distinction of being the first American woman to be fully ordained in Sri Lanka. In this same year, Vietnamese Bhikkhuni Dhammananda also ordained but at Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka.

2005 - The foundation of the North American Bhikkhuni Association, the first association of Theravada bhikkhunis ever established outside of Asia. Proposed by Ayya Tathaaloka. Co-founders: Ayya Sucinta, Ayya Sudhamma and Ayya Gunasari. 4 together = a Sangha.

First Modern Bhikkhuni Ordination in Sri Lanka



- 2003 - First bhikkhuni higher ordinations in modern times on Sri Lankan soil. (American Bhikkhuni Ayya Sudhamma, Thailand's Ven. Dhammananda, and Burmese born Ayya Gunasari were ordained at this time.)

Many of the bhikkhunis went on to build the bhikkhuni sangha. Ven. Sudhamma serves as the resident monk at Carolina Buddhist Vihara, a Theravada Buddhist center in a small house in the suburbs of Greenville, SC. Ayya Gunasari is now the abbess of the California bhikkhuni monastery Mahapajapati.



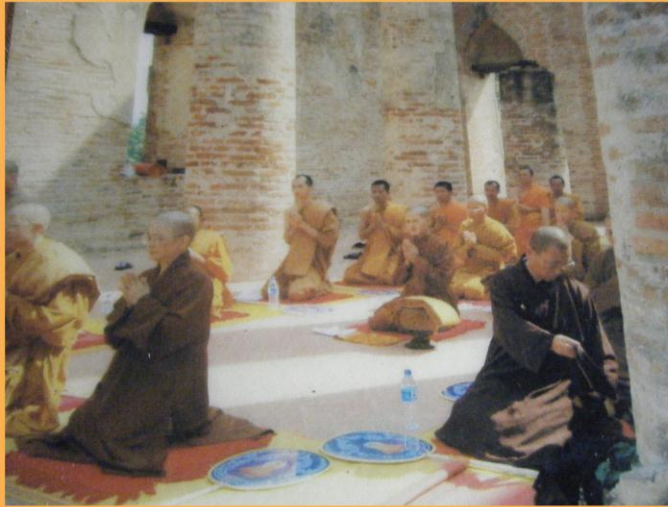
Bhikkhunis in Thailand

Bhikkhuni Dhammananda, Ph.D.

- Born Chatsumarn Kabilsingh in Thailand.
- **Received full bhikkhuni ordination in 2003 in Sri Lanka.**
- Professor of Buddhist philosophy and is currently abbess of one of the growing number of temples in Thailand where there are fully ordained nuns.



Ven. Dhammananda was the first Thai woman to ordain as a Theravada bhikkhuni. Her renowned mother Venerable Voramai ordained in a Taiwanese temple when Ven. Dhammananda was ten years old.



In 2006, in a secret ceremony in the ancient ruins at Ayutthaya in Thailand, three more Thai women ordained as bhikkhunis – Bhikkhunis Rattanaivali, Dhammamitta, and Silananda.

Bhikkhunis Rattanaivali, Dhammamitta, and Silananda now have their own viharas and are well supported by lay people in their communities.



Nirotharam Bhikkhuni Monastery Chiang Mai, Thailand

Bhikkhunis Phra Ajahn Nanthayani

- Founder of the Nirotharam community
- Eminent and skilled Dhamma teacher for many years.



Bhikkhuni Ajahn Nanthayani ordained as a bhikkhuni in 2008 in Sri Lanka. She had been a highly respected maechee meditation teacher in Chiang Mai for decades before deciding to become a bhikkhuni. Many of her students ordained with her and many have since ordained as samaneris and bhikkhunis. In Thailand at this time, there are well over a hundred samaneris and bhikkhunis, scattered throughout the country, with their numbers growing yearly.

Vietnamese Women Ordaining.

2003 – At Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka, eight women ordained—five Sri Lankans, one Czech, and two from Vietnam. Ayya Dhammananda was one of the ordaining Vietnamese women.



Ayya Dhammananda at the Sakyadhita conference in Vietnam.

Ven. Dhammananda, who was herself influenced by Sri Lankan Bhikkhuni Kusuma, has been instrumental in establishing a bhikkhuni monastery in Vietnam. There are about five Vietnamese Theravada bhikkhunis.



Hamburg Congress, 2007

Bhikkhunis and bhikshunis ordained earlier help
to mentor and ordain new bhikkhunis.

Picture taken at Hamburg Congress in 2007. Leading Buddhist monastics met to discuss the history and legitimacy of the ordination of women. Left to right: Burmese Bhikkhuni Ven. Gunasari (retired physician); American Ven. Sobhana from Bhavana Society; British-born Ven. Tenzin Palmo (Cave in the Snow); American Ayya Tathaaloka, abbess of Dhammadharini; Ven. Dhammananda, first Thai bhikkhuni, renowned scholar.

Bhikshuni
Tenzin Palmo
hugs a Thai
maechee while
teaching at
Wat Suan Mokh,
Thailand, 2007



"Every now and then, when she senses anguish or a need for solace, Tenzin Palmo approaches one of the women she's chatting with and gives them a bear hug. This motherly embrace is the manifestation of kalayanamitta (true friendship)."

"That's why you need a female monk," she says after hugging a woman in tears. "Because [male] monks can't do that."

Bhikshuni Tenzin Palmo, who follows Tibetan tradition, traveled to Thailand to teach nuns there.

Rocking the Boat

- 2009 – With Ayya Tathaaloka as preceptor and Ajahn Brahm as certifying acariya, four samaneras were ordained as bhikkhunis at Bodhinyana Monastery in Serpentine, Australia.
- Ajahn Brahm was then “delisted” from the Ajahn Chah lineage.



Ajahn Brahm and other monks

Sisters Vayama, Nirodha, Seri, and Hassapanna, were ordained as bhikkhunis at Bodhinyana Monastery in Serpentine, Australia. Since Ajahn Brahm was in the Ajahn Chah lineage, which does not allow full ordination for women, Ajahn Brahm was ordered to Wat Pah Pong in Thailand. He was asked to recant and declare the ceremony was invalid and that these women were not bhikkhunis. He refused and he and his monastery were “delisted” from that lineage.

American Bhikkhuni Sangha

June 21, 2008 at
Dharma Creek (Aranya
Bodhi) Anagarika
Suvijjana accepted the
ordination vows of a
novice , her
upajjaya Ayya
Tathaaloka, presiding.



2005 - Foundation of the North American Bhikkhuni Association, first Theravada bhikkhunis established outside of Asia. American women have gradually been ordaining as samaneris and bhikkhunis over the last 10 to 15 years. In 2008 the ordination of a female novice into the Theravada Bhikkhuni Sangha took place at Dharma Creek on summer solstice. Anagarika Suvijjana accepted the ordination vows of a novice with her upajjaya Ayya Tathaaloka, the Abbess of Dhammadharini Vihara, presiding.

Growth of the North American Bhikkhuni Sangha



There will be about twenty bhikkhunis in North America by the fall of 2011. In addition, dozens of women are now samaneris, anagarikas, or are aspirants, exploring when, where, and how to ordain.

In 2008, Venerable Madika was ordained in a dual platform ceremony in North Carolina. In the picture above, ordaining Ajahn Thanasanti is offering flowers.

August 2010 Bhikkhuni Ordination at Aranya Bodhi Hermitage California



On August 29, 2010 four novice women became bhikkhunis during an historic dual sangha ordination (bhikkhunis and bhikkhus) at Aranya Bodhi Hermitage in Sonoma County, California.

With Ayya Tathaaloka serving as preceptor, four samaneri were ordained as bhikkhunis: Ven. Thanasanti Bhikkhuni (United States), Ven. Adhimutta Bhikkhuni (New Zealand), Ven. Suvijjana Bhikkhuni (United States), and Ven. Phalanani Bhikkhuni (Germany) were ordained as bhikkhunis (fully ordained nuns) in the Theravada Buddhist tradition.

After being ordained by the Bhikkhuni Sangha on one side, the bhikkhunis then went over to the assembled Bhikkhu Sangha for the confirmation of their ordination, which completed the bhikkhuni ordination.

October 2010 Bhikkhuni Ordinations at Dharma Vijaya in Los Angeles



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

Upcoming Ordinations

- Oct. 17, 2011 at Spirit Rock Meditation Center, with Venerable Bhikkhuni Tathaaloka Theri as Preceptor, three more samaneris will be ordained as bhikkhunis:
 - Ajahns Anandabodhi and Santacitta of Aloka Vihara, San Francisco, California.
 - Samaneri Nimmala of Sati Saraniya Hermitage, Ontario, Canada.

Ajahns Anandabodhi and Santacitta of Aloka Vihara, San Francisco travelled to the UK in April 2011 to formally take leave of the Ajahn Chah lineage which does not allow women to fully ordain as bhikkhunis. Samaneri Nimmala has been training with Canada's Bhikkhuni Medhananadi.

Bhikkhunis Worldwide!

- There are now bhikkhunis in the U.S., India, Italy, Germany, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.



Alliance for Bhikkhunis



- Alliance for Bhikkhunis (AFB) was founded in 2007 to support the creation of a Bhikkhuni Sangha in the U.S. and its revival overseas.
- AFB acts as a clearinghouse for information on all things bhikkhuni.
- AFB educates lay practitioners about the essential role bhikkhunis play in preserving the Dhamma.
- AFB offers financial assistance to monastics.

Bhikkhunis near Joshua Tree National Park, Mohave Desert, Southern California, USA

Some of the Projects
Alliance for Bhikkhunis
Has Supported and
Hopes to Support

Health Insurance and Medicine

- Paid for bhikkhunis' medical and dental care.

- Paid insurance premiums for some bhikkhunis with no health insurance.



According to Ayya Tathaaloka: Several women who thought about 'going forth' had to reconsider when confronted with the fact that there were not funds for health care coverage. She has also not been able to accept other women from other countries who are bhikkhuni candidates as they cannot provide health coverage. They have joked that they are only able to accept women who are 'DNR' 'Do Not Resuscitate'! The Dhammadharini Board does not want to accept any new candidates under these conditions.

Ayya T's Note: my health insurance is probably lowest now -- my catastrophe insurance (\$5000 deductible) has just increased from \$165 to \$195 per month -- the cost has increased 300% in the past 4 years!

Helped Support Bhikkhuni Centers in Thailand



International Women's Meditation Center, Rayong, Thailand

Helped support bhikkhuni centers in Thailand. The land and two buildings were donated by a Thai-American woman. Planning and construction are currently underway. The Bhikkhunis opened the Center for individual and group meditation practice in September of 2009.

Contributed to a “new
used” kitchen trailer
for Aranya Bodhi
Monastery in
Northern California.



Meditation/ Living Cottages (Kutis)



The Alliance for Bhikkhunis supports bhikkhuni monasteries. Moneys have been sent to bhikkhuni monasteries in Sri Lanka, Thailand, and the U.S.

Helping with Technology



Following the practices of “Engaged Buddhism,” one of the goals of the Thai bhikkhunis is to help educate and empower women. Alliance for Bhikkhunis has paid for computers and related expenses to facilitate bhikkhunis networking and pursuit of education.

Assist in Travel to Conferences, Retreats, and Travel for Vassa



Bhikshunis chanting at Sakyadhita conference in Bangkok, Thailand 2011. The Alliance for Bhikkhunis (AfB) contributed to transportation and conference costs so bhikkhunis could attend this international meeting. The AfB also pays for travel so bhikkhunis can come together during Vassa and attend retreats.

Inform and Connect

Alliance for Bhikkhunis, through its online magazine Present and its digital Library, provides information on bhikkhuni news, activities, challenges, achievements and history. Through its Facebook page, it creates a virtual community.



So much of the work of the Alliance for Bhikkhunis is the dispelling of misconceptions about bhikkhunis and their history, and the empowering of women through a recovery of their spiritual legacy and education about the attainments and achievements of past and current bhikkhunis. Vital to these tasks is the additional activity of educating lay practitioners about why it is essential to have women monastics in the modern world.



International Bhikkhuni Day

Alliance for Bhikkhunis' Annual International Bhikkhuni Day is a critical component of AfB's mission to honor and celebrate bhikkhuni history. This annual event is one of the primary ways the AfB protects the inspiring stories of women monastics as well as enlightened laywomen.



Alliance for Bhikkhunis

Protecting bhikkhunis, we protect ourselves and future generations.

From Ayya Tathaaloka: Despite this being an age of rampant materialism, as we transition into the new age, there are increasing numbers of women who incline to renunciation. With the opening of even rudimentary opportunity, increasing numbers of women who have had aspiration have had the hope and the courage they needed to go forth. The benefits to the individuals to have such opportunity is incalculable. The benefit to a society to have populations of persons completely dedicated to peacefulness, non-harmfulness, and a simple (not-highly consumptive), sustainable way of life -- and who offer the benefits of the Buddha's teaching to all at no charge -- is also incalculable, making our world and qualitatively a kinder, safer, gentler and more peaceful and wise place to live.

I never mourned for the loss of my comfort (after ordaining), because I learned you can also do without. That was a really important learning process, a letting go of outer conditions. And that brought a great deal of *inner freedom*; it lifted me up to a level where the spiritual aspect of life had priority.

Ayya Khema



Let us know if you wish to subscribe to our free on-line magazine which has articles by bhikkhunis and lay practitioners as well. Our site www.bhikkhuni.net also has a library of articles from prominent Buddhist voices, such as Bhikkhu Bodhi, Bhikkhuni Kusuma, Ven. Analayo, and Bhante Sujato. Susan Pembroke chose this picture because what she recalls about Ayya Khema was her near continuous expression of amusement and her wonderful and frequent laugh.