

Comments from Published Public Dialogues

for delivery to the Abbots at the

World Abbots Meeting

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Thailand

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Dear Venerable Elders and Venerable Ajahns,

Please find herewith a selection of comments from published public dialogues, as made by members of the worldwide Buddhist community in consideration of recent events surrounding Bhikkhuni ordination and the placement of nuns in the Thai Forest tradition.

Although the comments were not made anonymously, we present them as such and appeal for your understanding regarding the impractical task of individually contacting the volume of authors represented within to request permission to republish their names.

Respectfully and with metta,

The Petition Organisers

- “It wasn’t until recent times, until after I had spent over twenty years as a ten precept nun, that bhikkhuni ordination... became feasible. Women have had enough faith and fortitude to survive on the fringes of the sangha for generations. They did not need further assistance to do just that. What they did need though was for the monks (as the ones who hold the legal authority), to realise the opportunity they have in the contemporary world, to transform the situation and again open up full membership of the sangha to the other half of the Buddha’s disciples.

I am humbly grateful to [the Venerable bhikkhus] for acting with wisdom and compassion to courageously use their authority for the benefit of countless beings. I bow with respect and gratitude to [all of the] other bhikkhunis who took part in the ordination ceremony out of faith and kindness, and at some disadvantage to themselves.

I feel appreciation and gratitude for the support and encouragement of our lay friends. We couldn’t have done it without your help either. May you all share in my happiness.”

- “There is still the reverberation of the triple request to both the bhikkhuni and bhikkhu sangha requesting higher ordination:

May the sangha raise me up out of compassion: and both sanghas present did.

How to express the change, the gratitude, joy, deep peace, depth and support, the blessings felt, ever since then! Truly feeling fully ordained, uplifted. ‘Endowed with the complete set of training.’

‘Bhikkhuni’ is not felt as a title in itself, but as a total and complete commitment and responsibility, a spiritual being. When factors are fulfilled, so are the outcomes.”

- “I am a Thai man, and I support Bhikkhuni ordination simply because ordination is the best way that accommodates our efforts to get on the ‘path’. That the bhikkhunis are not present in the Thai Theravadan tradition seems not a good reason for rejecting bhikkhuni ordination. (This is the reason a monk gave to me when I telephoned WPP– this information could be wrong as I did not have an opportunity to talk to Ajahn Liem himself.) I am happy to support bhikkhunis based on the Vinaya Lord Buddha himself laid down. May Ajahn Chah’s lineage remain true to Lord Buddha’s teachings.”

- “I have been disturbed that the Western Ajahns brought the cultural inferiority of women with them from Thailand along with the Dhamma. As someone who has been providing financial support to Western monasteries in two countries, I [anxiously] await for a statement [from the Elders] supporting bhikkuni ordination. Now that the issue is out in the open, I do not know if I can continue financial support without a full commitment to the other half of the Sangha.”

- “Ultimately the reaction to this situation is producing precisely what is needed: an energizing of the lay community and mobilization of support for the Bhikkhunis.”

- “My impression on meeting Ajahn Chah in both the UK and Thailand in the late 1970’s was that he seemed more concerned with transmission of dharma than convention. It’s only speculation, but I would like to think he would view this decision to ‘expel’ a part of his samvasa as a mistake.”

- “In Buddhism there is no hierarchy; no chain of command. So how can anyone expel an Ajahn? That doesn’t make any sense. Buddha has specifically declared that after him, his teachings -- the Damma -- will be the leader. In my view those who supported the Bhikkhuni ordination are the exemplary ones who practice Damma, in the true Theravada tradition, as true Buddha sāvaka.”

- “Buddha started the Bhikkhuni Ordination. Due to the views of some members of “sangha”, the bhikkhuni sasana was diluted in Theravada countries. It is high time that someone stood up, corrected that injustice and reintroduced the proper bhikkhuni sasana. It had to start with one Ajhan. All we can do is to send metta to those monks who appear to have failed to understand the essence of the Buddha’s teachings. May they all attain Nibbana, one day.”

- “We all have views on every matter. The key is what makes us attach to this view or the other. This issue needs to be dealt with using compassion and non-attachment. Sadly clinging to tradition without wisdom is attachment to views. We all need to cultivate wisdom and let go of self.”

- “It takes courage to go against popular beliefs. If Buddha did not go against the popularly held views in ancient India, if he did not go against those cast and gender based societies, where would civilisation be today?”

- “I fully support the Venerable Ajahns and bhikkhunis who have bravely taken the step in strengthening the Dhamma in the West. As lay people, we are most fortunate [to benefit] from [the teachings and perspectives] of women [who are] given the opportunity to practice as equally as monks.”

- “I am no expert or authority in Buddhism. But I do know that the Buddha taught a way of life 2600 years ago. The word ‘Buddhism’ did not even exist then. It was coined by the British subsequently. So why the stickiness over Thai tradition, forest tradition, and Ajahn Chah’s tradition? They are but names and branding.”

- “What is important is that the ordination of nuns benefits the whole community. I do not find anything unwholesome or harmful over it. Support for ordination was given out of compassion and loving-kindness. It saddens me that the good and wholesome intention has resulted in such an outcome.”

- “So do not be bothered by whether one Ajahn and his monastery are in WPP or not. It doesn’t matter. What is most important is that we continue to support this Ajahn, his disciples, his monastery and the good and wonderful work he is doing. Politics exist everywhere. The Elders are no exception.”

- “I am Asian and I support the wonderful work to revive the Bhikkhuni order. It is not an issue of East vs. West or clash of cultures. It is all about being true to Dhamma, compassion, and loving-kindness.”

- “May we celebrate the dialogue that all of this has generated. What a quiet little community we were before all of this. May we now embrace a little dose of real spiritual growth (as a community). Change requires dialogue; conflict is that tight corner where we get to do the work that leads to awakening. “Airing the dirty laundry” is observing reality as it is. Why shouldn’t there be dirty laundry in this community as in others? We have great power as a community to forgive. If there are weaknesses in processes, and they come to light, we get to build a stronger Sangha.

If there are decisions made based on lack of clear seeing, and they have come to light, let us debate and challenge one another. If there is a misguided undercurrent that is generating decisions that block women or other Dhamma Friends from voicing their concerns or practicing fully, then let those undercurrents come to light and let us and our beloved monastic community begin addressing them. If there are obstacles in the hearts of certain monks nuns and laypersons to encouraging all beings fully towards Nibbana then let these obstacles be removed.

It does seem that [the Western monks] expulsion from WPPS is entirely invalid. This is my hope and I believe it to be entirely possible to revoke it. Although I am not attached to the outcome, it could help to restore my faith in the dignity of the lineage. I propose the circumstances and processes around the expulsion to be separate issues from the ordination issue.”

- “These events stir strong feelings. I feel shattered by them. I cannot believe that this is happening in Buddhism. It reminds me of all that I dislike about the Catholic church. The Dhamma is what should interest everyone, not politics.”

- “I should also look at my tendency to take a side here: ‘I am on the right side and “they” are on the wrong side’. Views like that can only be wrong. Yet I am aware I have that view. In fact that is what leads to my disappointment with those who I counted as being on “my side” previously.” It also shows that I cannot look to others for a refuge. How can there be any refuge but myself? I would like to extend what moral support I can to Ajahn Brahm and the now independent Perth sangha. All this will pass as all things do – including the churning I can feel in my stomach as I write.”

- “It is unfortunate if kilesas have arisen in this debate and important to reflect on the common goals and aspirations we cherish in training to purify our own minds. It is a remarkable development that bhikkunis have been ordained in Western Australia and consequences have flowed from this decision. May the changes that have transpired contribute to the longevity of the sasana and give women the opportunity to whole heartedly devote themselves to the holy life, attaining to the fruits of the path for the benefit of the many.”

- “Words cannot express how appalled I am [at the] lack of wisdom, compassion and regard for the Buddha’s teaching which is being directed at [some Western monks] from senior monks overseas who should know better. Thank you the Ajahns whose courage and determination has led not only to the ordination of 4 bikkhunis, but to the re-examination of my own response to the call of the Dhamma.

As a lay Buddhist who read her first Dhamma book 53 years ago, I’m not bothered about WPP throwing out Ajahns, monasteries or any of us: I will still sit myself down, meditate daily and practice in my own humble way. I cannot count how many times I’ve read and heard the expression ‘the future of Buddhism lies in the West’ in all these years. Perhaps we are seeing the beginning of a new and more enlightened path, unencumbered by those who act in secrecy, seek to hold on to power, and will not listen to reason. As for me, I’m glad I’m still here to begin this journey. I’ve waited a long time for this.”

- “Shouldn’t the WPP rise above forms and social constraints of Thailand? Ajahn’s Mun and Chah were well known for going against the grain of their society, weren’t they? I thought cutting through social man-made constraints is one major aspect of renouncing and embracing the Holy life! In fact I see that message pervading across many teachings of not just (those involved in the bhikkhuini ordinations), but also that of a few other Senior Ajahns.”

- “This situation is a reminder to us lay practitioners that we have a responsibility to protect the Dhamma as well. If we do not hold erring monastics accountable, we collude and strengthen their unskilful behavior. I support a boycott of monasteries that continue to oppose bhikkhuni ordination. I do so out of love and compassion. As a lay person, I have only cursory knowledge of the Vinaya. One of the things I have come to understand, though, in reading the Patimokkha is that if we see someone doing something wrong and we do not bring this to their attention, then we share culpability if they continue to act in harmful ways.”

- “Free from being shackled to the WPP, the rest of the sangha could develop Buddhism appropriate for all the different cultural heritages. To me it’s apparent that the Thai Forest Ajahns compartmentalize themselves, identifying with their own view strongly and in most cases believing that their particular view is superior. Do we really need to follow that? When the Buddha was alive there was only one vehicle, the Buddhayana way and the rest came after he passed away. So we all – bhikkhuni, bhikkhunis and laity – should practise the Buddhayana way.”

- “The idea that a woman should strive hard to be reborn in the next life as a man first, before being able to ordain, is not the teaching of the Buddha. The Buddha himself ordained woman in this very life. That is why there was a four-fold sangha, with the bhikkhuni sangha included. The Buddha didn’t tell women to wait until their next life as a man.”

- “Why the need to identify with being Asian or Caucasian, Eastern or Western, or male vs female? Can we not learn to go beyond such superficial distinctions already, and instead follow the teaching of the Buddha, who made no such distinctions and who ordained both bhikkhunis and bhikkhus?”

- “Thanks to the Ajahns for their courage in bringing four new bhikkhunis into the sangha. We are blessed. I know this schism will pass and that we will have even more bhikkhunis.”

- “May I humbly suggest that instead of seeing who is right and wrong, wise or not wise, or who is good and bad, can we all stand together in unity – sangha as a whole. Forget about the Ajahn Chan lineage or other lineages and take this as a lesson for us all [to] come together [to] discuss and work out a plan to revive the Theravada bhikkhuni order.

Let this be a glorious event for everyone in sangha! It does not have to be the glory of any one person or monastery. No one person will truly be able to claim credit for this event other than the Buddha himself, who set up [Bhikkhuni ordination] in the first place. What the sangha could do is work together to revive this tradition and rejoice in the glory as one. In this way, we are merely putting back what our original teacher wanted and would have done. That’s all, nothing more.”

- “When they are talking about the backwardness of treating women unequally, it is about the backwardness of the situation and the Elders, not the backwardness of Asians. I am an Asian myself, and can say there is no reason for [gender oppression]. Do not become too identified with being Asian, and get offensive thinking people mean to say that Asians are backward. This is an unsubstantial assumption.”

- “It has always saddened me when other belief systems discriminate against women. But it really breaks my heart when Buddhists squabble or fall out over this issue. Buddhism will always evolve and we should treat our brothers in Thailand with compassion for their misguided actions, because they are in the minority. No one person or view is bigger than Buddhism itself. In reality Buddhism will grow [as a result of reviving the Bhikkhuni order], and all Ajahns and lay teachers who support it --including those from other lineages – are the ones who will guide us toward our goal of enlightenment.”

- “Shocking! I never suspected this from a Buddhist country, and from monks who have practiced for years. What have they been meditating on -- what atrocities to commit against women? How many different ways to oppress them? This is not Buddhism. This is anti-womenism.”

- “History has revealed that women have been suppressed and deprived of opportunities in education, employment, politics and even the pursuit of spirituality. It wasn’t that long ago when women were not given the opportunity for higher education or even allowed to vote. Today, much has changed and significant progress has been witnessed over the last 30 years.

However, in the religious sphere, men have continued to use holy texts to justify discrimination against women. Given that the aim of religion is to liberate, suppression or deprivation of rights for women goes against the grain of what religion was meant to be.

Progress should not be confined to only the non-religious space, especially when the change is for the greater good. However, progress cannot happen unless we are willing to question traditions and conventions. If religion or rules are unquestionable, it poses great dangers as it can be easily manipulated to mislead and to control a segment of the community.

It is also important to understand the psychological motivation of discriminatory practices. As discrimination is often born out of insecurity and egoism, we need to consider how men need to be assisted to develop greater confidence so that women under their influence will be treated with greater respect and be given fairer consideration.”

- “The burden of proof does not lie with those in support of gender equity. The Hamburg Congress was a good illustration of this. A more rounded, complete and compelling set of arguments in support of bhikkhuni ordination you won’t find. Yet the final summation was “more research needed to convince the narrow-minded geshes”. No, there has been enough research. Centuries of it, in fact.

The burden of proof lies with those who are caught in resistance to equity. The lens of enquiry needs to be turned inward by those who block the healthy evolution of the 4-fold sangha. Let’s not wear ourselves out furnishing comprehensive and clear responses to all the unreasonable excuses that hinder women’s access to a valid place within Buddhism. Let’s hold up the mirror to those who make the excuses. What do they see? What do they need?”

- “The Thai Forest tradition needs find the truth of Dhamma — teachings of Buddha— as a pointer. Didn’t Buddha do the same thing? Didn’t he say “I only teach suffering and the ending of it?” Tradition rooted in dogma only increases suffering.”

- “I hope that sooner or later, the Venerable sangha at WPP and other places who do not support bhikkhuni ordination will appreciate the need for gender equality and agree to uphold the truth of the Dhamma. I am confident that this event will open up the path ahead for many more deserving nuns round the world. Metta to all, including the Venerable sangha at WPP.”

- “Equality of women is the main issue that could potentially catalyze the formation of truly unified and ‘mainstream’ western sangha—as we westerners generally hold gender equality as a basic assumption, in contrast to our eastern brothers and sisters. Our task may ultimately be to form something new and uniquely western – not Thai Forest, nor Mahasi, nor Sri Lankan... nor whatever.

To outgrow our ‘Asian parents’ and find our own way in the world –without sacrificing either the strength and purity of the teachings. To create monasteries where western men and women can live and train regardless of their practice roots, while holding a pure, congruent, and egalitarian Vinaya. Where people are welcomed based purely on Dhammavinaya, not on cultural lineage—or gender.”

- “Let this be a beginning of a new chapter. By the way, the only authority on Buddhism is the Buddha, and he supported Bhikkhuni ordination! Unfortunately office-politics are everywhere, even in Theravadan Buddhism. Good on all parties involved with the Bhikkhuni ordination!

- “I hope we all can learn from the recent events, look at the issues at hand, work out the issues supporting the need for Bhikkhuni ordination, and what real issues are stopping the reviving of it. Then we can all work out a plan to revive the tradition [as] a harmonious, joyous and united whole, supporting the Triple Gem – Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. This is important for everyone affected by this.”

- “Congratulations to [all involved] for providing opportunities to women that has been long overdue. Even saying ‘providing’ for women in this day and age seems so ludicrous. As a species we have not understood the meaning of mutual respect for the other gender.

The reactions of monks, even the Western ones, is very unfortunate. The support they have received from the lay community for many years has been misplaced. Now it’s our turn to ask: what have they accomplished? They don’t even seem to have [cultivated] compassion and wisdom.

The Five Point document is ridiculous. I would expect something like that from the mullahs of the Middle East -- not from Buddhists. Well, my support for them stops today. I can forgive them for their ignorance. I cannot support woman haters. What type of “enlightenment” are they working towards?”

- “In my humble opinion, the main root of this problem is so trivial that it is sad to accept: that ‘we’ divide Buddhism into different sects and traditions due to our attachment to self and the resulting self-importance.... and thus it’s the division ‘we’ have created that has made it impossible in ‘our’ standpoint to have Theravada bhikkhunis again. If only all of us (especially Theravada male monks) regarded Buddhists as just Buddhists, then we would not be in this sad situation.”

- “One of the best things to come from this situation (apart from four Theravadan nuns being able to take full ordination) is that it opens discussion to the ongoing issue of discrimination against women in various Buddhist traditions.”

- “We could formalize the relationship of the different schools and sanghas by not debating the issue of whether Buddhism is a religion anymore, and uniting instead under one flag of Buddhism. Our women could be ordained without issue and we could promote the causes unique to our culture. However, we can’t do this unless we start agreeing on what Buddhism is. If Buddhism is indeed the word of the Buddha, then Bhikkhuni ordination is just one [more component] in a normal, healthy sangha.”

- “My thanks to [all those involved in the Bhikkhuni ordination] for opening a new vista of possibilities on how to approach our spiritual practice with intelligence and responsibility. The path [forward] is not simply something that is ‘given’ or ‘handed down’; we have to find it, re-find when lost, and keep opening and shaping for ourselves and others as we trade it – in our hearts, as well as in society.

This cannot be done without questioning and engaging, both intellectually and emotionally. This is unsettling, and seems to be going against the peace and harmony and reassurance that we often seek, and even demand, from monasticism, Buddhism [and] meditation. Learning from experience isn’t comfortable, but it is liberating, and what else can we do? [It is not acceptable to allow] Buddhism to be crushed to death by institutions, rather [we must work to help it] to bloom with its potential for growth, aspiration, freedom and goodness for all beings.”

- “I’ve been connected to the Thai Forest Sangha for about 16 years, lived in monasteries in the UK and Italy, and known and experienced many of the blessings, troubles and struggles people voiced [about this issue]. I think one of the big problems is when groups, traditions and communities become self-preserving and self-celebrating, they turn a blind eye to the power they have to create pain or well-being, and regression or mental growth, through their own collective thought and choices.

I [feel that] the ‘proper channels’ for reform are not just ‘there’: they, in fact, are being created through our intentions. To stick with group loyalty and reverence to the masters is an intention, and as such leads to [questionable] results. But whether good or bad for the whole community, we can evaluate for ourselves. Democracies have their own rules, forums and procedures for developing rules.

The Vinaya might have been intended to provide a similar structure for the sangha, but a strictly legalistic approach cannot address or solve all problems. In Italy we have just seen how the whole process can be thwarted when a government makes rules for its own sake and preservation, while ‘democratically’ basing its dubious authority on the majority that supported it in the first place, dismissing all opposition as ‘subversive attack’.

We are all connected, so any steps toward bhikkhuni ordination will be for the benefit of all.”

- “I don’t believe it’s all ‘done and dusted’ now and time to sweep everything under the carpet. Important issues have been brought to the public domain and continued dialogue is what will make this constructive and beneficial for the future of our precious four-fold sangha. The time to “move on” from this issue is when nuns from all traditions and countries are recognised as such and are no longer facing repression or excluded from higher ordination.”

- “It looks as if the emergence of bhikkhunis in the inner chambers is presenting the Thai school with a supreme spiritual test. The big question is whether those who cling tightly to archaic and oppressive forms will cause it to perish and provide the scattered material of new forms, or whether, by adapting to the current of the times and bringing to manifestation the deep truth and universal message of its indwelling spirit, it will emerge rejuvenated and changed for a fresh term of existence.

It seems as if the English Sangha Ajahns and their colleagues are pushing it along the former route -- to their own ultimate detriment -- while the monastics in [the West] have courageously chosen the second alternative. Only time will tell which one will triumph, but let us hope it will be the form that displays the greatest acceptance, equity, warmth, kindness, and compassion.”

- “It’s been 25+ years since ball started to roll in 1979 in Chithurst, with anagarika ordination and subsequently the ten-precept ordination in 1983. This was of course, a good thing. But since then but no official progress towards moving on to full bhikkhuni ordination has occurred. This is a bad thing.

Progress has stalled at the same stage as that of Thailand. How many more decades does this need to move on? If the hierarchy of WPP is concerned about nun’s official progress, which they surely need to be, things would and should have moved at a much faster rate. It does not take [much] to realise the hierarchy of WPP does not want this. Either that or they [cannot] move forward in this regard because the Thai hierarchy does not want it. So someone has to give.

This is definitely a difficult situation. [The analogy I draw is that it was also] very important for Prince Siddharta to stay with his new-born baby, wife and extended family. But it was even more important [for him] to move on and renounce the lay life for the greater good of the rest of the world. This is also exactly what [a couple of Western] monks have done.”

- “I wonder if these legal arguments are not somehow missing the point... As I see it, fundamentally the Thai sangha is opposed to women ordaining. Even if there is not a lot of “support” for ordaining women among the older Ajahns, certainly there is a lot of support everywhere else. Most likely this is a reflection of Thai cultural values, which are basically sexist more than anything else. To support this viewpoint various misrepresentations of the Vinaya and misapplications of Thai law have been employed; sadly [this is] accepted by many in Thailand.”

- “I am really saddened by all this [fall out], but at the same time I rejoice that a bhikkhuni ordination has been performed in the West – may there be many others!”

- “With the response from the [Forest Sangha website], it is clear that we are not in harmony -- more like harMONEY.”

- “This situation is one of greatest concern to me, and has shaken my previous understanding that the worldwide lineage of a wise and accomplished teacher such as Venerable Ajahn Chah should be deserving of generous support simply because it is practicing in that lineage.

My new understanding is that I should be more wise with my lay support of monastics. I will ask them their views, for I now know they hold very fixed views and wield them strongly. And, I will not provide dana to monastics who prevent others from practicing as they do, just because they are women. I will not support a sangha that doesn't support bhikkhunis.”

- “When a person gains inspiration in the Dhamma and wishes to live the renunciate holy life, it's relatively simple. They don't need the approval of all sangha members within a “lineage” or “tradition”, or only after decades of debates and international conferences. There is too much reliance in the Thai Forest Sangha on Achariya-vada – what one's teacher, or their teachers said, rather than clear-headed, non-biased, investigation of the authentic Buddhavacana. Anyway, even if they we're relying on the teachings of Ajahn Chah, I can only think that he would have supported Bhikkhuni ordination.”

- “[The] decision to proceed with the bhikkhuni ordination and the subsequent decision to refuse to declare the ordination was invalid were courageous and correct decisions. I wholly support these actions.”

- “Opposing these attitudes [of the oppression of women and nuns] with reasoned argument cannot really work because the basic premise of the Elders, that women are inferior to men, is not reasonable in a modern world. Until Thai culture shifts it is hard to see this premise changing in the WPP sangha.

The Thai-educated western Ajahns unfortunately feel compelled to support this unreasonable position, even if their private view differs. This is mainly, I think, out of ‘respect’ for their Thai teachers (translated as submission to the Thai authority) and a desire to remain part of what is admittedly a very great and valuable community. These Western Ajahns then have to rationalise this position with legalese and cultural trappings and appeals to “proper” process. But the fundamental injustice toward women seems again to take secondary place. The proof is not in what people say, but what they do.”

- “In my opinion, since both the bhikkus and the bhikkunis have transcended gender, there should be no problem being in one sangha instead of splitting into [separate] sanghas or lineages. I welcome bhikkunis into the Buddhist community to contribute to the welfare of all beings [and to] propagate the Buddha-Dhamma to the world. I appreciate both the sacrifices and struggle of the four-fold sangha (bhikkus & bhikkunis, male and females novices and preceptors) for the benefit of all.”

- “The theme of bhikkuni ordination is just one of the themes that is opening up on the horizon of Buddhism in the West. As a young monk for some 13 years in Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh’s sangha, I have been in touch with many challenges and a fair number of my elder and younger brothers have left or disrobed.

I fully support women receiving the full ordination; this for us in [my monastery] a yearly and normal occurrence and [our abbot] has done much to support the nun’s sangha. Every year we perform a ceremony in which the whole monk sangha prostrates to the nuns (including our abbot) and vice-versa, while we recite a beautiful text honouring our mutual aspirations. This would never happen in Vietnam, or other Buddhist countries. I wholeheartedly support bhikkuni ordination and all Ajahns who support it.”

- “Those calling for a softer approach are really demanding that others not upset the status quo of long-held cultural sexism, not to cause waves, and to idly let women suffer the brunt of inequality in spiritual life.”

- “It's strange how some monks resort to the most convoluted legalistic arguments to prevent women from taking ordination. And then, to add insult to injury, they declare that strict adherence to their own inferential and extrapolated legal minutia is the way to nurture "the qualities of the heart."

To use a Christian analogue, this would be as if Jesus came and said, "Yes, the adulteress broke the commandment and must be stoned. That is how we should show love to our fellow humans."

Can anyone explain how Buddhism came to be locked into such a tight net of legalistic forms? Most of us were attracted to the Dhamma because of its reasonableness, spirit of kindness, and relative freedom from the legalistic superstitions that haunt Western monotheism. Yet now we are treated to virtually the same thing, all in the name of "pure Buddha-dhamma." I [know] the Vinaya is [critical], but as a system of self-discipline and communal regulation -- not as a way of shackling one's hands and closing one's heart."

- “The Buddha himself was a radical reformist in his day, setting aside the barriers of caste and gender (with a little push from Ananda!) as requirements for sangha. As best I can see, this is only a ‘Buddhist’ issue insofar as a Buddhist tradition has allowed cultural bigotry to override the teachings of the Buddha.”

- “The difference between following Vinyaya set forth by the Buddha, following blatant sexual discrimination set forth by a small group of Thai elders, is a distinction that needed to be made known to the general public. I am happy that this issue is finally being discussed openly.”

- People have been trying the ‘softly softly’ approach for decades and all that seems to have done is to give the big “thumbs up” to a Buddhist “old boys club” mentality. I have nothing but heart-felt appreciation and admiration for bhikkhuni ordination and for the Ajahns who support it. Those who don;t are already being left behind in history.”

- “I just got off the phone with a dear friend who’s a monk at a WPP branch monastery in Thailand. He is a very avid bhikkhuni supporter, and was even at the June 2009 meeting/conference at WPP. For many of us, the current hard feelings are difficult to witness. I don’t like seeing monks disparaging each other as they are. That said, I’m glad that the decision to ordain the bhikkhunis was taken and acted upon. It’s forced a discussion that would [otherwise] have never happened. As my friend mentioned to me, it’s important that this discussion continue—and this is why we ultimately must be sure not to turn our backs on each other.”

- “The bhikkhunis have been ordained. The WPP Ajahns may have over-reacted, but so what? It seems to me that the whole “split” has been exaggerated. To the extent that it is possible, I think an emphasis on harmony and reconciliation would be quite useful at this point. I still think there are bhikkhus (and laymen) who are sitting on the fence or who may seem aligned to the “anti-bhikkhuni abbotts” but can be won over through persuasion and demonstrating compassionate, moderate, restrained and conciliatory behaviour at this point.”

- “As an [Western] Buddhist woman, I [am] limitlessly heartened to know that Thai Theravadan Buddhism is evolving to a new form, bringing it in line with the Buddha’s teachings and giving to women the possibility to take the same advantage of this precious human birth as men have given themselves for numbers of years.

To know that the reaction to it by some Western Ajahns has been so extreme and condemning is very confusing, disheartening, shocking and distasteful. Their strain of Buddhism is not mine, and I will be removing their teachings from my bookshelves and audio devices. This cloud of delusion from these leaders has no place in my practice of Buddhism.”

- “It’s so hard to understand the positions and views being wielded by the Elders. I’m absolutely disappointed in them.”

- “What is more important? Sticking to one’s [views], or helping to reinstate the four-fold sangha and bhikkhuni ordination? With the subsequent excommunication of [one of its own], this raises doubts in people’s minds about the integrity of Elders. I have yet to see a plausible reason as to why the [Thai Forest sangha] has gone ahead with bhikkhuni ordination so far. When people see a mismatch between what a teacher preaches and what he/she does, it is very disappointing, confusing and heart-breaking. My heart isn’t in supporting the hierarchy of the Thai Forest sangha any longer. Tell me, why should it be?”

- “I thank all those involved in the Bhikkhuni ordination for their resolve and faith in the true teachings of the Buddha. It is these teachings – not the politics – that are of worth to me and all beings.”

- “The Buddha was ahead of his time. He did not shy away from going against the social norm [in his own] time. Society lived by the caste system and judged people according to the type of family they were born into. The Buddha said that whether someone is a Brahmin or not shouldn’t be determined by which family they took birth in, but by their own character. He also ordained the “untouchable” caste, which [was forbidden] at the time. I totally agree with the Buddha, because people shouldn’t be excluded from spirituality because of their [birth conditions].

The way the law is in Thailand, we might have no choice but to let things change at their own pace. But I don’t know how long this would be. I am only concerned about the devout female practitioners in Thailand. They live in a Buddhist country, but can’t embark on Middle Way as intended by the Buddha, and as nuns [now can] in the West.”

- “One of the best things to come from this situation (apart from 4 Theravadan nuns being able to take full ordination) is that it opens discussion to the ongoing issue of discrimination against women in various Buddhist traditions.”

- “Good on all those [involved in the Bhikkhuni ordination] who had the courage to stand up for what they and most other people know is the right thing to do. The fact that [an Ajahn and a monastery] have been expelled from the Thai Forest tradition really does not mean a thing – it, however, does show the ‘un-Buddhist’ approach taken by those who were responsible for that decision. How can they preach to lay people about compassion, understanding, and joy with others after taking such an approach to this whole issue?”

- “In my mind there is only one question that should have been asked – ‘if the Buddha was alive today would he have had any reservations in ordaining women?’. If the WPP monks can honestly say the answer would be ‘YES, the Buddha would not have ordained women today’ then I would have had some respect for the views held by those monks.

As lay people, we are delighted and share the joy of the four nuns ordained recently and hope to see many more ordinations happening in all parts of the world.”

- “From the perspective of organisational dynamics, I might have been quite sympathetic to WPP’s actions if the exclusion/expulsion motion was initiated and passed by the majority of the monks. After all, it took many years for the monastic centre in Bangkok to even accept Ajahn Chah is a legitimate practitioner. It was a hard-won acceptance, and WPP has undoubted brand equity and market cache in the Thai monastic scene; any other organisation would succumb to the instinct to preserve that position in the Thai psyche.

I think if the collective majority of Thai monks felt that WPP is an exemplary Buddhist institution first, before it is a [political body], then there wouldn’t be blindness about the following: does the Thai Sangha Act have extra-territorial effect on overseas on its “Thai” missionaries and institutions? I thought the only international law applicable in such cases is the Dhamma-Vinaya.”

- “The Five Points... now this leaves me speechless. I now wonder if the high regard in which I’ve held [the Ajahns] for so long has been completely misplaced. It’s a sad, sad day for the lineage of Ajahn Chah.”

- “If consensus means 100% agreement with no exceptions then you will never get it. Someone will always come up with a different view or interpretation. There will always be resistance to change. The psyche favours staying put in the comfort zone; change can be upsetting and uncomfortable.

However, that does not mean one should do nothing. Injustices and inequalities should be corrected even if one encounters resistance and criticism especially from your peers. I salute the Ajahns and all the Theravada bhikkhunis for their bravery and fortitude. Buddhism in the West should free itself from the cultural baggage of other countries.”

- “The world and human civilization is evolving and changing. At any given time and age, different values and perspective arise according to the circumstances of the time and age of the society where Dharma is practised. However, the guiding principles [should] still be rooted in the spirit and motivation of the Buddha’s teaching and his life practices during his 45 years of missionary work.”

- “A recent example of reform without going through “sangha” consensus and “proper channels” is the abolition of eight conditions (atthagarudhamma) for the bhikkuni order by the more progressive schools. This, like the Theravadan Bhikkuni ordination controversy, created some stir [at first], but at the end of the day, it is a reform so pertinent to the modern era of gender equality -- and undoubtedly in the spirit and motivation of the Buddha --to treat all sentient beings without discrimination.”

- “I understand that one Ajahn had ordained trees -- yes trees -- in Thailand to protect them from loggers. I applaud this act of ecological conservation. However, I very much doubt if had the consensus of the sangha, or if it did not break any rules of the sangha council, or if it was in compliance with the Vinaya. In any case, does anyone else think it is strange that the ordination of trees is more acceptable than the ordination of women?”

- “My experience in robes was that we were constantly told that restraint from expressing [our views] the difficult issue [of gender equality] would have the best effect; one or two monks had even been heard to suggest ‘meekness’ as the appropriate mode for nuns. On the contrary, what I found was that persisting through the defences and resistances to air such matters was more effective (if uncomfortable all round).

Silence in more recent times has led to the imposition on the sisters of the 5 Points. It is easy, and lazy, to dress up resistance to dialogue as ‘noble silence’. It becomes passive-aggression, and its negative consequences ripple out. It is harder, and worthier, to develop tolerance for the discomfort that apparent conflict can bring. It is also difficult to hold a paradox such as ‘the monks I find noble are amongst those who have acted ignobly on this issue’. Yet a capacity to hold both truths and move forward in dialogue is an important developmental step.

Let’s not block – through recourse to textual aphorisms – those who are managing to take that step. The heart is not a legislated domain. Give it some space to open.”

- “I’ve read the statements on the Dhammalight website and am feeling bad. I know it is useless to think about water under the bridge, but I really can’t help wanting to know why some monks are very aggressive towards other Ajahns and women. Is it really about the Dhamma-Vinaya, or is it [about] something much more personal?”

- “I thought that this might be an appropriate teaching to consider at this time: “A great being is great because he or she is free from obstructions in the way they relate with life. We are not so great because we get caught in feelings and make a problem out of life. We create obstructions by the way that we deal with the eight worldly dhammas: praise and blame, gain and loss, pleasure and suffering, popularity and insignificance. Because of delusion we relate to these worldly winds heedlessly – indulging in what we like and resisting what we don’t like. Wisdom on the other hand simply sees the reality of the sensory world. It knows the space within which all experiences arise and cease. Such knowing means a great being doesn’t even have to try to let go; all inclination to cling automatically falls away. He or she experiences sensual pleasure but adds nothing to it and takes nothing away.”

- “As an educator, I read all this and think of Louis Althusser’s essay “Ideology and the State Apparatus.” Clearly the elders at WPP are benefitting from and clinging to Thai law on behalf of their own privilege. While this is a tried and true tactic (see Paulo Friere’s “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”), one would hope for at least a bit more enlightened action from supposed spiritual leadership.”

- “I [personally] know the seniors behind the 5 Points. Feeling strongly about women having the same rights as men to fully renounce if they so wish, I feel ashamed these days. Hearing the excommunication declared, my jaw dropped in amazement. It was a day of sorrow for me. I had hoped that the maha theras would finally come to their senses and go in the other direction [and] do the right thing. Instead they justify their fear of change with [an argument about ‘upholding the Vinaya’]. Since I live with these seniors every day I know how the talk goes...off the record. There is a genuine male chauvinist atmosphere in the vihara that I thought I wouldn’t find when I left worldly life behind. Are not my companions in the holy life supposed to have gone beyond such things? Where is the metta and karuna ...or are they mere hollow words?”

- “The Dhamma is not a static phenomena. It is constantly renewing itself. It permeates everything. If [one thinks they are] practicing the Dhamma by vehemently upholding [only] the Vinaya, afraid of any change when the world around them is changing, then they are not in touch with the living Dhamma. [If it is so], then we are in a dead tradition and our practice will be fruitless; we might as well turn our monasteries into museums and say: “This is how they practiced in the days of the Buddha, 2553 years ago. And we are preserving it here in minute detail.”

- “[As an anagarika], I have been advised not to speak about this matter. But, can I really take full ordination in this tradition, I now ask myself. Do I want to become a bhikkhu and officially represent a lineage that is so orthodox and stuck in old traditions that it can only lead to marginalization in the future? I now have to contemplate this carefully.”

- “As a [monk, nun or lay person], our only true “lineage” is the Buddha; and [it is therefore] absolutely right for us to [understand] that [our] obligations are to the Dhamma and Vinaya, and not to the Thai state. Nor are [we] bound to [the Elders] in so far as the Dhamma and Vinaya are concerned.

[The] courageous act of going ahead with the bhikkuni ordination is living and manifesting the great compassion of the Buddha, and that of our great Teacher Ajahn Chah. The compassion of liberating all beings (including women) from the unfair, unjust and uncompassionate denial to walk the same spiritual path to Nibbana, was taught by the Buddha to all sentient beings. This is our only leader, our only teacher.”

- “May the fourfold assembly thrive, regardless of those who stand in the way of women’s access to Dhamma-Vinaya. I can’t remember the Buddha ever saying that monks have a monopoly on prestige and material support from lay Buddhists. My recollection from the suttas is that the Buddha made extra effort to safeguard the livelihoods of bhikkunis, especially from the misdeeds of unscrupulous bhikkhus.”

- “That report from Elders is [confusing and disappointing]. It reminds me of closed directives from Theistic religions, or government legislation. To b that the entire world must abide by “the Thai state”, or “Thai Buddhist laws” is perhaps the greatest form delusion possible from a “Buddhist” perspective. Words like “elite” have no place in Buddhism; such [an approach] is [certainly] not in line with the Buddha’s teachings.

My wife, who is a Christian, said “This is exactly what [all the] other religions are doing. I thought your lot were smarter than that.”

Any [monk or monastery or sangha] outside of Thailand is not a Thai monk or monastery or sangha. It is irrelevant where a monk/nun was trained: it is how he/she exercises his/her training that matters. Viva the fully ordained bikkunis and all those involved in the ordination!”

- Suddenly, lot of progress [for Buddhism worldwide] was made in October 2009, and we have only to continue in this appropriate way. It’s already happening.”

- “To suggest that this issue is a “Thai Buddhist vs Western/Australian Buddhist” issue grossly oversimplifies the issue and misses the point, [just as] suggesting that the Elders are just misogynists (and to only understand their legacy through this one act) misrepresents their motives, too.”

- “I must also reflect on my own personal responsibility in colluding with this silence. We all have to. It is easy to shy away from such worldly debate sullyng the pure realms of the spiritual and for me to claim my relative silence has been an attempt to avoid adding to the potential schism; but in the end all Buddhists – and all people – are shamed by this discrimination.”

- “I remember Ayya Khema saying that, ultimately, it’s up to the women, lay and ordained, to make this work (everyone can join, but she was speaking out specifically to women). And the only way we can make it work and show the ordination to be a worthy move forward for Buddhism, is by upholding the Dhamma-Vinaya as bhikkhunis and upasikas of the highest order.

And now that we have that chance, let us focus on that! That, I feel, is the most positive and supportive way for me to contribute to the situation as it stands. I don’t see others’ approval or disapproval (individually or as a group) on this one issue as bearing so much weight (given my inclination and life situation) or as a reason for me to abandon their Dhamma teachings. Or perhaps what I should say is that I’m not willing to make that an important criteria: to me it really isn’t.

Important is what’s happening right now, is how we are individually and collectively ‘harnessing’ this energy – the thinking, the writing, the studying, the learning, the frustration, the joy, the plans, the meditating, the reflecting, the excitement, the hopes, the expectations, the trepidation, and anything else – [and] how we’re milking it for what it’s worth and using it to develop and grow strong in our practice.

Because how we harness and utilize this energy does and WILL have a tremendous and direct effect on others. This energy IS available, and we can always direct and redirect it towards the highest good – the highest good for others and ourselves. I believe we’re trying, each in our own way. Keep at it.”

- “I do not think that misogyny is the motivation for the decision of the Elders and Ajahns. Furthermore, I think that all the comments about “Thai monks”, “Westerners” and “the Asian Way”, etcetera, is misleading.”

- “As a very devoted lay supporter for over 30 years of Forest Sangha nuns and monks, it has long greatly distressed me that there has been this ongoing discrimination.

The finer and even grosser details of the Vinaya debate aside, I really struggle to retain respect for the Ajahns. I feel great gratitude towards them, yet these same Ajahns, despite otherwise exemplary conduct and deep insights, sadden me by the lack of open heartedness that their tacit support of [all that] this discrimination represents. We are all interdependent -- men, women, nuns and monks -- and should speak up when we see injustice.

- “The generalisations and accusations that have been flying around in this debate miss the central points. I personally support all [those involved in the Bhikkuni ordinations], not out of faith, but having been convinced by the clarity of the arguments in favour of bhikkuni ordination.

It is upon the strength of these arguments that these decisions rest. I believe that because these arguments in favour of bhikkuni ordination are clear, fair, reasonable, compassionate, in accordance with the Vinaya as [taught] by the Lord Buddha, and achievable in practice, that they are worthy of supporting, and that they shall win over former sceptics (like me) and stand the test of time.”

There are Thai monks that support bhikkuni ordination. Even Somdet Buddhajahn is tacitly supportive through his actions to moderate the reaction of the Elders and Ajahns. And there are Western monks and lay people that are resisting bhikkuni ordination.

There are many within Theravada that cling to tradition and fear change. If we who support bhikkuni ordination suspend our judgement for a moment, we can easily understand why they feel this way. There is much about Theravadan tradition that is worthy of adhering to. If it had not been for such tradition we would not know the tradition handed down from the Buddha today.

But as in most things in this world, it does no good to cling to views, especially extreme views. We, each generation of Buddhists, must appraise what is handed down to us anew and work out how to apply the Buddha Dhamma according to our circumstances. This is what the Buddha taught.”

- “Change in this great and ancient tradition will come in stages. Let us reflect not only upon the errors of those we disagree with, but also upon the good that they have done. Let’s keep an open door so that when the time is right, we can all be reconciled.”

- “When there is a status given to the female sangha, as in the Buddha’s time, this translates into more students, resources, spaces and places for study – for both women and men. Without the bhikkhuni order, those places and resources have been vastly diminished [for practitioners] compared to the Buddha’s time. I would like [Buddhism] to go back to the ways of the Buddha.”

- “At last! A break-through.... monks with enough standing in the order, as well as enough clear-sight, compassion and independence, have taken the necessary risk of being criticised and shunned by their own order to perform a bhikkhuni ordination. In my opinion, these bhikkhus have fully realised their responsibility in Dhamma-Vinaya in this regard, and have fully owned their power of place within the order in a thoroughly appropriate way.

All the bhikkhus who have resisted and blocked this move to date have neither realised nor owned their responsibility in Dhamma-Vinaya in this regard. I believe it is the unresolved psychological complexities of their fear of change and their fear of the feminine, individually and as a group, which have manifested in absurd resistance and angry sabotage over the years when it came to addressing the reintroduction of the bhikkhuni order in particular, and the rightful place of the feminine in general.”

- May all our hearts be open to these wholesome changes. I certainly started out having reservations about bhikkuni ordination. I was waiting to see if the arguments were solid – rational and supported by evidence. And they are. If my stubborn [heart] can be [softened], then anybody’s can!”

- “I ask myself: what kind of practice is it to [feel] you have more status, rights, or birthright than any other [being]? The honouring of any form of dominance (in my humble understanding of the [Buddha’s] teachings and looking back on the history of violence against women) is a destructive force.

The [exertion of] dominance over another is [only] attachment to self and identity. It is this dominance theory [that] in Christianity [has provided] the deep-seeded justification of political, economic and environmental destruction. Institutionalized “dominance” of men over women in Christianity led to the massacre of 2 million women as “witches” in Europe. I cannot bear to see this fundamentalist dominance of women further extended into Buddhism as well.”

- “The momentum behind bikkhuni ordination paves the way for [all beings] to see the Buddha’s message that all beings can reach Nibbana. As much as I love my male teachers and may have adopted a male teacher over a female teacher at times; as much as I try to see through form,; I am still in female form and not fully enlightened – when I see a bikkhuni, it gives me a faith that I have the potential to reach Nibbana too.”

- “It goes without saying that gender equality should have its place [in this tradition]. It requires a high level of commitment, dedication and sacrifice for somebody to take action for the purpose of helping those women who have been largely disadvantaged in the Thai Forest tradition.

- “It’s time for a great public outcry to be heard. The discrimination against women, and the culture of male chauvinism in a patriarchal society like Thailand, have also enabled sex trade and child prostitution to escalate beyond control in my country -- Thailand. Nuns should not be excluded from Buddhism, or from anything else. All of this has to stop.”

- “There is a need for a four-fold sangha rooted in the West. I think that it will develop but, rather than the lay sangha following the Elder monastics, as happened in Asia, a strongly rooted Western lay sangha will give rise to Western monastics who, unlike those in Aisa, actually live according to Dhamma-Vinaya.”

- “One of the considerations I've been with is how much the lack of education the Thai Elders have of the West - and how much that is showing up in this debate, say compared to His Holiness the Dalai Lama who has put himself out to really engage Western culture, science, psychology, feminism, democracy, etc.

I feel it would have been good if the Western Theras would have helped educate them, rather than hide behind the lack of knowledge of the Thai Theras and from that position justify their deep mysogyny (not all Western abbots - but I feel the 5 Points have emerged from rage, upset, and fear of women.)

Whatever happens, I can't get away from the psychological factors playing out here. One sure won't get an education by burying ones head in the sand.”

- “The point has been made that sometimes reasoning isn’t the best way of getting one’s point across. To that end, may the bhikkhunis be well developed in their training, and highly skilled in the Dhamma and Vinaya, so that many may prosper in the dispensation and reach Nibbana.

And may we contribute to that success by providing them with suitable conditions conducive to meditative practice, and by being supporters who are equally well-disciplined and learned in the Dhamma-Vinaya. That is, after all, what we all wish to see and make possible. To achieve this, there is plenty of work to do. And this work I will most happily apply myself to.”

- “The Elders seem to be isolated and surrounded with people who speak, act, and think like they think, and have for the most part only experienced a life similar to their own. In such an environment, they cannot possibly learn to understand the world in which they live. Kindness and compassion stem from an understanding that it is sometimes only karma that makes our own life easy or hard. If these monks never look beyond their own life mirror, then they may become permanently blind to this truth. Perhaps they already are.”

- “Thank you to all those involved in the Bhikkhuni ordination for their deep compassion, dedication and courage. May the deeper peace and even-mindedness that underlies the [four-fold sangha] flourish evermore, and may all beings [be permitted to] attain their every goal and aspiration. May we all realise enlightenment for the benefit of all beings.”

- “What strikes me here is that everyone says that bikkhuni ordination isn't at issue, but rather it was the 'disrespectful' way that it was done that was the issue. All right then - since bikkhuni ordination isn't the issue, let's all sit down, figure out a 'respectful' way to do it, and ordain some bikkhunis! I suspect if someone suggests this, then suddenly bikkhuni ordination will become the issue, and then at least we can talk about why it is instead of all this red-herring posturing.”

- “I would like to invite [the Elders] to reflect and think deeply in their hearts. I believe this issue will also resonate in they put themselves in the women’s shoes.”

- “We at the Buddhist Fellowship are proud to have a spiritual patron who has the courage and conviction to effect change despite obstacles and objections. After all, isn't that what Right Leadership is about?”

- “To the monks who were harsh towards those involved in the Bhikkhuni ordination, I acknowledge that your actions and words are due to defilements and do not represent the purity of the Dhamma. It is a reminder to all of us that even monks and Elders are human like us, and [that] we are all on the same journey of overcoming our defilements.

Thus, we should not be misled by the robes. We need to be discerning as to who and how we offer support. The Buddha's advice has always been: "offer gifts to those worthy of support".”

- “The ill will exhibited [towards the bhikkhuni ordination and those who were involved] is disappointing to say the least, especially when the Elders and Ajahns are expected to be inspiring lay people to be kind, compassionate and forgiving. The act of ordaining nuns can't even be compared to monks amassing wealth, misbehaving with women, or misleading lay-followers with superstitious, uneducated traditions and practices. Why not take these monks to task instead? That would be of greater value to the Thai Forest community and to Buddhism [as a whole].”

- “We hope that the Elders and Ajahns at the meeting in Wat Pah Pong would reconsider their actions and reflect on this question: "Would Ajahn Chah have responded in the same manner in this situation?" Somehow, we doubt it, as he would have applied more compassion and wisdom in resolving the matter. After all, if the monks are not against ordaining nuns (as alluded to in their statement), then what is the real problem here?”

- “We shall just consider this incident as a “Bad Brick” that has added to the "colourful featurea" of Wat Pah Pong. Let not this “Bad Brick” make us forget the greatness of Ajahn Chah and the legacy he left behind. We can only hope that in the honour of Ajahn Chah, the monks who initiated the excommunication will have the wisdom and kindness in their hearts to rescind in the interest of the Dhamma and the Forest Tradition as a whole.”

- “We hope that harmony amongst the great abbots is restored quickly and that we can celebrate a new era where there is mutual respect between the Theravada monks and nuns, and all are once again worthy of the respect of the lay community.”

- “This is a sad day for the Buddhist community. Such ignorance is portrayed where an “excommunication” has to take place just because effort which was inspired from compassion and right intentions has been taken to promote gender equality. What a shame!”

- “ We can all argue till the buffalos come home about what the Suttas and Vinaya actually say about Bhikkhuni ordination. But when we ask the question, “What is the compassionate thing to do?” the answer is clear; equality for all. [Not having equality] is why Buddhism has looked so backwards for so long for modern people of compassion. [And] which is why so many people have been harmed by our failure to reform in relation to the bhikkhuni question.”

- “I personally find, that after being very interested to ordain for many years (practising in the past with that aspiration and then becoming disillusioned about it), that the compassionate concerns I am witnessing in support [of bhikkhuni ordination], in both scholarly appearance and personal... from sangha who are ordained and lay... is truly inspiring to me. It is reminding me of the heart of why I love the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. Thank you so much dear compassionate and wise ones.”

- As I read over the Five Points, Ajahn Chah’s words to his young student Sumedho keep flooding my thought waves: “Oh, how you suffer, Sumedho.”

- “This is not a “women’s issue” [or] only for women studies, but a total lack of awareness about basic human rights. The denial of bhikkhuni sangha is an expression of an unhealthy society. As long as women (worst in this case, as they are nuns) are exploited and suppressed, it implies the existence of exploiters. [An even greater] danger is when the exploiter is the system are sustained and nurtured by a government.”

- “I do believe the EST has responsibility not only to support the welfare of the monastic sangha – but also to the lay community that supports them. That responsibility needs to include transparency, and a ‘checks and balance’ system to prevent undue power from [running amok] in the monastic heirarchy.”

- “I believe what we see from the EST these days is a near total lack of transparency and a sycophantic relationship to a few Thai Elders that it aims to protect at the expense of the larger welfare of the [entire] global 4-fold sangha.”

- “I sincerely hope that [these recent events] will lead to real, open dialogue between the monastics and the laity, which has been so badly needed for so long now...”

- “I hope the historic constitution of a complete 4-fold sangha will serve as an unstoppable catalyst for the continuation of the Buddha’s vision under the Ajapala banyan tree, formed in the 2nd week after His Sambodhi!”

- “As a man, I was put off by the treatment of women as I witnessed it in Burma. It’s no better in Thailand, as we see. The aspect I found most distressing was the intractability of these old encrusted ways of behaviour and the acceptance of them as Dhamma. Ouch!

The first time I tried to bow to a very senior nun she almost had a heart attack. At the same time, she admonished me for my lack of protocol. I responded by saying if I couldn’t physically bow in respect to her, I would nevertheless continue to bow to her in my heart and fully intended to do so. She said that would be fine, but she was mostly just relieved that I wouldn’t any longer publicly embarrass myself or her with inappropriate displays.

A big part of the problem is [with Elders] being passively compliant with the status quo and blinded by cultural tradition. {They seem to believe that} foreigners don’t actually understand the “real” Dhamma. This is another cultural belief that I found off-putting. Still do.”

- “If some of the Elders or Ajahns actions regarding [another monk’s] involvement in the bhikkhuni ordination were based on their personal feelings towards that [other monk], then what is really needed here and now is ‘acknowledge and forgive and [move forward]’. Acknowledge that though trying hard to attain enlightenment, they are not yet fully enlightened and are still under the influence of the ten fetters. Also, we should forgive them all. We ourselves, during our lifetime, have done so many unwholesome things. Practice is compassion towards others as well as ourselves.”

- “I’m just an ordinary practicing Buddhist. I don’t know much about Theravada monastic code, but I do know that the Buddha taught us that both men and women suffer equally, and they all seek the same path to end suffering. My heart tells me that any tradition -- no matter how old, large, powerful or prestigious -- that does not allow bhikkhuni ordination is out of line with the teaching of the Buddha. I’ll gladly walk alone and take refuge elsewhere.”

- “Unless this issue is addressed transparently, with openness, and integrity (without secrecy), the Dharma will never truly root in the West. The democratic values of the West, which can be seen within the Vinaya as well, must be part of how the Dharma is language and experienced in the West... otherwise the cultural congruence will not be there.”

- “Separate from all of these monastic politics, are how Westerners feel about women's issues and the Dharma. Many lay women teachers are no longer interested in the monastic container because of the seeming hopelessness of it being equalized in their lifetimes. So, they move on to create Dharma on their own terms, divorced from the monastic Sangha. I have heard many women teachers say they will never practice in Asia because of the gender oppression. That feels sad to me, but understandable too.

Younger lay women practitioners go even further to express the sentiment that the traditional oppression will die out with the aging senior teachers, and so they also are doing "their own thing" and creating dharma practice spaces that are gender equal, regardless of traditional practices.

While I find the separation from the monastic sanghas (both bhikkhu and bhikkhuni) contradicts the wisdom of the four-fold Sangha, I can feel the unfilled needs in the above sentiments. It feels that the Middle Way has yet to be found.”

- “I am not a [scholar] of the Vinaya. I am just a simple person trying to practice the Dharma and seek the truth. In the Buddha’s teachings I have found teachings that I intuitively feel is “the truth”. I also sought a teaching that was free of dogma, ritual, and cultural values. In the Thai Forest Tradition as taught by [the Australian monastics], I believed that I have found it.”

- “It is inconceivable to me that the Buddha would see any difference between men and women, for are not our bodies just a vehicle? That senior monks and leaders do not have the intuitive wisdom to not discriminate on the basis of sex is also beyond my comprehension, but then I am just a simple man. I will be content to be a simple man, for if these men -- who I am sure have achieved very high levels of insights and jhanas -- cannot see this, then what has all their achievement actually given them?”

- “This is indeed sad news. I was made aware of the issue via an open letter on Dhammalight and find the whole matter rather impossible to believe, as these seems to be such petty matters for something which I see as only beneficial to the sangha as a whole. I applaud [those involved in the bhikkhuni ordination] for what they have done, for they have shown me that there are at least a few Buddhist teachers that I can follow.”

- “Regardless of the outcome [of these recent events], I remain a fervent supporter of all those involved in the bold decision to resolve the bhikkuni issue, and can only wish that ill-will [towards them from] the Thai Elders will subside in time.”

- “I don’t think it serves anyone to make a pretense of cool-headed rationalism when it’s obvious that these events spark strong emotional responses on all sides. In a Buddhist context, the ruse of emotional control [can sometimes be] an attempt to claim the high ground by appearing equanimous or wise. The hypocrisy of using unemotional language, while taking actions that seem loaded with fear.... well, that’s not something I want to emulate as a practicing Buddhist. For me, nothing is more essential to practice than honesty; particularly self-honesty. My interpretation of recent events is that some senior monks have strayed dangerously far from self-honesty. Sometimes [I get] the sense that all this back-and-forth is [just] about old scores being settled. [I hope] that this is not the case.”

- “The problem with [dogma as opposed to Dhamma] has always been the way it controls what people say or think by utilizing the accepted doctrines in a way which silences. For example, if I complain about inequality, I am told that there is no such thing as “man” or “woman” – it is all just conventional wisdom. Why is it then that [conventional wisdom] is defended to the death if it means changing the power structure? Sadly, it [seems to be] all about power for some.

Some men want to hold on to it [because]they are terrified of a power sharing arrangement with women. But at the end of the day, it is all really only about justice, equality, and dignity. No more, no less.”

- “The bhikkunis often disappear from the discourse altogether, as if they’re not agents in their own right. It doesn’t seem to have occurred to the Elders and Ajahns that the women themselves have a right to decide the timing of their own ordination, according to their own preparedness and practice, and that monks’ politics should take a back seat.

Of course, the newly-ordained bhikkunis at Dhammasara don’t have internet there and haven’t weighed in on these debates. How beautiful, and ironic, that they’re simply getting on with practice while we carry on here.”

- “With all due respect, in my humble opinion, Ajahn Chah's lineage does not define Thai Buddhism. Nor does Thai Buddhism define Theravada Buddhism. Nor does Theravada Buddhism define Buddhism. Only the Buddha really has that ability and authority. For any culture or lineage to hold onto authority is a form of collective clinging.... and from that will result only collective suffering.”

- It is a complicated issue with generations of karma to be purified around it. That is why the immediate reactions of the senior Ajahn Chah monastics is disturbing. There has been no time to see clearly, as a collective community (from the directions of the four-fold sangha) what is going on in the breadth of the issue internationally, as well as historically.”

- “In [any of the letters] on Dhammalight, it was [not mentioned] that since the bhikkhuni ordinations took place, one monk [cancelled the visit of] a bhikkhuni who had previously arranged to have a retreat at his monastery and already had an air ticket. I don't mention this to antagonize anyone; I don't know [this monk] myself, but have heard some good reports. Still, I don't think it serves anyone to ignore such a serious contradiction: [for this monk] to publicly declare himself to be 'definitely not anti-bhikkhuni', while simultaneously choosing punitive action against the participating bhikkhunis.

These are bhikkhunis who have never been under WPP authority, and who were fulfilling their duty in line with Vinaya at the request of the women seeking ordination – [and] in one case, at least, at a time of illness and great discomfort. This is the same behaviour as the Elders; an approach which is in fact the [crux] of the whole problem.”

- [Have] the senior male monastics just reacted? {Maybe} if they just held the space for further transparent exploration of what to do next, they could have come out of this with pretty good standing in the Western lay community..... but their image and reputation is questionable at this point.”

- “The bhikkhunis [themselves] often disappear from the discourse altogether, as if they’re not agents in their own right. It doesn’t seem to have occurred to the Elders and Ajahns that the women themselves have a right to decide the timing of their own ordination, according to their own preparedness and practice, and that monks’ politics should take a back seat. Of course, the newly-ordained bhikkhunis at Dhammasara don’t have internet there and haven’t weighed in on these debates. How beautiful, and ironic, that they’re simply getting on with practice while we carry on [out] here.”

- “I am a Western Buddhist. I come just now upon this division amongst my brothers and sisters. Humbling oneself in order to open the hearts of others seems in line with the teachings of the Buddha. Let us all not respond to our pain with words that will create more separation. If we insist there can be no forgiveness until others change, then we bind ourselves [and others].”

- “Most of the lay western teaching community is against [the Elders] response in regard to excommunicating [one of their own] -- the offense did not seem to be major in the Western view. To Western lay teachers, if there was an offense at all, it would be minor compared to the issue of gender disparity. Perhaps [one monk’s] actions were worth a reprimand, but not an expulsion..... we are taking on the sensationalism of Judeo-Christianity, if we don't watch out.”

- “The 5 Points are so [draconian] that it doesn’t seem possible! What is there to gain from these five rules? Already the poor nuns have no legitimacy, no power, no voice. I think it has gone beyond sexism. I think we can now call it misogyny.”

- “The Dhamma is beyond politics, defiled prejudices, and cultural accretions – so we can forgive those who are misguided, and get on with the job of supporting genuine seekers of enlightenment. Sadhu bhikkhunis!”

- “I can affirm almost identical behaviour in a Zen organisation in the UK. My local Zen group decided to invite a master [from Japan], not from our lineage (but whose master’s master had also been the master of the founder of the organisation in question, so almost the same lineage).

The governing board of the UK sangha of which we were part told us to rescind the invitation. When our group leader (with support of the group) refused, he was summoned to the board (600kms away). Again refusing to obey, our group was expelled from the sangha.

I love being part of an independent sangha, where the priority is meditation, dhamma, and fellowship -- not money, power or organisation. I think the expulsion [of one monk] is also a great opportunity for the {Thai Forest tradition} in the West! Rather than follow someone else’s idea of how the Buddha would have wanted Thais to live in Thailand (seemingly what the Elders say we should do), let’s work out for ourselves how to be real global Buddhists.”

- “I do not see this as a West vs. East issue at all. The Buddha was Asian, and he set up the bhikkhuni Sangha many years before gender equality became an issue in the West.

The Bhikkhuni sangha has been preserved down through the ages by the Asian communities in China and elsewhere. In the modern era, it is the sangha of Sri Lanka that has led the way in supporting the bhikkhunis. My personal experience with bhikkhus from Burma, Laos, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India, and Thailand is that most of them fully support bhikkhuni ordination.

What [we are] actually doing is not forcing Western culture on Asia, but [instead] trying to introduce the wonderful [teachings] of Buddhism to the West!”

- “I think the Buddha said that all people should show respect to one another no matter what their station. It's hard to believe that he was making a sexist command [when he said that]. It feels like either the Western monastics are being cowed by the "old boys club" in Thailand for some reason that I don't understand, or that the Western monastics are trying to talk modernism without backing it up with action.”

- “Behind the disingenuous arguments of the Five Points, the UK Ajahns have the hard line message that there is no hope for full bhikkhuni ordination for all women in this tradition. The Five Points are odious, denigrating, humiliating and patronize women.

The authors of the document are faceless and hide behind their robes. Are they afraid of being identified so that their supporters and critics can see they do not walk the talk that they regularly give to their disciples?”

- “Imagine saying to your brother monks that the recent ordination in which you took part was void, without consulting the bhikkhuni uppajaya, the nuns who were ordained, your community... to place you in such a position reveals other agendas, jealousy amongst them. What are they thinking?”

- “The Elders and Ajahns are trying to create a three-fold sangha without nuns. But the [Buddha’s] four-fold sangha will continue – not only is it legal, there is [also] clearly enough desire and goodwill.”

- “How many more nuns and potential great practitioners in that form have to be lost to this endless politicking and procrastination by the male elder council? For me that’s the issue – and that goes beyond the [so-called] legalities of bhikkhuni ordination. What we really need is an entire attitude and culture shift [away from] this old male council.”

- “This Elders power structure also really influences many monks in a negative, unhealthy, painful way.”

- “When I was a young monastic in Thailand, I was appalled to see how female monastics were treated. Mae Chees were viewed as servants in some places. I have worked as a diversity and social justice advocate for the past few years and seeing the issue with this perspective makes it clear how blind some of the senior monks are to their privilege.

I remember talking about race and class and some of the observations I had, as a brown skin person, and I was usually told that these are all “conventions”. White monks get treated like celebrities in Thailand; I wonder if all this adulation has blinded some of these Western monks.

Also [recognize] that the UK monasteries want to keep their ties to Thailand. [But] what do these “ties” actually mean? We are not talking about the Vatican here – or are we?!

I am so happy that the bhikkhuni ordination happened. I was at Amaravati when [female Ajahns] were there; [they] are such a great example of what a good monastic and teacher is! Our planet has many needs and real urgent problems, feminine wisdom in the voice of meditators is a great asset. I have deep respect for the Elders and abbots and hope that eventually this issue finds a good resolution for all.”

- “I disrobed after attending the Hamburg Congress, in part, because it was made very clear to me that our particular tradition was caught in fundamentalism around the place of women in the tradition.

This fundamentalist attitude flows to other issues too. It represents a closing of the heart and a taking refuge in textual forms.

The question is not about aspiring to equality. The point is about recognising it in the first place. It is not that something has to be “gained” by women; it is that something has been taken from women.

People are complex creatures. That some men have fear and loathing of women isn’t the problem. The problem is a resistance to investigate its origins, and a misuse of one’s position to keep women out.

To investigate this requires moving from the safety of texts to the uncharted and murky territory of the heart. An aptitude in this kind of investigation is something the siladhara in the UK have developed over time and contribute to the communities there. Several monks there have remarked on how essential it is to have that element of the feminine brought into the practice. Those voices tend to go unheard...”

- “There are many supportive and "clear-viewed" monks in the Ajahn Chah Thai Forest tradition, who are as [horrified] at the events as us. They don't have a voice - for similar reasons as the nuns. It is really only a very few conservative leaders at the top that need to change.”

- “Sadly, in my experience the control-obsessed behaviour [of the Thai and UK bhikkhus] is also played out in the nuns community in the name of “training”. Newly ordained members of the community are particularly vulnerable, since there are so many readjustments to be made, and one's ability to assess what is acceptable and what should be challenged is a hard call to make.

I was in my early twenties when I ordained as an anagarika, and even though the nuns on the whole offered a great deal of encouragement, I witnessed some upsetting interactions that were unchallenged in the name of hierarchical respect. I've spent many moments since leaving the community frustrated that I had not stood up for others and myself in those situations. I also realised very quickly that these situations occurred as a result of the education received.”

- “This is a case of the Thai sangha wishing to exert [control] over how Buddhism should develop overseas. It is as if they feel they own the Dhamma!

22nd Oct 2009 is the new birthday of Theravadan Buddhism in the West... throughout history, upholding freedom and equality has been a struggle... the Buddha too had to go against the flow, against the flow of the caste system, gender equality and so on.

By the lack of reasons given [by the Elders] to their opposition, there is obvious jealousy and resentment behind this which is quite hard to understand and to forgive. One only needs to contemplate the status of women in Thailand in general to realise there is also a very strong cultural inertia behind this opposition which for me is easier to forgive, because it is hard for them to see how things could be different from what they are used to.

Isn't there something similar about this [situation] and when the Bodhisattva's five ascetic friends left him when he began to adopt the Middle Path? The future of Buddhism lies in a strong bhikkhuni order, which would be a sign that Buddhism has [once again] been fully rekindled.”

- “The real core issue here seems to be power hierarchy over consensus and Dhamma. So much pain and abuse would have been avoided if only the spirit that the Buddha himself intended had been honoured.”

- “Thanks to all those “standing up” for the bhikkhuni order, and for the way it should be in accordance to the Dhamma-Vinaya... instead of succumbing to the pressure of tradition and culture. This is really in the spirit of Kalama Sutta. May the bhikkhuni sangha prosper and bring its benefits to all beings.”

- “I have been closely following the [events] from the beginning, but so far abstained from “taking sides” or being emotionally involved in the discussion. However, after having seen how the line of arguments from all sides but the UK sangha have been put on the table, I have drawn my own conclusions:
 1. The bhikkhuni ordination was justified, based on Lord Buddha’s intention to establish a fourfold dhamma structure himself. Vinaya and suttas seem to support this.
 2. Tradition is condition. Conditions are subject to change. Making them the signpost for approved behaviour and decision seems like a pretty unskilful approach.
 3. I doubt that the Thai Elders of WPP are unskilful as such, but perhaps they are not all that enlightened yet? Not for me to judge their line of argument, only to the degree that it seems to be legalistic in terms of Thai rules, not Vinaya rules. i.e. irrelevant for the assessment of bhikkhuni ordination, on which they haven’t expressed a formal statement yet in scholarly terms (only in Thai legal framework, which is of course invalid outside of Thailand).
 4. As the Thai Elders are skirting the rightfulness of the ordination, this suggests that their scholarly arguments might be weak – probably referencing the lineage issue. The lineage issue is also irrelevant as far as it represents a traditional approach (see point 2).
 5. The dismissal of [one of their own] is based on “procedure”, or failure to adhere to a specific cultural setup. This might be personally upsetting to the people involved but again, if the Vinaya is the yardstick they’re following, the cultural background is irrelevant anyway.”

- “I fully believe that the new bhikkhunis and all those involved in the ordination have acted with the best of intentions, and in the best knowledge that are following the Vinaya and Lord Buddha’s spirit and intentions for a [four-fold] sangha.

Personally, I would appreciate a stronger emergence of a “Western” Buddhism that leaves the cultural and traditional frills of historical paths behind. I trust that [those involved in the ordination] could become some of the exemplary leaders to actually encourage similar-minded and good practitioners on such a path. I for some can say I will fully support any like-minded Buddhist practitioners -- be they monk or lay, or male or female.”

- The Elders and Ajahns hierarchy’s inability to see through tradition and into the [spirit] of Dhamma is mind- boggling. Their actions do not seem to be in line with what they preach. This is so disappointing.”

- “To all those involved in the bhikkhuni ordination: you have acted in a way that upholds, reflects and nurtures the things I value most about Buddhism and Dhamma. Thank you.”

- “Even after so much outpouring of disagreement from the very people that support the Thai Forest tradition, our Ajahns have failed to come up with a valid response [explaining] why they oppose bhikkhuni ordination! As far as I know, their response in a nutshell is, “Our Elders in Thailand don’t want this, so we follow them because they are our Elders and we don’t want to break [that] link”.

Thank goodness Prince Siddhartha didn’t adopt such a policy of following the tradition of his Elders, like as his own Father and the well known renunciate teachers of his time. Otherwise there would’ve been no Dhamma!”

- “If people didn’t care about WPP they wouldn’t even bother to ask WPP to review their decision. Trust me, people won’t be barking up this tree for a long time. For example, I already know many who support Bhikkhuni ordination will no longer provide dana to any of the male WPP branch monasteries.”

- “History in the making. For those involved in the bhikkhuni ordination, there is now the opportunity to form an authentically western Buddhist lineage, for the first time in human history. It was only a matter of time, and hopefully this is just the beginning of many more bhikkhuni ordinations.”

- “I am a Buddhist laywoman. I have been a Buddhist now for some thirty years. I have also waited thirty years to see the full ordination of women. It is not the [monks involved] who should denounce the ordination. Nor should the women denounce their ordination. It is the WPP who has chosen to expel [one of their own], a courageous and compassionate Ajahn who has recognized the simple fact that, without the full ordination of women, Buddhism cannot survive in the West.”

- “An essential truth of Buddhism is change and impermanence: it is noteworthy that the WPP does not seem to be able to recognize [this very thing].”

- “Reading [about] the 5 points, I feel a lot of sadness. When I disrobed I was persuaded that insisting on democracy, transparency, equality, and mutual respect (not just between men and women, but also between juniors and seniors in the community) made me unfit to be a nun.

I'm glad I held on to my values even though leaving was very painful for me. It pains me to think of how many good people the community has lost by not supporting them and nurturing their aspiration. The real authority in a Buddhist community should be the teachings of the Buddha as a path to liberation.

Of course this moves the authority from the hierarchy to each individual, and this has at all times threatened the authorities. I've always told people that what is special to me about Buddhism is that it places the authority within each of us, that the teachings encourages us to investigate and experience the truth for ourselves.

So realizing the extent of the oppression and power abuse that goes on is [difficult]. I wish to do what I can to change that; I wish to see the four-fold sangha flourish in this time where there is so much need for wisdom, compassion, clarity, and kindness.”

- “How many more nuns and potential great practitioners have to be lost to this endless politicking and procrastination by the male elder council? For me that's the issue - and that goes beyond the legalities of Bhikkhuni ordination. What we really need is an attitude and culture shift.”

- Those involved in the bhikkhuni ordination have shown both courage and wisdom. They have clearly recognized that full bhikkhuni ordination for women is essential if Buddhism is to survive in the West. There are already thousands and thousands of us who recognize this. Those involved in the bhikkhuni ordination have acted to secure the spread of the Buddha Dharma and ensure its future in the West.”

- “Imagine the contributions to the Dharma, to Buddhist scholarship, to the four-fold sangha, and towards the enlightenment of all beings that have been lost in this mass turning away of women. How many were consumed by the monastic gender dilemma presented to them and are now MIA in the Dharma? How many more will have to sacrifice themselves, and how many more must go missing before things change? How many practicing nuns are suffering silently as we debate their potential futures? How many more who wish with all their being to go forth but out of mistrust of monks or horror at the inequities [they'd] be subjected to, opt for an easier – but less honest – lay life?

The suffering of so many, which has been caused by so few, is absolutely senseless. And let's be honest: it is not only those monks who have directly made these decisions whose intentions are in question here – the moral issue of silent monastic bystanders is also prominent.

For the well-being of my own practice, and for the benefit others, I must continually struggle towards remaining open-hearted and compassionate towards all beings, reminding myself that even the arahants are subject to the five aggregates and to samsara.... and that none of us, including the monks who would reject an aspirant (and possibly an arahant) on the basis of gender, are living how we should be. But I still feel a moral responsibility to engage in action that will further the empowerment of women in the Dharma.... and this is as it should be.”

- “It is interesting to note that this act of compassion, bhikkhuni ordination, which should be a matter of course for any Buddhist -- rattles so many egos and upsets so many people.”

- “Based on first Noble Truth of suffering and respect for the suffering of any human, nobody should be denied the practice of holy life. And the fastest way to liberation is holy life of homelessness. All those who suffer should have option to live holy homeless life. I remember clearly that Ajhan Chah invited everybody to his monastery, to try out the holy life. Let all who suffer, end their suffering, and help others to end theirs.”

- “[It looks like] a very strong anti-nun element is [at work] in the Thai Forest Sangha. Just take a look at the 5 Points. And the misogyny is not restricted purely from the Elders. When you have senior Ajahns being so openly hostile to ordination and women in any shape or form, it is a situation that had to end in what has happened with the split.

To listen to these Ajahns speak on the subject of female ordination, you would find it hard to imagine the idea that women can actually successfully pursue the homeless holy life.

I applaud the recent events such as Bhikkhuni ordination, the moves to establish a nuns monastery in the US, the establishment of Dhammasara, and the increasing assertiveness of the siladhara sangha in the UK.

Ultimately, [all of this has] made public all of those bhikkhus who are hostile to nuns, and the need for the lay people to do something... and this is exactly what is happening.

That [all of this] is so very harmful to the image of the Thai Forest tradition, the Elders, the bhikkhu sangha, and to a degree Buddhism as a whole, seems to not have been a concern of these anti-nun monks. What a shame that so few are able to harm so many.....”

- “Ok, so the bihhkuni ordination was [done] despite Thai laws -- maybe it is time to move forward to a more global and modern Theravada Buddhism. In Romania, where I live, there are [currently] few Buddhists, and I hope Theravada Buddhism will [one day] be “at home” in my country too.

But I am wondering [if] it is necessary to import Thai customs, Tibetan customs, etc.? If Theravada Buddhism fails to provide equal conditions for men and women – even here in a country like Romania! – [then] it will become extinct like other ancient dinosaurs. I guess it will have to adapt at present time conditions, it will have to find a line between arbitrary and too rigid. After all it is The Middle Way.”

- “I doubt that Bhikkhu Bodhi was given a full and accurate picture of all developments by whomever spoke to him and swayed him. I feel disgusted at the thought that such a sincere and honourable monk as Bhikkhu Bodhi might have been manipulated [by other monks], as seems to be the case from his reliance on someone else's characterization of "the way this tradition functions".”

- “The argument that things would have turned out much better had the WAM happened first:

- a) doesn't hold water, given the extreme over-reaction to the ordinations and the total lack of positive dialogue or education on the issue in WPP, and

- b) ignores the agency of the women themselves in deciding the timing of the ordinations, according to their own preparedness.

As for "hurt feelings", this insults us. Are senior ajahns' feelings inherently more important than women monastics or anyone else's? Surely the Buddha points us to each take responsibility for our own feelings.”

- “I [give my] full support for bhikkuni ordination. How unfortunate that this incidence has revealed the uglier side of those in our tradition, eg. discrimination, misogyny, lack of compassion, etc. But from now on, let's just rejoice for the ordained nun and let's not hold ill will against any [of those] who are against this.”

- “I am disappointed and confused by [all] these developments. I always thought it was the Thai hierarchy that was forcing the WPP to desist from bhikkhuni ordinations. I am sure this is still true to some degree. I felt that within the WPP itself, a more enlightened view prevailed, and that the WPP itself was a force against misogyny and discrimination.

I thought they already ordained bhikkhunis in the UK and have done so for some time – so I am confused by these events. I was a supporter of the EST, and once held them in the highest esteem. But now I am beginning to doubt that my support was well placed.”

- “In the Buddha’s time, if someone (male or female) asked to go forth as a lay or ordained follower, he just said “Ehi bhikkhu/bhikkhuni” and that’s it -- simple. A simple ordination is keeping in line with the Buddha’s teachings and Dhamma. It is the essence of the Dhamma.

Creating all this papanca and hesitations about ordination is not in keeping with the Buddha’s teachings and Dhamma. {Bhikkhuni} ordination is keeping with the spirit of the Buddha’s teachings. That is what was done recently. Beautiful! If they waited and asked the whole international community of monks if it’s ok, then that would not be in keeping with the teachings of the Buddha.

When a monk wants to ordain he does not need an international meeting and decades of meetings before commencing the holy life. [Bhikkhunis] shouldn’t either.”

- “This anti-nun [situation] is very sad. [Maybe] they perceive a large bhikkhuni sangha as a halving of “their own” (i.e. bhikkhu) support [and] prestige. Either way, if you are looking for logic in the [bhikkhu] position.... you won’t find it in the actions taken by WPP.”

- “As a monk for 7 years, I had the opportunity to meet many wonderful and peaceful monks from the Thai branch of Ajahn Chah’s lineage. I feel very sad to hear these same monks reacting to the bhikkhuni ordinations with such lack of understanding, compassion and sympathetic joy.

The recriminations that have followed, and the venom that [some of their very own monks] have had to endure is simply appalling. My faith in Buddha Dhamma is not shaken by all this nonsense, but my faith in these mean-spirited monks is certainly shaken.

How would they feel if they were reborn as a woman, with the sincere desire for renunciation and nibbana? To follow the path of the arahant bhikkhunis we read about in the suttas?

All good wishes and metta to [all those involved in the bhikkhuni ordinations]. Thanks, too, to Bhikkhu Bodhi for his scholarship, rationality, gentleness and compassion. May all those women wishing to attain the highest have access to the robes and livelihood of bhikkhunis, as envisaged by the Lord Buddha.”

- “I admire, treasure and highly respect all [those] who are committed to earnestly practice as a monastic, and [all] those who teach Dhamma in an open, fair and equal manner -- be they man or woman. The [bhikkhuni ordinations are a] great blessing to everyone who wishes to practice in the Buddha’s path.”

- “My recollection from the suttas is that the Buddha made extra effort to safeguard the livelihoods of bhikkhunis, especially from the misdeeds of unscrupulous bhikkhus.”

- “May cool heads prevail and may we all keep our mindfulness and respect for the robes of the all the bhikkhus and bhikkhunis -- past, present and future.”

- “Personally, I only regard the Buddha’s Dhamma as important. The rules of WPP, we can let WPP follow. If the WPP and Mahatherasamakhom want to follow the social norms of their location in Thailand, I do sympathize with them as well. But not in other countries. I hope both sides can reconcile instead of dragging [this] out any longer. After all, both belong to the sangha of the Buddha.”

- “I am saddened by how things turned out surrounding the issue of reviving the Theravada bhikkuni tradition in the current era. If Buddha were alive now, given the current globalization, would he not reinstate the Theravada Bhikkuni ordination, whilst respecting, but not necessarily following, the different cultures in India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar and other parts of the world?

What would [the Buddha] do to support the bhikkunis to learn, practice and share the Dhamma in the same equal way as a bhikkhu? In this modern day, he would adapt to make the monastic path accessible to everyone.”

- “The [WPP] response has just, very interestingly, helped me make up my mind to reject the weak arguments and poor processes of those [opposed to bhikkhuni ordination], and strengthened my resolve to fully [place all] my support behind [those involved in the bhikkhuni ordination].”

- “The Buddha could not have been born if not for his mother. No monks or nuns can be born if there were no women to give birth to them in the first place, of course not forgetting the importance of men that contribute to the conception of the babies. Certain qualities may be more evident in men and not in women but it is also true in other essential qualities in women which are not usually evident in men too. No one is more important than the other; we are all interdependent.

In an Asian culture [I am a Thai man], whether you are a man or a woman, as youngsters, you have to pay respect by addressing women elder than ourselves, be it siblings, uncles or aunties. In the sangha, if monks are given seniority based on the number of vassas completed, then why would nuns not be accorded with seniority in same terms? Yet the UK and WPP subject nuns who have completed more vassas as junior to even a novice monk? Isn't this totally going against order of [what is right]?"

- “What of rebirth? Have I not seen that I was female in the past and therefore wish to extend the same opportunities I had to other women? Can I control my own rebirth such that I will return again in this privileged male form? Do I have some guarantee that I won't return as a female?

In this case, is it not in my self interest to ensure that institutional obstacles to practice are removed for all future births? Do I truly believe I can control rebirth and return as a man? Would such a belief help my understanding of anatta and rebirth? In my humble opinion, honouring dominance and discrimination seriously detracts from the practice.”

- “I am struck by the line from the WPP letter 'The Wat Pah Pong Theras lack of knowledge of the latest studies on the subject is, in their eyes, 'irrelevant.' Well, it would be great to help them to become more relevant, and for the WPP Theras to have more knowledge. This very ignorance regarding realities in the West and the implications of the patriarchy in the tradition could tear the legacy of Ajahn Chah apart.”

- “How can those Ajahns and Elders who [claim to] teach the Dhamma of the Lord Buddha, be acting in such a way that is so harmful to everyone? I say the more popular [all those involved in the bhikkhuni ordinations] become, the better off the Buddhist and non-world will be for hearing the true teachings of the truly wise ones who comprehend the Buddha-vacana so well.”

- “I am confident that the bhikkhunis and bhikkhus who are caught in the middle of all this will only come through this challenge having gained much skill, depth in wisdom, and good kamma, whatever the ‘end’ result. May the rest simply roll off their backs like drops of water on the lotus flower, without burdening them.

The world, even the religious world, is full of conflict. And what the Buddha repeatedly taught is how to resolve conflict effectively, wisely, and compassionately – so that we can get on with the real work we have to do. So there is nothing to fear, we are well equipped, so let us use the equipment well! May this apparent conflict not squash our faith in the Buddha’s teachings and our good-will towards each other, but only serve to renew, revitalize, and refresh our faith and good-will.”

- “The WPP Elders and Ajahns are well on the wrong side of history. They will be found deeply flawed, not only now, but by posterity, for their opposition towards the ordination of women.

I would like to quote the following from the Wisdom Publications blog. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, a Buddhist nun and a professor of Religious Studies at the University of San Diego, says in “Dignity and Discipline”: “Just as countries who refuse women the right to vote are considered backward today, Buddhists will certainly go down on the wrong side of history if they deny fundamental rights and freedoms to women. Recognizing full ordination for women is not only a matter of social justice, it is also simply a matter of common sense.”

- “It seems that some male monks are so concerned with politics they may have forgotten what the Buddha asked of them.”

- “The Buddha made extra effort to create and safeguard the bhikkuni order. This should be highlighted in big, bold letters for all monks to read!”

- “Most monks seem to have forgotten why more rules were needed for bhikkhunis — not to discourage women from ordaining, but to protect his female disciples from unscrupulous monks and men.....the very same [kind] of monks and men who would now further harm bhikkhunis by denying gender equality and full ordination.”

- “The Buddha did not say that Buddhism should be confined to Thailand only. It originated from India and spread to many parts of the world. So, nothing wrong with [any country breaking away] to create its own tradition (if one still insists on having their “own” tradition at all).”

- “If the Western sangha and Buddhist community can do a better job than those in Thailand, then why not? I am a man, and fully support gender equality and bhikkhuni ordination.”

- “The oppression of women, children and minorities were acceptable until a brave few had the rectitude to speak out against them. Advances in quality of life for all beings have been initiated by those who refused to accept the status quo. Those who witness boldly also give voice to the voiceless and hope to the hopeless. I congratulate all those who involved in the recent bhikkhuni ordinations.”

- “The Buddha himself denied the rigid social milieu of his time by refusing to accept an Indian caste system in which women were “untouchables”. 2,500 years ago, his actions were revolutionary. To be a revolutionary is to walk in the footsteps of the Buddha.”

- “The forward-thinking spirit and wisdom of Ajahn Chha no longer seems to reside with WPP. Truthful practice of the Dhamma-Vinaya and serious Theravada scholarship have moved of Thailand and into the West, Australia, and Sri Lanka.”

- “I have been following the fallout of the [recent] bhikkhuni ordinations and have just read through the “Where We are Now” article [on Dhammalight].

The focus of the article, as mentioned in the initial paragraph, is about “ongoing efforts to balance the needs in living sangha life in the West.” It is [not] ironic that [to them], the “needs of the sangha in the West” are balanced when women are discriminated [against] and treated unfairly.

Bhikkhuni ordination [was] revived in Sri Lanka for more than 20 years ago now, and choosing [not] to support this [same] development in the [Thai Forest tradition] is just blatant [oppression].

Furthermore, the UK siladharas should be ordained as bhikkhunis [before being “sent out”] to establish their own monasteries. Even if the siladharas [are able to] establish their own independent monasteries, it is unfair because they will [not] have the full protection of Vinaya. To [those who] believe that “permitting” the siladharas to go [out] on their own is something done well – I say that, [on the contrary], it is a terrible thing that has been done to them.

Bhikkhunis will strengthen, not weaken, the Buddha Sasana. [I beg] our [Elders and Ajahns] to please show wisdom and compassion towards] the bhikkhunis and siladharas. Please give them the freedom and protection of the Vinaya, and ordain them as bhikkhunis for the welfare of all beings. The world will thank you for that.”

- “It was clear to many people that [all those involved in the bhikkhuni ordinations] were preparing to do this, as outlined in [all of their communications]. The information had leaked out that this ordination was to take place in February 2010. Apparently, several Ajahns were preparing something to attempt to prevent the ordination, and for this reason it was moved up to October 2009 and done quietly.

I believe that there is precedent for this in Vinaya. There is a story in the Cullavagga about Pavarana being moved to evade hostile bhikkhus. Similar problems have existed from the beginning, and it is proper for conscientious bhikkhus and bhikkhunis to do what is necessary for the sake of protecting the true Dhamma and Vinaya.”

- “The unwise, unjust, and indeed un-Buddhist reaction from the Elders and Ajahns clearly shows that its current spiritual leadership has become irrelevant in the modern world.”

- “I extend my sympathy and compassion to the fearful Elders and Ajahns who have fallen victim to delusion. May you all be well, may you all find freedom from such suffering.”

- “If we just put ourselves in the shoes of those who are being discriminated solely because of gender, then perhaps even we men will understand how they feel, and be [brave] enough to find the [strength] to finally [end] this injustice.”

- “I am just a regular Buddhist layperson who is overjoyed to hear news of the bhikkhuni ordinations! Hierarchy must be excluded from all Buddhist teachings. [Those involved in the bhikkhuni ordinations] are [returning to] the true values of Buddhism, and not following any wrong or selfish view.”

- “All this seems to be finally awakening me out of a sleep of not doing or saying anything until [almost] too late. Time and time again I see rules and procedures, doctrines and dogmas, myths and legends used to protect a power base. And so often I see myself and others not challenging or doing or saying about what is wrong because of fear or laziness, or both.

The established traditions in government, business, and religion have formed a habit of using ‘the rules and procedures’ to protect themselves and their interests, while threatening or actually using punitive punishment against others. And, the [Thai Forest] tradition seems to be amongst the worst at using rules, myths and legends, to protect themselves – and simply ignore [all other] human suffering.

Well done to [all those involved in the bhikkhuni ordinations] for having the courage to [stand] for what is right.”

- “All this may be the biggest problem of our time.[Buddhism] should be the place where it is most important to [ensure] gender equality. Patriarchy is the reason why we have any problem at all, but the true Dhamma is beyond forms, feelings, and perceptions....”

- I believe we should all do metta practice for the [Elders and Ajahns] who don't support [bhikkhuni ordination], and who excommunicated [one of their own] from their organization. Metta to all these suffering men...."

- "I think what we are witnessing here, in the light of the 5 Points and the stark contrast to that with the Perth ordinations, is the waking up of the lay community to realities of the power dynamics within the monastic sangha that many of [those] who are/were monastics have been aware of for a long time.

The discrepancy between what gets talked and what gets walked... The feelings of confusion, despair, disappointment, and for some alienation, are also shared by those who are subjected to the unhealthy wielding of power, without checks and balances, by the few within the 'elder council', (and that seems to not be all elders; there seems to be a culture of intimidation where any variance of view is mentioned).

This is crazy-making [because] what is unhealthy then becomes the norm, which creates many strange inner and outer resonances [such as] problems with trust, authenticity, diminished capacity for love and kinship, fear, and paranoia. Those of course who do 'leave' in one way or another, often walk into invisibility, shame, self doubt. It's a painful and complex legacy that has been well hidden.

Like any abusive and dysfunctional situation, when it first comes to light there is potential for shock, blame, denial, justification, abdication of responsibility by those who have perpetrated it."

- "It is sad and very disappointing to read about the unfair and draconian way the WPP sangha has dealt with [those involved in the bhikkhuni ordinations]. Fancy asking to change four venerable bhikkhunis into mae chis!). Metta to all suffering beings..."

- "I believe we are all wise enough to choose our own path and the teachers we follow. We all can [see] the wisdom of [those involved in the bhikkhuni ordinations]. [Let us not] dwell on the fact that an Ajahn has been excommunicated, when we can dwell on celebrating the courage of those bhikkhus and new bhikkhunis. Metta – and dana! – to all these monks and nuns alike!"

- “If these Five Points are in fact real [it’s hard to believe], then I feel that they just condemn the authors and supporters of the Five Points into (eventual) irrelevance and obscurity. What century are we living in, for goodness sake? Keep it real. Keep up the fight for women to be given equal access to Dhamma-Vinaya.”

- “The way I see it, when it comes to Vinaya, it is not enough to know only the “rule”, but also to see with the [heart into] the rule. Otherwise it is [too] easy to follow a rule, yet miss the entire spirit of it. By not examining or understanding the reasons behind a rule, we can apply it in the wrong way and can [cause] unnecessary harm to ourselves and others. The Buddha was said to constantly remind his students that it is the spirit that counts [most].”

- “I find it extremely sad that such a noble event as the bhikkhuni ordination has elicited such an extreme reaction from that group of WPP monks. How things have changed since the Buddha’s time!”

- “Of course you are uncertain, Kalamas. Of course you are in doubt. When there are reasons for doubt, uncertainty is born. So in this case, Kalamas, don't go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, 'This contemplative is our teacher.' When you know for yourselves that, 'These qualities are unskillful; these qualities are blameworthy; these qualities are criticized by the wise; these qualities, when adopted and carried out, lead to harm and to suffering' — then you should abandon them.”

- “A man hears inspiring dhamma teachings and sees a wise example from a bhikkhuni and [he] gains faith in the Buddha and the path, and decides to go forth. A woman hears inspiring dhamma teachings and sees a wise example from a bhikkhu and [she] gains faith in the Buddha and the path, and decides to go forth. All [may] go forth for the ending of all suffering and the realization of nibbana; it just seems so natural and right, as the Buddha intended.”

- “I do not understand that just because a few monks did things ‘their own’ way (and the way of the Buddha), why this should delay further discussion, plans and actions to [fully] revive the Theravada bhikkuni order.

I support the full reinstatement of the Theravada bhikkuni order and any sangha who makes an effort to revive this noble tradition.

I do not support those who unreasonably, irrationally or cowardly oppose the reviving of the tradition due to their own cultural reasons.”

- “Something has happened – and as we all know, when awakening happens on any level, one can’t go back to sleep. What one can do in such a situation is to follow one’s inner wisdom as best as possible [since the heart] will be the most true guide in the end.

Meanwhile, there is a possibility that a more open and honest community will emerge from this mess – perhaps even a paradigm shift, if there is enough awareness and willingness to move the situation into dialogue within the four-fold sangha.”

- “I’m stunned and saddened by this chain of events, and grateful to and all the men and women who took part in and supported the bhikkhuni ordinations.”

- “It is hard for us “Westerners” to appreciate the depth of the Thai Forest tradition leadership attachment to existing power structures, authority and tradition (however flawed). It is not adherence to power structure, but adherence to the Dhamma-Vinaya established by the Buddha in which goodness arises. If the Elders were not insulated by the Thai government, they would have lost their material support and power years ago.

The irony is that this current drama will only enhance the international prestige of, and support for, bhikkhuni ordination.

I still have tremendous respect and gratitude for the Thai Forest Tradition, and those many arahants produced within this Tradition. Over time, however, all traditions are subject to defilement, old age and death. We can’t take refuge in temporal traditions, only in the Dhamma.”

- “It’s important for us all to remember that lay supporters/practitioners have always provided the ‘checks and balances’ for monastic power. This was encouraged, respected and allowed by the Buddha. Therefore as a lay person, I feel it is reasonable to withhold financial support [to monks] until more clarity is achieved.”

- “Silence in general has kept the serious lay practitioner in the dark about the power dynamics [at the highest levels]. It is a painful awakening but undoubtedly a blessing as well. My practice is [now] stronger not weaker, better informed, not worse, more compassionate not less, and ultimately more self-contained within this "very one-fathom long" body with its perceptions and thoughts.”

- “When [the 5 Points] were presented to the siladharas, they were told that if they did not accept them, then no more siladhara ordinations would be granted and their [entire] order would die out. There were two candidates for ordination who have been waiting since February but it all had to be put on hold until these points were agreed upon. [Essentially, it was] 'gun to the head and sign here'. They have definitely shot themselves in the foot with these Five Points. Thailand is one thing, but you can't get away with this in the West.”

- “What the Elders and Ajahns have failed to do is acknowledge that:

- 1) The position they have taken is a product of ‘conditioning’ that is not in accord with Dhamma or Vinaya; and
- 2) That ‘awakening the heart’ and ‘recognising our own conditioning’ best occurs within a loving context.

Loving contexts do not support these inequitable, unfair power structures that are not from the Buddha. What is from the Buddha is something that they have admitted is a legitimate possibility.

Why aren’t [the Western Ajahns] willing to look at this? [Because] they don’t want to lose their connections with their Thai peers. And why is this so important? [Because of the] worldly gains of emotional, financial, nostalgic, and power support that they gain.

But the real gain [may be] the unique and spectacular form of access they have to those other highly attained beings within [their] tradition. This access is made easier, more personal through their positions as fully ordained male Sangha. Perhaps they are even unaware of this great investment on their part.”

- “Anyone who wishes to exclude women from fully following the monastic path, is a patriarch first and a monk only in name. Metta to all beings.”
- “This [whole situation] leaves me disgusted and saddened. I may simply say to those that wish to renounce the nuns or those who participated in the ordination, that to do so will not only hurt these good people, but themselves, as this [reaction] will [harm] [many] more people than were directly involved.”
- “We here in [the USA] were saddened to hear about these events. My support for [those involved in the bhikkhuni ordinations] is only strengthened by the news of the circumstances surrounding the expulsion. Kudos to [all those involved in the bhikkhuni ordinations] for not quavering in this tough situation.”
- “The "5 Points" are an incredible slap [in the] face. Bless all the Sisters [who are] sitting with this latest setback and trying to find ways to peace.”
- “I would have liked to have seen the siladharas take a stand and reject the Five Points from the outset, but then they would have been excommunicated just like [one of their own monks] has been. [For the siladharas], [the monastic path] is their whole life, and other than disrobing they don't have many options. Welcome to the dark, seedy world of the Thai Forest tradition.”
- “My support for the Thai Forest sangha whas now been transferred to [all those involved in the bhikkhuni ordinations].”

- “By expelling [one of their own] from their “men only club”, they have insulted the Buddha. I choose my teachers with great care and by this action you have expelled yourselves from my support.”
- “I am a man and have attended several retreats led by bhikkhunis, and have found them to be the most [beneficial] retreats of all.”
- “It is a shame that democracy does not exist in Thailand, but even more shame that it does not exist in [Buddhism and] the WPP.”
- “If I am to go forth, I will go forth in that lineage which honours most closely the Buddha’s teaching and legacy. If given the option, I shall pursue nothing less.

It is a matter of integrity and taking the Buddha’s teaching sincerely to heart. He encouraged women to practice as Bikkhunis, and that is my highest aspiration. Any other way compromises the fundamental messages and teachings of the Buddha.”

- A huge ‘thank you’ to the WPP for giving us this marvellous opportunity to put our practice to practise! For all of us – monks and laypeople – living in places where there is peace and harmony, with our material needs easily met, having the company of good friends and easy access to the Dhamma, it is easy enough to become complacent in our practice, those nasty kilesas and asavas well hidden and locked away by delusion.

And now how they rise in anger and ill-will, jealousy, judgement, blame ... the full works!

Now’s the time for forgiveness and metta, for compassion to those caught up in anger, for mudita – joy – that the Bhikkhuni Sasana is established in [the West], and finally the tough one, equanimity – upekkha towards the whole situation.

‘And this too shall pass.’ All this will subside in time and the bhikkhuni sangha will grow from strength to strength.”

- “[I] remember the huge uproar there was in Sri Lanka when Bhikkhuni Kusuma and a few brave women, supported by many courageous monks, received ordination at Bodh Gaya 12 years [or so] ago.

Most of the sangha were against it – and many still are. But the tide cannot, will not, be turned back. There are now over 600 Bhikkhunis in Sri Lanka, and Venerable Kusuma is setting up a training center for bhikkhunis ‘with the hope that under a single umbrella organisation, a new Bhikkhuni organisation will arise under one banner’.

Women at long last have the same opportunity as men for the training needed to progress along the [holy] path. If it could be easily accomplished by leading a lay life, or as an anagarika keeping 10 precepts, the Blessed One would not have set up a structured sangha for bhikkhunis.

He saw it fit 26 centuries ago to ordain women, and it is even more fitting in the 21st century when all women seek to be equal partners [in Dhamma].”

- “The 5 Points are self-serving. Serving who, I ask? Not the lay person [seeking] spiritual guidance. Serving the sangha? Which sangha? The [elite] male sangha? The terrible answers [to these questions] are all there in the 5 Points.”

- “I remember the ten-precept nuns – dasa sil mathas – of yore. They were mostly poor and not well educated, living on their own or in small groups and practising the best they could. They could not go on pindapat as monks did, instead going to homes of people they knew, collecting provisions and fending for themselves. Sometimes they’d be invited to someone’s home for a meal.

I remember too meeting a young Swiss 10 precept nun in Sri Lanka, about 15 years ago, in tears because there was nowhere she could go to receive a proper training.

On a recent visit to Sri Lanka I attended several Dhamma discussions by well known monks, where about 90% of the [attendees] were women. It is women who seem to treasure and value the Dhamma most. [This] may be because women are more sensitive to suffering and seek a way out.

Theravadans should be ashamed that we do not adhere to the spirit of the Buddha’s teaching, and accept that we are equal in the Dhamma. The [Buddha] ordained people of both genders.”

- “I've just spent [hours] reading about issues that I hadn't fully grasped even after 25 years of visiting CBM and ABM. And I am appalled. They're teaching one thing, and doing something entirely different.

It's amazing that [with these 5 Points], they're willing to put such lack of awareness in writing. They seem to have no idea how... the hurtful, stone-age thinking... regarding 5-Point agenda will be received generally in the lay community.

Sadly, that illustrates just how completely out of touch they are with the reality of gender equality in the West. In the end] they might find that they have bitten the very hand that (literally) feeds them.”

- “How unbelievable, and heartbreaking, to excommunicate [one of their own monks]. If I wanted to write a sketch to discredit Theravada Buddhism, this would be it. This is the very sort of thing that drives people away to Tibetan and Zen Buddhism.

I have stuck with this 'school' for years because the style and the teachings seem to suit me best. But this sort of thing from the Elders has been a constant problem. From this day forward, it will be impossible for me to take refuge in the WPP sangha.”

- “Loss of innocence is painful. But through that loss we can leave behind childish things and emerge, albeit shakily, a bit older, a bit wiser.

This hurricane has, strange though it may be, turned out better than anyone [in support of bhikkhunis] could have planned.

The opponents of bhikkhuni ordination in the WPP sangha [have] brought shame and embarrassment onto themselves and [their institution].”

- “With this ending, we also have a beginning. And between endings and beginnings, there is continuity. The Buddha would have us bring together those who have been separate. We need not reject all that we have learned from those poor WPP Elders and Ajahns who have disappointed us. They still have some wisdom too. Only, not so much as we may have once thought.”

- “Why are Western monks, who, unlike many of their Eastern counterparts, have a fair idea of what equality between all genders entails, stuck with Asian lineages that seem to have great respect for some of the moribund customs of today? Seriously, when are we going to have a truly “Western school” of Buddhism? For the record, I am a non-Westerner.”

- “It is both a relief and yet heart wrenching to see what was 'under the surface' of WPP for so long coming out into public debate. That this 'fall out' is happening is, in many ways, really a long time coming.

Much could have been avoided with more skilful behaviour and openness from LP regarding the nuns and lay community. The silence from other Elders is unfortunate and complicit in creating the painful confusion that is now swirling around. I'm so sorry and sad that it has come to this mess.”

- “Let’s not create obstruction for the female gender because we are stuck on a minor rule that the pavattini needed to be Theravada in particular (if it really even does anyway).

In the Mahaparinibbana Sutta, the Buddha, as part of his last teaching, tells the bhikkhus that they can abandon some minor rules, but that they should stick to the major ones; but since they can’t discern which is which, they decided to keep all of them without distinguishing which are the minor ones that can be abandoned. The Buddha doesn’t suggest that they should adhere to all minor rules regardless of any negative consequences [doing so] may cause. He does allow the monks to abandon some minor rules, and stick to the major ones.

[In the current situation] the decision to adhere to all minor rules are that of bhikkhus who cannot discern for themselves which are the minor ones that can be abandoned.

Besides, that minor rule that the pavattini has to be Theravada is not even in the real Vinaya of the Buddha in the first place! It does not state in the Vinaya that the pavattini has to be Theravadan! This is something that comes much later; from someone else [other than the Buddha].

[In fact], the word “Theravada Bhikkhuni” can’t be found [anywhere] in the Vinaya.

- “It's unfortunate to hear the deafening silence from the Elders in response to the storm of reaction that is gathering. I feel what is needed is for there to be authentic, heart and true communication from the Elders to these recent events -- not smoke screens, blame, legal arguments, defensiveness. The situation calls for nothing less than honesty, authenticity, humility and most of all heart, from those same Elders that seem to ask this from those they teach.”

- It is a sad day for [all those] who are travelling towards Enlightenment. These ‘trained’ Elders and Ajahns are stopped at the Station of Ego. Have the bhikkus ever thought what would happen if they were to be reborn as women who wished to become bhikkhunis?”

- “The accusation was that [the excommunicated monk] had “failure of view”; in other words, not obeying the views of the WPP.”

- “I can’t believe they are excommunicating one of the most highly developed monks of modern times. [This monk] is doing the very thing that is so much needed. The very thing that others are keeping a blind eye to!”

But what about non-identification with form (as well as other aggregates) as self? Why treat others differently because of their form? How come the Elders can’t take into consideration the essence of the Buddha-Dhamma when making a decision? Why don’t the WPP [Elders and Ajahns] know what Lord Buddha teaches?”

- “I hope they don’t send someone from WPP to replace the excommunicated Western monk. We need bhikkhus [like him] who embody the Dhamma, and no nonsense monks to share the true teachings of the Buddha. Not everyone can do that.”

- “Too many times, I have supported the UK sangha and thought I understood the UK Ajahn’s teaching of submitting into the form. But I can no longer support them or their teachings.”

- “Just a thought: the present Dhammayuttha Elders council in Thailand did not exist until King Rama IV invented them. Now what this means [is that] they are not strictly from the Buddha’s lineage. Actually, this [verifies] that what they say is not right or true to the [Dhamma].”

- “To my mind, the Theravadan ordinations in the West was a case of following the example of the Buddha, who also enabled an ordination of bhikkuni where it hadn’t happened before. Perhaps the WPP should concentrate on following the Buddha’s example, not settling for the much more dubious lead of (some of) the First Council.”

- “Portrayal of women as inferior to men in the 21st century is not only politically incorrect and offensive, it is also downright false.

If Dhamma is about finding the truth of our existence, we need to pay attention to scientific findings as well. Even though scientific findings are not complete, and never will be, there is a mountain of evidence from all branches of science that show that, we as a species, are really not different from even the chimps and bonobos.

So how can we possibly be so different from each other just because we have different sex organs - which are simply different plumbing for biological functions?”

- “Why do we foolishly adhere to [doctrine]? This is superstition. The ‘Vinaya said so, so it must be right, it must be true’. We are here entering into the human habit of ‘blind faith’ and unquestioned assumptions. This is not what the Buddha taught. If Dhamma teachings fall into the same dogmatic pit as other religions, then its survival becomes one of keeping people in bondage through unquestioning assumptions and blind faith. This is also not what the Buddha taught.”

- “A Thai monk recently said that several senior Thai monks sadly admitted that Thai Buddhism might degenerate in a hundred years or so. Why?

Perhaps because many of the Thai male monks have not wholeheartedly practiced the Buddha’s eightfold path and attained enlightenment? We have some good monks and we also have men in saffron robes violating not only Vinaya but also discrimination laws.

As long as one is still lost in the whirlpool of delusions, greed and hatred, one can never walk the Way, let alone guide laypeople on the Way. Who in the Thai male sangha will be wise and compassionate enough to take trouble to seek ways to help women get ordained as bhikkhunis — to walk on the most accommodating path to enlightenment discovered by the Buddha?”

- “From attending the 2007 Hamburg Congress for re-introducing bhikkhuni ordination - presided over by the Dalai Lama - it became clear after the presentation of abstracts from dozens of scholars that the placement of the 8 gaurudhammas is very suspect as the actual Buddha's intention or action. It seems rather that it was a later addition from the Brahmin's at the time; a move to both control the 'new' religion, in part by keeping women in line with the status quo of the time, and an appeasement to conservative forces. The narrative of this history emerged from the first Council led by Mahakassapa, a former Brahmin.

However all that aside, the siladhara aren't bhikkhuni's so shouldn't be subjected to the 8 gaurdhammas. You can't [deny] them bhikkhuni ordination, but then expect them to take on board the most crushing aspect of that ordination.

Given that these points have no legal authority in the ordination of the siladhara; given that they were un-negotiated and hidden from any input from a larger Thera council of course the nuns themselves; given that they have had a crushing effect on the order; given the light of recent scholastic evidence as to the authenticity of the 8 garudhammas; and given that the Vinaya was shaped by the culture of the time of the Buddha -- I feel we should at the very least look to the spirit of what the Buddha intended and act upon that to maintain the healthy transmission of the Dharma here in the West.”

- “So it seems that the WPP are following Maha Kassapa’s lead (if the account is historically accurate), criticising those who seek to enable the recognition of women’s Buddhist practice, and tacitly implying that the Buddha was wrong to ordain women. What we are seeing today is heir to an old old problem in the Sangha.

Ananda also got into trouble for not having asked the Buddha which Vinaya rules could be changed to suit local culture and conditions and which not. Whatever the Buddha would have said, had Ananda asked him, I think one thing is pretty clear: if the Vinaya impedes people from fully realising the dhamma, living it, and passing it on, then it is time for change.

To my mind, the [recent] ordination in the West was a case of following the example of the Buddha, who also enabled an ordination of bhikkuni where it hadn’t happened before. Perhaps the WPP should concentrate on following the Buddha’s example, not on settling for the much more dubious lead of (some of) the First Council.”

- “What I come back to again and again is that in an absence of a map of a way forward is that the movement out of suffering needs to be grounded in clear seeing of the reality of suffering and a whole-hearted commitment not to harm.”

- I [am just a] normal, [everyday] lay Buddhist, one who is actively seeking to enhance and deepen my relationship to Dhamma. [But] I was deeply challenged to find out my Dhamma hero monks were, by their own actions, holding a glass ceiling over the aspirations of women in my tradition to fully ordain.

My first reaction was that these bhikkhus were not only denying the aspirations of any women in this tradition, but they were specifically denying my own aspirations to practice in an enlightened tradition created by Buddha. They were also disavowing my own very fledgling aspiration to one day practice as a monastic as they are now practicing.

My second reaction was to deny them my support.”

- “I have been following the big news in the Thai forest tradition. I think we need to really look into what are behind the reactions from the Elders: lopa,dosa, and moha, aren’t they?? And what lies underneath is ‘Avijjha’ which leads to ‘Upadana’ attachments..... isn’t it?”

- “What's really important to note is that the siladhara order has no official place in the scriptures or Vinaya, whereas the bhikkhuni order does.

Due to its ambiguous nature, the siladhara order is vulnerable and can be subject to all sorts of impositions, changes, modifications, etc. that the bhikkhuni order cannot.

If we're thinking about the sangha established by the Buddha, then the bhikkhuni lineage is the only way to move forwards in order to bring things back into a state of balance and limit the possibility of corruption, etc. This is not to discount the siladhara order, but realistically accepting its vulnerability and lack of protection as it actually is not mentioned anywhere in the Vinaya or scriptures.

It is a modification on genuine nuns ordination as outlined in the Dhammagupta Vinaya. This is something that was construed in the UK about 30 years ago by the monks.”

- “I received the Three Refugees and Five Precepts in 1965, and have been a practicing layman ever since.

I am shattered by this schism in the Thai Forest tradition. Please remember exactly what The Buddha said concerning those who follow the path of Devadatta.

This schism is bringing heartbreak and despair to laypeople who have trusted the monks and fed them for years. And, it is bringing disgrace to our noble religion in the eyes of outsiders.

Whatever the conventions in Thailand may be, for UK/EU monasteries it is imperative they do not break the Convention on Human Rights here. Serious trouble will ensue if this discriminatory practice is taken to an EU Court by an aspiring bhikkhuni seeking ordination and refused on gender grounds alone.”

- “I think there is an opportunity here for those elders who are more 'middle way' from within the Ajahn Chah samvasa to speak out for the sake of harmony, reason and compassion.... and integrity regarding the place of nuns in accordance with what is appropriate for the West and in accord with the spirit of the Dharma.”

- “For me, the continual reminder is that even though I may wish it to be otherwise, the path to less suffering often goes through more suffering -- personal, interpersonal, and collective. And the path to more suffering often is hidden by the immediacy of an effort to eliminate pain and suffering without seeing and understanding as many conditions as possible.

It is a lived experience that the path to less suffering is not linear. I find it to be a fascinating and challenging time to practice. Many blessings and deep bows to all your efforts. I do have faith in all of our collective intentions.”

- “It seems to me, as a simple lay person, that the resistance to bhikkhuni ordination may be simply grasping on to control, or fear of change itself.”

- “There are so many parallels to the current issues of gender in Western Dharma the issues that we are currently going through with multiculturalism in Western Dharma.

In the 80's and 90's there were many dedicated and successful efforts to create women-safe practice spaces as well as to empower women into positions of leadership and teaching in the West. It took a lot of struggle and moving through challenges.

The dynamics of all these experiences, present and past, have many similarities. In greater and greater ways, I hope that what is revealed from all of this is to where the path to less suffering leads us all.

I feel that there is deep wisdom and compassion in all that we have gone through. And also more of both as we move through what is yet to be.”

- “My wife used to pull me [along] to attend talks by Buddhist elders and monks. After each talk, I felt further away from Buddhism, until I attended one by [the monk who was excommunicated]. He is a great communicator, and gave all the answers I was looking for. I learned how to meditate [from him]. In short, I have great respect for [all those involved in the Bhikkhuni ordinations] for not only [their] teachings, but for setting the example for other Buddhists (laypersons and monks) to follow.”

- “To [all those involved in the bhikkhuni ordination], your compassion towards the self-proclaimed guardians of what is “right” is admirable. The ordination [was] a prime example of training put into practise. A lesson other monks should heed.

If any other monks wish to push their heavy barrows further and impose their will upon others, then they must do so with the understanding of what goes around, comes around, i.e. kamma. Any wedge driven by those opposed to bhikkhuni ordination will find it turned against them. They will find themselves isolated rather than isolating the wise monks (and any other supporters) of bhikkhuni ordination.”

- “I see a lot of support for bhikkhuni ordination and this is all we really need to be concentrating on. “
- “In many years as a scientist, and now as a nun, I've never been 'political' -- about either gender or ethnicity. In fact, I looked a bit askance at those who were. But knowing what nuns in Burma face, and now witnessing the recent events/revelations here in the West... it's clear for me personally that ignoring the issue is no longer an option. Hopefully, there are many others out there who have also been 'woken up' by this -- and that a sustainable momentum is created that will carry things forward.”
- “[Power] and control is not the way of the Dhamma – [those involved with the bhikkhuni ordination] only followed the intention of the Buddha – it was the right thing to do. The ‘authority’ of those who continue to oppress cannot bear good fruit. The only way through this is to keep opening the dialogue – dispelling fear to speak out and share – so thanks to [all those involved with the bhikkhuni ordination] for opening the road of healthy communication.”
- “I know that this bhikkhuni ordination lineage will continue now [that] it has begun. No one wants to support [dogma]. A great shame that the Thai Forest Sangha could not have gotten their act together to do it in unison however. But someone had to start this ball rolling, or rather, pull the first brick out of the wall to a chorus of “Don’t! What are you doing – you are pulling down the great wall which protects us...” [In other words], from accountability.”

- “If consensus means 100% agreement with no exceptions, then you will never get it. Someone will always come up with a different view or interpretation. There will always be resistance to change. The psyche favours staying put in the comfort zone; change can be upsetting and uncomfortable. However, that does not mean one should do nothing. Injustices and inequalities should be corrected even if one encounters resistance and criticism especially from your peers. I salute [those monks involved with the bhikkhuni ordination], and all the Theravada bhikkhunis for thier bravery and fortitude. Buddhism in the West should free itself from the cultural baggage of other countries.”
- “A recent example of reform without going through “sangha” consensus and “proper channels” is the abolition of eight conditions (atthagarudhamma) for the bhikkhuni order by the more progressive groups of Mahayana Schools. This, like the Theravadan bhikkhuni ordination controversy, also created some stir but at the end of the day, it is a reform so pertinent to modern era of gender equality and undoubtedly in the spirit and the motivation of the Buddha in treating all Sentient Beings without any discrimination.”
- “Did the Buddha not say there are 84,000 ways to teach, and did he not find gentle ways to persuade non-Dhamma friends to come and listen to the Dhamma each according to their conditions? Does each of us know the “best way” while “the other” does not? Look more deeply. I have something to learn from every way, every situation, and if I am not learning, I need to look more deeply. I am not seeing your compassion...I know it is there somewhere...I will look more deeply too.”
- “Please know that so many of us rejoice in the ordination and support [those involved with the bhikkhuni ordination].”
- “Thank you to all those interesting in helping the development and establishment of the Theravadan bhikkhuni sangha. “The Vinaya is intended to support and encourage human beings to find liberation from suffering.” [Remembering this] really makes the goal of what we’re trying to do here clear. Monastic life is there to support and encourage all human beings to find liberation.... the Vinaya and leading the holy path makes it much easier to meditate, renounce and awaken from delusion. It is important [for all beings] to have the [opportunity] to lead this monastic life.”

- “Listen to how the Buddha [himself] described bhikkhunis: ‘[A] bhikkhuni is auspicious, a bhikkhuni is the essential, a bhikkhuni is a learner, a bhikkhuni is an adept, a bhikkhuni is ordained by both complete Orders by means of a (formal) act at which the motion is put and followed by three proclamations, irreversible and fit to stand.’ (Vin iv 213 (emphasis added).) There can be no doubt as to original principals regarding women entering and finding support in the holy life.’

- “[The] summation ‘The Vinaya rule [one of the Ajahns] quotes was intended to curb the bad behavior of unscrupulous monks, not to stop human beings from practicing Dhamma because they have different reproductive organs’ is a true gem. This really puts things in the right perspective. Hopefully, people will not miss this line and contemplate it carefully and I am sure it will clear the confusion.

The mass of evidence in support of bhikkhuni ordination has been ignored for too long. The voices that tended to be the loudest in the past have been those who focused on the few places in the Pali Canon where it appeared that He did not support nuns. I only wish these voices had been questioned earlier.

The argument makes it clear that in “what is affirmed as the oldest strata of the Theravada Buddhist teaching” there is no ambiguity regarding the strong place and status of women in Buddhism; they are there as bhikkhunis practising and variously realising the Dhamma. No doubt about it, despite the later textual incursions, interpretations, impositions, and even immolations that posit a dim view of women.

What I found poignant is this: that in this oldest strata of the teaching “gender discrimination belongs to the sphere of Mara and those deluded in the lay world”.”

- “Thrash about as they may, the Thai secular and religio-institutional authorities have no power over [stopping bhikkhuni ordination in the West]. Nor do they have any power over anyone who takes in [the Buddha’s true] message – all this concern for titles and power and face is [just] chaff to Dhamma.”

- “The problem is that some may have the idea that in order for any bhikkhu ordinations to be valid, one’s preceptor must have a kind of ‘licence’ from the Thai Sangha authorities first (or equivalent authority) – such that any further ordinations Ajahn Brahm performs will be invalid, or at least not recognised if these monks choose to visit Thailand, to live in Thai monasteries. I know this is all outside of the Vinaya. Only the Vinaya can determine one’s ability to act as a preceptor, not some State controlled politico-bureaucracy.”

- Dhamma is perhaps to be absorbed by the heart above all, and to be interpreted by the mind with caution. Attempts to 'preserve' the interpretations by being attached to rites and rituals can be dangerous, as the Buddha pointed out.

I have found it increasingly difficult not to be depressed by authoritative men who 'appear' to be intent on finding a legalistic reason to withhold recognition of the ordinations, not because of the event itself but because it will allow some women to participate, even though the Buddha himself said that they had equal spiritual potential."

- "I do not have such an issue with the Thai Ajahns, they are beholden to their own culture and history. I am however deeply saddened by [all the] Western Ajahns who seem to be unable to think or act without Thai approval.

When "respect" for the Thai Sangha overwhelms natural justice, when legal argument replaces compassion, when concerns about procedure are greater than concerns about principle – then there is a real problem.

There is nothing Buddhist about enforcing regulations and procedures that disenfranchise any group in the Sangha. Would they support a rule that prevented blacks from ordination? Or Greenlanders? Or former Baptists? Or there was a height requirement? Of course they would not.

Would they believe for a moment that the Buddha intended any of these groups to be treated that way? Of course not."

- "Looking at recent events - besides the enormous complexity of the shared legacy of 2,553 years of the Buddhasana - it seems that a few monks pushed the agenda to create this split.

In terms of [those involved with the bhikkhuni ordination], they referenced back to the original intention of the Buddha and were motivated by compassion, for the welfare of making this opportunity open for women, and also to accord with the needs and current climate of our contemporary culture.

It seems that aside from those few who pushed the 'expulsion' at the meeting in Thailand on Nov 1st – just a few monks from how I've read the statements – there was the sense that the majority would have moved to 'cover over with grass' and allow the samvasa to hold.... an approach I can only think Ajahn Chah would have approved of."

- “After having taken the full ordination, the ‘upasampada’, it really has given me a sense of at last my good wishes are being fulfilled.

Being a monastic I always have a very strong sense of duty and responsibility to fulfill the Vinaya precepts. Some people have said it doesn’t matter whether you are a bhikkhuni or not, as long as you keep it in your heart. In the past I had the same mentality too, until some time ago. I realised that it doesn’t actually work.

As many supporters of Dhammasara Nuns’ Monastery know, the nuns from Dhammasara have been upholding many more precepts than just the ten precepts. Some time ago when I went back to Malaysia to visit my family, I met a senior monk trying to tell me that as a Ten Precept Nun or Samaneri, I do not need to keep those rules. I felt that trying to keep 311 Patimokkha rules as a Ten Precept Nun that people would think you are crazy or making a big fuss. Recently I have been reflecting on one of the discourses from Majjhima Nikaya 6. It really gives me lots of joy and happiness: ”

“Akankheyya Sutta — If a Bhikkhu Should Wish (Extract): “Bhikkhus, dwell possessed of virtue, possessed of the Patimokkha, restrained with the restraint of the Patimokkha, perfect in conduct and resort and seeing fear in the slightest fault, train by undertaking the training precepts.

If a bhikkhu should wish: ‘May I be dear and agreeable to my companions in the holy life, respected and esteemed by them’, let him fulfil the precepts, be devoted to internal serenity of mind, not neglect meditation, be possessed of insight, and dwell in empty huts. If a bhikkhu should wish: ‘May I be one to obtain robes, almsfood, resting place and medicinal requisites’ let him fulfil the precepts...”

- “To echo something that was said earlier, I am amazed at the level of fear, denial, almost soporific group trance that the UK monasteries seem to be in the sway of. I feel that our role as concerned, observant lay people is to try and wake monastics up to what is happening in their name”

When I read this in the ongoing discussion on the web I felt a strong need - as a woman living in the UK communities for over a decade - to write a response.

What I want to say is: I am not asleep to what is happening. I applaud the current unfurling of the complexities and denials that are active in our community life. The issue for me is not just one of gender equality or democracy, though those are important results that come from a heart that is genuinely open and something I very much wish to see. This, to me, is rooted in a spiritual emergency.

The core of why I came here is this: I was deeply suffering but sensed, even more deeply, that in our very nature is the capacity to awaken. Hearing the Buddha's teaching on non-clinging brought a light which has helped an inner perspective to grow. Where is the heart closed, where is there fear, need to control, protect, hide etc? Learning to let this light flow and be active - to bring its power to transform into real, living life - this is the human/spiritual journey as I see... My experience shows it does bring space for wisdom, love, and compassion to shine. From our nature - all of us.

To have been able to ordain was in effect making an outer commitment to this inner capacity to awaken. Tradition, a vehicle. Living in a place where I felt a shared aspiration has been profoundly helpful. Having a community, teachings, living as an alms mendicant, have nourished me beyond words. I want to see that openly and fully available for anyone to whom it is beneficial, as the Buddha intended.

In these ways I respect the place of teachers, of tradition and of training.

But any aspect that has become institutionalised can cut rather than celebrate this awakening life. In everyone: those that apparently hold power as much as those who apparently don't. Whatever spiritual authority comes through our forms, if it is true, belongs to no-one, and everyone, so when the form takes hold of it - in rigid hierarchies or whatever - we are lost.

Structure/freedom, solitude/engagement, accepting teachings/knowing one's inner authority - these are some of the most wonderful and creative paradoxes we have. But when rigidity sets in, and uses liberation teachings and vinaya to justify its stance, the creative relationship with freedom is endangered (to say the least).

It is out of concern for this, as a monastic regarding the "what is happening in our name", that I feel moved to write.

What I see happening in our name is spiritual justification of certain loyalties - to Thailand, to the lineage and whatever attitudes prevail in that family. Of course this has, in part, a genuine spiritual basis in terms of a lineage of teachers who have truly affected one's life, and I respect that, I feel and honour it in myself.

But there is also a loyalty process that is more to do with the sense of family, with acceptance and, importantly, with support, social, political and financial. Examining family values is notoriously difficult; they get embedded. Without listening to outside feedback, without valuing it, without being willing to speak when timely and risk losing support, we just condition each other in certain attitudes - around hierarchy, gender, around what is or isn't proper practice. And how then does one preserve an openness of view? How does practice connect to anything outside its own small world? What happens when one steps out - as is evident with Aj Brahm - is uproar...

Experiencing this kind of 'world closure' - ever more clearly - is heartbreaking. This, and the external imbalance of male/female, the more obvious issue at hand, are both, to me, symptoms of a deeper spiritual issue.

Both reflect to me an inner split of masculine/feminine that spiritually and in the world has powerful effects. There is a split: purity of mind/ heart is taken as something that makes one move right away from the world - rather than more fully able to experience (whatever) from a place of presence.

It becomes clear - if the feminine is the more embodied, connected aspect of being, then to exclude it, outside or inside any of us, leaves us vulnerable to closing down to parts of ourselves, to others and to the world. As seems to be happening. This is the spiritual emergency I feel we are in.

This is truly heartbreaking when the Buddha's teaching is such an open ground. I experience it as something like a betrayal of the beauty and potential that is within us all. Not defeating, but deeply, deeply saddening and sobering.

Where it leaves me is with an ever firmer conviction that practice must be connected in our lives. That our work as monastics is not just to transcend the world - when anyway, even as renunciates, we live in it - but to acknowledge the drives of fear, anger, control, desire, human need - and not just play them out in our monastic forms. Then the vinaya could again become a vehicle that facilitates awakening rather than a model of purity that replaces the heart. Its a big task.

What nourishes me is that the model of practice that the Buddha established was not something static. 2500 years ago, in the social conditions of his time, the Buddha established ordination for women. The vinaya was established through a series of responses to specific situations. Responses. He also took conventions of purity and reestablished them in saying a Brahmin is not a Brahmin by birth alone but by deed. This was a fearless heart putting its wisdom and clarity into action. He was connecting practice in the world.

So, personally, I find the discussions and events unfolding crucially important. Questioning: issues of authority, how transcendence can become avoidance (so, integration), the importance of presence and embodiment...these are basic and pressing areas.

If, as someone said recently, these are areas of more 'feminine' insight, they are something the presence of women in and around this tradition can bring - and partly why we (and men who enter these arenas) seem to be so threatening. We are not the threat. It is that work that is the threat, but so important in terms of Dhamma." ~Sr. Sumedha