

Present

The Voices and Activities of Theravada Buddhist Women | Winter 2012

September 29, 2012

The 2nd Annual International Bhikkhuni Day

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A Sima of Flowers: An Interview with Ayya Ananadabodhi and Ayya Santacitta
Unveiling Bhikkhunis in Oblivion: What Deccan Cave Inscriptions Reveal about the Ancient Bhikkhuni Sangha
Zhao Hui (1957-): An Innovative and Reforming Taiwanese Bhikkhuni
Bhikkhuni Nirodha on Ordaining and Renunciation
Etaṃ Santam: Etaṃ Panītam (This is Peaceful, This is Excellent) Reflections on Monastic Life at
Aranya Bodhi Hermitage, California, USA
Practical Dharma and Our Korean Sisters—An Interview with Martine Batchelor
Reflections from Around the World on the 1st Annual International Bhikkhuni Day

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

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A Sima of Flowers

An Interview with Ayya Anandabodhi and Ayya Santacitta

by Donna McCarthy

The dew was still wet on the grass, but the sun was beginning to take the chill out of the morning air. Three deer grazed their breakfast on the hill beyond the Meditation Hall. At Spirit Rock, on the morning of October 17, 2011, about 350 friends, supporters, staff and teachers from Spirit Rock, as well as over fifty monastics from Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana traditions gathered at the Meditation Hall to celebrate an historic event. On this auspicious day three Buddhist monastic women, samaneri, were about to be fully ordained as bhikkhunis in the Theravada tradition.



Spirit Rock Meditation Hall and Deer

Significance of the Ordination

The event was historic because bhikkhuni ordinations, although prevalent during the time of the Buddha, had died out in the Theravada tradition some 1000 years ago and are only recently beginning to be revived. All of the noted speakers addressed this in their talks:

“Today we witness a truly historic occasion, along with the other very recent Theravada bhikkhuni ordinations in Sri Lanka, Australia, Northern California, and most courageously, those that have happened in Thailand. For over 1,000 years Theravada bhikkhuni ordination has not been possible. But today, we are seeing the re-emergence of the full and proper place for female mendicants within the Holy Sasana of the Buddha. It’s been a long, long wait.” (From the closing address given at the ordination by Thanissara, Dharmagiri Buddhist Hermitage, South Africa, Buddhist teacher and former siladhara nun.)

Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi said, “For Sisters Ānandabodhi and Santacittā, in particular, the road has been hard. When they tried to fulfill their dream, they must have found it strange to be told that the doors were locked and the key had long ago vanished, that we must wait for the next Buddha to bring it back thousands

of years in the future.”

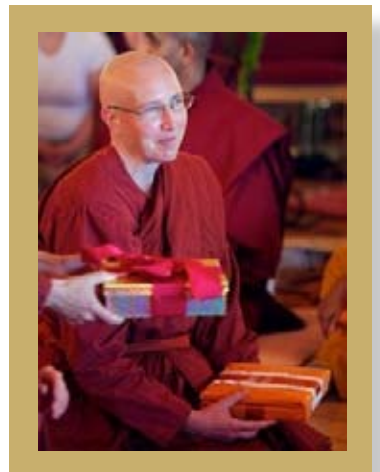
And Venerable Bhikkhu Anaalayo, in his talk on the ordination said, “The revival of the bhikkhuni tradition is, in my personal view, the most significant development for the Theravāda tradition of the 21st century..... Today’s event is another step in this direction, namely the revival of a full Buddhist community of four assemblies by reviving the bhikkhuni sangha.”

Although there have been several smaller bhikkhuni ordinations in this tradition in the past few years, this was one of the first ordinations that truly had the feeling of being “mainstream,” not only because of its location at Spirit Rock, but because of the wide support, both active and passive, of Theravada monks.

The Bhikkhuni Candidates

Ayya Anandabodhi was born in Wales in 1968. She first came across the Buddha’s teaching on the Four Noble Truths at the age of fourteen and felt a deep confidence that the Buddha knew the way out of suffering. She has practiced meditation since 1989 and lived in Amaravati and Chithurst monasteries in the UK from 1992 until 2009, training with the community of siladharas under the guidance of Ajahn Sumedho and Ajahn Sucitto.

In 2009, she moved to the US at the invitation of the Saranalo Foundation to help establish Aloka Vihara, a Theravada Buddhist monastic residence for women. Ayya Anandabodhi currently resides at Aloka Vihara in San Francisco and offers teachings at the Vihara as well as in the wider Bay Area and occasionally in other parts of the US. The example and teachings of Ajahn Chah continue to be a source of inspiration and guidance in her life and practice.



Ayya Anandabodhi Presenting Gifts

Photos: Ed Ritger / www.edritger.com

Ayya Santacitta was born in Austria in 1958 and has practiced meditation for over twenty years. After graduating in hotel management, she studied cultural anthropology and worked in avant-garde dance theatre as a performer and costume designer.

Her first teacher was Ajahn Buddhadasa, whom she met in 1988 and who sparked her interest in Buddhist monastic life. She has trained as a nun in both the East and West since 1993, primarily with the siladhara community at Amaravati Monastery under the guidance of Ajahn Sumedho. Since 2002, she also integrates Dzogchen teachings of the Vajrayana into her practice.

Ayya Santacitta is co-founder of Aloka Vihara, where she has lived since 2009. She offers teachings at the Vihara, as well as in the wider Bay Area and occasionally other parts of the US, sharing her experience in community as a means for cultivating the heart and opening the mind.



Ayya Santacitta Bearing Gifts

Ayya Nimmala, a native of Canada, has been stewarding and training at Theravada Buddhist monasteries in Canada for the last five years. She

became an anagarika in 2008 and then took samaneri ordination in 2010, both at Sati Saraniya Hermitage, with Ayya Medhanandi as preceptor. She is currently training at Sati Saraniya Hermitage and is a member of that community in Perth, Ontario, headed by Abbess Ayya Medhanandi Bhikkhuni. Ayya Medhanandi was also a siladhara nun in the UK with Ayya Anandabodhi and Ayya Santacitta before she ordained as a bhikkhuni in Taiwan.



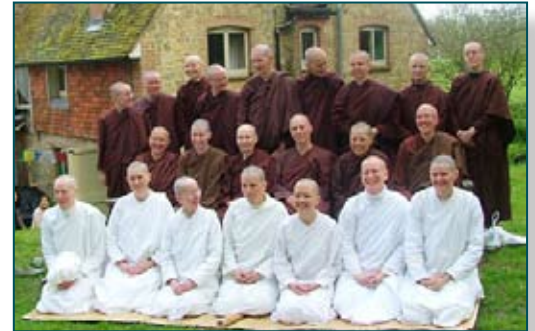
Ayya Nimmala Finishes Her Vow Taking

Brief Background of the Theravada Tradition and the Siladhara Path

Historically, in Thailand, the only monastic option for Buddhist women was that of a mae chee, eight-precept nun. In 1979, at Chithurst Buddhist Monastery in the UK, a branch monastery in the Thai Forest Tradition of Ajahn Chah, a group of four women requested and received permission from the abbot, Ajahn Sumedho, to become mae chee. After four years, the eight precepts did

not provide an appropriate training and the lay community asked that the nuns be given a higher ordination. Ajahn Sumedho requested and received permission from the Thai Sangha for them to take ten precepts, relinquishing the handling of money, cooking and driving. They began wearing dark brown robes to distinguish them from the saffron robes of the monks. Thus the siladhara nun's order was established.

When Ajahn Sumedho took this step to create the siladhara order, it was a radical development giving the nuns an opportunity to be alms mendicants, an opportunity that was not available to them in Thailand. The siladhara order began to grow and gave many women an opportunity to train. These communities at Amaravati and Chithurst were very successful in terms of excellence of training and forming a cohesive nuns' community.



Siladhara Ten Precept Nuns Order – UK

Thanissara explains, "Since then, in the English monasteries of the Forest Sangha of Ajahn Chah, where Ayya Anandabodhi, Ayya Santacitta, and Ayya Nimmala's teacher—Ayya Medhanandi—trained, there have been forty-four siladhara who have ordained over the last, nearly thirty, years. The siladhara, who are categorized as ten-precept nuns, actually lived and still live as bhikkhunis, in all but legal status."

Subsequently, several of senior siladhara, Venerables Medhanandi, Thanasanti, and now Anandabodhi and Santacitta, wishing to pass on full ordination for future generations of women, have chosen to follow the bhikkhuni path. Their past struggles, and their courage, have "broken trail" for others who wish to follow. One might say of Ayya Nimmala that she enjoys the first fruit of their struggle.

Leave Taking

In order to take full ordination Ayya Anandabodhi and Ayya Santacitta formally "took leave" of the siladhara community and the Ajahn Chah Lineage, which does not offer the option of full ordination for women. In fact, bhikkhuni ordination was specifically prohibited by the "Five Points."¹

In April of 2011, in announcing their intention to take leave of their order and become bhikkhunis, the nuns wrote:

"Since our arrival here last December, we recognize more and more the impact on our hearts of those five points and the vulnerability of the siladhara ordination, which is valid only in the Ajahn Chah/Ajahn Sumedho lineage. The ready availability in the U.S. of bhikkhuni ordination offers us a new platform for

the establishment of a training monastery for women. Taking all these things into consideration, we have come to the decision to move towards taking bhikkhuni ordination to provide a stronger container to pass on to other women.”

Donna: Can you describe your “leave taking” from the Ajahn Chah lineage; what was that experience like? Were there any places where you felt fear but went ahead?

Ayya Anandabodhi: The nuns received us with warmth and respect and it was very touching to see them again, having been through so much together over the years and knowing that we were meeting in order to part. I appreciated the leave-taking ceremony. The whole of the siladhara community and four senior bhikkhus were present and sat encircling us as we took leave. I felt there was an honoring of what we have given to the community over the years. The leave taking ceremony was an opportunity for us to acknowledge what we have received there and to ask forgiveness for any harm we may have caused others and to offer forgiveness in return. It felt empowering to be able to so clearly state my intention to leave in order to continue my practice as a Theravadan bhikkhuni. I appreciated the dignity and kindness within which the ceremony was held.

I can’t say I experienced fear during the process of leaving. I could not have ignored the call to take bhikkhuni ordination, any more than I could have ignored the calling to enter monastic life in the first place. The whole process seems to have been held within a greater intention than my own.

Ayya Santacitta: The leave taking at Amaravati went very well. For sure, the siladhara sisters were very supportive and helped to make the ceremony a kind and heartfelt one. We stayed for one week at Amaravati and had time to say “good bye” individually and also as a group. We were given blessings by the monks and the nuns and a lovely departure with a rose petal shower and chanting. There was no fear and it all felt very clear, actually I really did not feel that there was another option for me. The only other options beside bhikkhuni ordination would have been to become a wandering ten- precept nun or to disrobe.

Since my first days in Ajahn Buddhadasa’s monastery in Thailand, I felt called to help set up a monastery for women. That was in the early 90s. It has taken a long time for this intention to start ripening and in 2009 I followed Saranaloaka’s invitation to come to the Bay Area in order to help with setting up a training monastery.

And Finally, the Ordination

The morning started with the meal offering. Two long rows of tables set up in front of the dining hall overflowed with food

offerings. Following the meal, the laywomen and laymen lined the pathway to the Meditation Hall and scattered flower petals in front of the feet of the monastics as they processed into the Hall.



In the center of the meditation hall a “sima” had been established. A sima is a boundary within which the monastic sangha’s formal acts are performed in order to be valid. At a monastery, monastics will gather within the sima to recite the patimokkha, the basic rules and regulations of the order, or to hold sacred ceremonies such as ordinations. The sima boundary is delineated by sima markers. In Thailand they are often carved from stone.



A Thai Sima Marker

When visiting a monastery in Northeast Thailand, I was shown the old moss and lichen-covered stone sima markers. I found myself wondering what the bhikkhuni sima markers would be like. My mouth fell open when I saw tall stands topped with bouquets of flowers and leaves cascading over the sides, holding the sima stones.



Flowered Bhikkhuni Ordination Sima Marker

Photos: Ed Ritger / www.edritger.com & 'GNU Free Documentation License'

With the monastics seated within the sima, lay women and men, and other witnessing monastics, took their seats in circles around the sima. Jack Kornfield welcomed everyone to Spirit Rock Meditation Center. Ayya Tathaaloaka Theri, the pavattini, or preceptor, explained that each of the candidates would be requesting their upasampada, full ordination, by an act of the Dual Sangha.



Ayya Tathaaloka, Preceptor

The candidates would first be ordained by a quorum of Theravada bhikkhunis, led by Ayya Tathaaloka Theri, and then confirmed by a quorum of Theravada bhikkhus, led by Bhante Pallewela Rahula Mahathera as the ovaḍakacariya or confirming bhikkhu.



Photos: Ed Rütger / www.edrütger.com

Confirming Bhikkhus & The Monastic Sangha

For over 1,000 years Theravada Bhikkhuni ordination has not been possible. But today, we are seeing the re-emergence of the full and proper place for female mendicants within the Holy Sasana of the Buddha. It's been a long, long wait."

Thanissara, Dharmagiri Buddhist Hermitage, South Africa, Buddhist teacher and former Siladhara nun

The ceremony was followed by congratulatory addresses and talks by prominent monastics and Buddhist teachers. Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi was unable to attend, because of poor health, but in his recorded congratulatory message he talked about his study of Buddhist texts, and said "if we start with different premises from the traditionalists, we could reach a different conclusion. We could conclude that bhikkhuni ordination for Theravada women is valid, and given this fact, we could claim that there are no legal barriers against such ordinations."

Venerable Anālayo reflected on the importance of bhikkhunis in the time of the Buddha, the negative attitudes toward them that arose after that time, and the importance of the revival of the bhikkhuni order. This was followed by Words of Blessing from Ruth Denison and a brief Sharing the Vision by Jill Boone, President of Saranaloaka Foundation. Thanissara, formerly a siladhara, gave a moving closing address reflecting on the struggles that have been endured in order for this event to happen. (Links to their talks appear at the end of the article.)²

At the conclusion of the ceremony, lay people were able to congratulate the new bhikkhunis and present gifts. Gratitude was expressed to Mindy Zlotnick and volunteers for their impressive organization of the event.

For an explanation of the ceremony, please see page 3 of the ordination program at this [link](#)--

The Future

In her concluding remarks, Jill Boone talked about the future. "The bhikkhuni ordination is both a deep personal commitment and an auspicious, historical moment for women in Buddhism. It is also the beginning step of establishing a training monastery for women. We hope, within the next year, to be able to acquire rural property near San Francisco, for Ayya Santacitta and Ayya Anandabodhi to move to in order to create a monastery where both men and women can visit for short periods to participate in the community and where women can stay for longer periods to reflect on whether they want to pursue monastic life. It is with great joy that I am experiencing this moment of transition and opening."

Choosing the Bhikkhuni Path—

Questions and Answers

We wondered about the process and influences that propelled the two women who had been siladhara for so many years along the path to becoming bhikkhunis.

Donna: What first drew you to Buddhism? Why did you feel called to become a monastic? What things factored into your decision first to ordain as an anagarika?

Ayya Santacitta: On trips to Burma and Thailand in the late 80s, I saw Buddhist monastics and temples and felt deeply struck by a peaceful presence, but I also had less inspiring experiences with particularly one monk. I lived for more than a year at Wat Suan Mokkh, the temple of my first teacher Ajahn Buddhadasa and felt called to ordain, but the situation of the Thai nuns, mae chees, did not feel very inspiring or promising. I needed to be

with Westerners and traveled to Amaravati in the UK to see how that would be. After a few months, I became an anagarika there.

Ayya Anandabodhi: I first came across Buddhism in my early teens through a book while seeking to learn to meditate. Although much of the book was beyond my grasp, as I read about the Four Noble Truths, I felt an immediate resonance and a deep confidence that the Buddha knew the way out of suffering. At the age of twenty, on hearing that there were Buddhist monks living in Thailand, I knew deep in my heart that I wanted to be a Buddhist nun. Until that point I had no idea that Buddhist monastic path was still open, so it was a delight to hear that there were monks practicing and teaching in the world at that time. I just assumed that there must also be Buddhist nuns. A couple of years later I visited Amaravati Monastery and greatly benefited from the environment and teachings there. There were both monks and nuns living at Amaravati and although I was very aware of the discrepancy in the power structure between them, I assumed that over time, the form would naturally evolve to be appropriate to the Western culture. I became torn between my lay life and the strong calling to monastic life. It was after the death of Ajahn Chah in 1992, that I decided to spend a year as an anagarika and see where that led.

Donna: Who were the main people who influenced your decision to ordain as a bhikkhuni and can you tell us about your own personal decision-making process in choosing to ordain as a bhikkhuni?

Ayya Anandabodhi: Attending the Hamburg Congress on Buddhist Women in 2007 began to open my perspective on bhikkhuni ordination. Until that time I had felt that the whole bhikkhuni issue was so fraught with difficulties that I was inclined to stay as a siladhara and live a quiet life. I had always heard that the obstacle to ordaining women in the Theravada tradition was a legal one involving Vinaya, which could not be changed. Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi's excellent presentation at the conference broke down that myth, as he concluded that the obstacles to bhikkhuni ordination rested on certain legal premises that could be challenged in the light of a more liberal attitude toward the Vinaya and a more accurate understanding of Buddhist history. (Now published as "The Revival

"When they tried to fulfill their dream, they must have found it strange to be told that the doors were locked and the key had long ago vanished, that we must wait for the next Buddha to bring it back thousands of years in the future."

Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi

to win equality for women in the monastic sangha, seemingly against all odds, also touched me deeply during the conference. However, I still had my doubts about the practicality of keeping the bhikkhuni Vinaya in the 21st century and whether that was something I wanted to take on.

It was during a solitary retreat in May 2010 that I finally realized that bhikkhuni ordination was the only way forward if we were to establish a training monastery for women here in the US. Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi befriended our community around that time. His depth of knowledge and breadth of vision opened up new vistas of possibility for me.

I made investigations about taking full ordination with well-established bhikkhuni sanghas in Sri Lanka, Korea, and Taiwan. The problem I came across again and again was that they did not recognize our siladhara ordination and training as having any validity at all. Those who were open to giving ordination to Western women required that we live for two years with them

of Bhikkhuni Ordination in the Theravada Tradition.")

The incredible dedication of Venerable Jampa Tsedroen Bhikkhuni (Main organizer of the conference and editor of "Dignity & Discipline—Reviving Full Ordination for Buddhist Nuns"), and her struggle

as samaneris (novices) and a further two years as bhikkhunis. This would be appropriate for women newly entering the monastic life, but did not take into account the eighteen years of training we had already fulfilled. Taking ordination in one of these countries would have meant losing Aloka Vihara and the community that had built up around

it. Fortunately, Ayya Tathaaloka Theri was open to discuss the possibility of giving us ordination. She recognized our siladhara ordination as a valid pabbajja (novice ordination) and respected our years of training. After some discussion, she agreed to be our bhikkhuni preceptor and brought together the key people needed to perform the ordination. This was a great gift.

Ayya Santacitta: For quite a long time, I was not interested in bhikkhuni ordination, mainly because of the Eight Garudhammas and also because I had heard that the code of rules was impossible to hold. After coming to the West Coast and looking into setting up a training monastery for women, it became clear that a real ordination, bhikkhuni ordination, and equality of ordination status, was needed as a strong basis to start building from. I felt unable

and unwilling to pass on the Five Points¹, given to the siladhara order by the monks' sangha of Amaravati/Chithurst monasteries in the UK.

After meeting Ven. Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo in India in 2005 and in ongoing correspondence after that, she was very clear in letting me know that she thought that bhikkhuni ordination is very important. In the Vajrayana tradition, nuns cannot become geshe-ma (Doctor of Divinity) if they cannot study the Vinaya, and they only can study the Vinaya if they are bhikkhunis. Reading papers from the Hamburg Congress in 2007 showed that bhikkhuni ordination was a possibility. In July 2010, a conversation with Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi cleared away last doubts for me and I felt ready to look for a way to receive bhikkhuni ordination.

Donna: What were some of the benefits of your siladhara training and how has that training helped you to travel along this bhikkhuni path? Has being a siladhara influenced how you wish to organize your bhikkhuni viharas? If so, how?

Ayya Santacitta: Living in a Western nuns' community for seventeen years, with interruptions when traveling to Asia, has been a great opportunity for learning about myself through the

before and/or during the ceremony?

Ayya Anandabodhi: Approaching the ordination was like moving towards a threshold that we have been told for so long could not be crossed. There was no real knowing what was on the other side and there was no going back. As we drove across the Golden Gate Bridge on our way to Spirit Rock on that glorious sunny morning of October 17th, the thought came to me: "It's a beautiful day to die!" With this I felt a great sense of joy and expansiveness. I was moved to see the incredible care and skill that people put in to making the ordination a beautiful event. So many people came to show their support and I delighted in seeing the many monastics from all schools of Buddhism come together to witness this full ordination.

Ayya Santacitta: Regarding the ordination itself I had no doubts. I felt that this was the right thing to do and needed to be done. It was amazing that all the right conditions had come together for the ordination ceremony to be held in such a loving and empowered space, with many friends and supporters present who came from as far as Austria, Germany, England, and Australia.

Donna: What were some of the most poignant moments during

"The bhikkhuni ordination is ...the beginning step of establishing a training monastery for women." Jill Boone

feedback of group living. In particular I have learned that keeping rules very tightly and strictly is not helpful. I also appreciate how therapeutic support was used by the siladhara order for group work and also for individuals if it was available.

Ayya Anandabodhi: I found great benefit in being part of a nuns' community dedicated to monastic training, meditation, and service. It is rare to find such a community in the West and I feel a deep gratitude for the years I spent with the nuns in England. The siladhara keep a high level of training very close to that of bhikkhunis. There are minor differences in my life now, but much less than I had anticipated. I feel the siladhara training has provided a sound basis from which to develop the bhikkhuni training here in the US. The emphasis on meditation, monastic discipline, and community are elements from the siladhara training that carry through to our vihara here. I feel it is important for women to have their own communities, not governed by the monks. I am happy to see several bhikkhuni viharas and hermitages being established in the US at this time and in other parts of the world.

Donna: What were some of the feelings that you experienced

the ceremony for you?

Ayya Santacitta: I really loved the procession so beautifully orchestrated by Ayya Tathaaloka Theri and also that the ordination sima was in the midst of circles of lay people. Having a female preceptor in the center of such a large ceremonial setting was something I had never seen before. I really had to stop and take that in deeply, so as to fully notice the difference and allow myself to feel the tenderness of a totally new perception. I was very glad to have Thanissara there and loved her closing address. It was also powerful to witness how supportive the Sri Lankan monks were of our ordination. I was very touched by the kindness of the two witnessing monks as they chanted with so much heart.

Ayya Anandabodhi: Stepping into the sima boundary at the very beginning of the ceremony and requesting full ordination from Ayya Tathaaloka Theri and the Bhikkhuni Sangha was a poignant moment for me. I felt a lot of gratitude to the bhikkhunis for being there and for having opened the way. Bhante Shantarasita and Bhante Amara Buddhi, both local Sri Lankan

monks, chanted with such metta and mudita during the last part of the ordination, that I felt the stresses and struggles of my last years in England being washed away, bathed with this timeless devotion to the Triple Gem. The circles of friends and supporters surrounding the sima made a network of Dhamma practitioners, holding that sacred space. How rare for all these conditions to come together!

Donna: How does it feel now to be a bhikkhuni? How does ordaining as a bhikkhuni change things? How has or will your life as a bhikkhuni be different from your life as a siladhara?

Ayya Anandabodhi: It feels very natural to be a bhikkhuni. There are some small changes in our daily lives, but nothing that has felt very significant so far. The main difference is that I am now part of the pioneering Bhikkhuni Sangha, and that has a different energy than being part of a close-knit group in a well-established lineage.

Ayya Santacitta: I feel like I am out of a box and in a much bigger space. In terms of Vinaya, the siladhara training is actually very close to bhikkhuni training; there are not many changes in daily life for me after bhikkhuni ordination. The biggest change for me is not being able to cut plants or pick flowers, as I love to take care of flower arrangements on our shrine. Another difference is living now in a small community of just two to three nuns and a lay steward. At Amaravati, there were always about fifty people around. It is not easy to let go of the companionship of a whole circle of spiritual friends at the same time.

Donna: What advice would you give to a woman considering ordaining?

Ayya Santacitta: Do not look for the perfect monastery, as you will not be able to find it. Follow your heart's intuition when looking for a place to ordain and work with what you find. The only thing you can really influence is keeping your intention clear and knowing why you want to ordain. Keep coming back to that intention everyday and take care of it.

Ayya Anandabodhi: Take the time to check out a few places and see what feels most resonant, but don't get lost in an endless search for perfection. In the beginning, think of making a commitment for a year, rather than debating whether you can commit to being a nun for the rest of your life or not. Be willing to do the work that is required— both inner and outer.

Congratulations

Along with our congratulations, we extend much gratitude to Ayya Anandabodhi and Ayya Santacitta for their thoughtful responses to our questions.

To conclude, in thinking about the events of the day, we have to agree with the sentiments expressed by Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi:

“In Pali there is a word that expresses what I'm feeling far better than the English word “congratulations.” This is the word anumodanā. The word means “rejoicing in unison,” that is, sharing the joy of those who directly experience joy. I know that today is a day of great joy for the three new bhikkhunis. It is also an occasion of anumodanā for me, and it must surely be a day of anumodanā for everyone present at their ordination.”

¹ “The Five Points” were given to the Siladhara Order in August 2009 as a requirement for them to remain part of the lineage of Ajahn Chah and Ajahn Sumedho.

1. The structural relationship, as indicated by the Vinaya, of the Bhikkhu Sangha to the Siladhara Sangha is one of seniority, such that the most junior bhikkhu is “senior” to the most senior siladhara. As this relationship of seniority is defined by the Vinaya, it is not considered something we can change.
2. In line with this, leadership in ritual situations where there are both bhikkhus and siladhara—such as giving the anumodana [blessings to the lay community] or precepts, leading the chanting or giving a talk—is presumed to rest with the senior bhikkhu present. He may invite a siladhara to lead; if this becomes a regular invitation it does not imply a new standard of shared leadership.
3. The Bhikkhu Sangha will be responsible for the siladhara pabbajja [ordination] the way Luang Por Sumedho [Ajahn Sumedho] was in the past. The siladhara should look to the Bhikkhu Sangha for ordination and guidance rather than exclusively to Luang Por. A candidate for siladhara pabbajja should receive acceptance from the Siladhara Sangha, and should then receive approval by the Bhikkhu Sangha as represented by those bhikkhus who sit on the Elders' Council.
4. The formal ritual of giving pavarana [invitation for feedback] by the Siladhara Sangha to the Bhikkhu Sangha should take place at the end of the Vassa as it has in our communities traditionally, in keeping with the structure of the Vinaya
5. The siladhara training is considered to be a vehicle fully suitable for the realization of liberation, and is respected as such within our tradition. It is offered as a complete training, as it stands, and a step in the



About the author:

Donna McCarthy, PhD. Following graduation from college, Donna served for two years in the Peace Corps in Sabah (North Borneo), Malaysia. Another Peace Corps volunteer serving in the same town was Bob Jackman, who later ordained as a Buddhist monk, studied with Ajahn Chah, and became known as Ajahn Sumedho. Donna received an MA in International Studies in 1974 and PhD in Social Psychology in 1994. It was through renewing her friendship with Ajahn Sumedho, some thirty years later, while working in the UK and during a subsequent trip to Thailand, that she was introduced to Buddhism. She has been practicing for sixteen years. Donna has two adult sons, a grandson, and lives in San Diego with her husband Brian.

Zhao Hui (1957-)

An Innovative and Reforming Taiwanese Bhikkhuni

by Dr. William Chu



For many Western female monastic aspirants, the Taiwanese Bhikkhuni Zhao Hui (1957-) is an obscure figure who has otherwise been a long-time vocal advocate for women's rights in Buddhism, including the abolition of the Eight Weighty/Special Precepts (gurudharmas Sanskrit, garudhammas Pali) that all Mahayana nuns are expected to observe in their relationship with monks. She has inspired a number of Taiwanese Buddhist organizations to conduct bhikkhuni ordinations without using the gurudharmas. For the sake of clarification, it is important to note that the gurudharmas are not a part of Theravada bhikkhuni ordination.¹

Born in Burma and emigrated to Taiwan at the age of ten, she was ordained in her college years by Yin Shun (1906-2005), the abbot of Huiji Lecture Hall (Huiji Jiangtang) until his final years. Her ordination master, Yin Shun, was one of the most erudite and influential Chinese Buddhist monastics of modern times. Much of Zhao Hui's scholarship and reform ideas were inspired by him. Active in both Buddhist and secular reform movements, Zhao Hui has championed various causes by issuing exceptionally prolific corpus of twenty-five books and more than forty articles, lecturing and teaching at a number of Taiwanese colleges and seminaries, and undertaking public actions some considered to be provocative such as fasting to protest the removal of a Buddhist icon from a municipal park in Taipei, petitioning former Taiwan President Chen Shuibian to issue a declaration making the Buddha's birthday a national holiday (as

he had done earlier for Christmas), and carrying out intense debates with politicians against the euthanization of stray animals. She is currently Leading Dharma Master (zhidao fashi) at the Buddhist Hongshi College in Taoyuan, a Buddhist seminary she helped found in 1993.

Zhao Hui has been an avid proponent for the revival of the bhikkhuni lineage wherever it has died out (Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos) or where it never has been established (Tibet, Mongolia, and the Himalayan Kingdoms). She is also one of the key architects in Chinese-speaking circles of Buddhist reforms to address gender inequality issues. Many of her works focus on advancing scriptural and scholarly arguments for the full re-establishment of bhikkhuni lineage everywhere and against subjecting female monastics to the gurudharmas.

Regarding monastic precepts in general, Zhao Hui understands them as serving the purpose of dealing with specific situations and conditions rather than being moral or inviolable absolutes. She attempts to demystify the Vinaya—the monastic codes of discipline (which includes precepts, ordination rites, confession rites, and commentaries)—by emphasizing the historical, evolutionary, condition-specific nature of its development. She maintains that many of the Vinaya precepts were established after the Parinirvana of the Buddha, rather than during his lifetime. She also maintains that the Vinaya contains procedures by which qualified monastics may carry out their revision to address issues arising in different situations and

localities. She often quotes Yin Shun on this issue:

“Many regulations in the [earliest] Saṅgha went through the process of initially being abolished (kai) and then re-established (zhi), only to be re-established and abolished several more times. After the Buddha’s demise, his disciples developed mutually and significantly different monastic regulations in accordance to their different ideologies and locations. Some were more rigorous and conservative and developed a fastidious style... Some valued liberality and gave rise to something more expedient in nature... In conclusion, as Buddhist ideas and institutions are transmitted throughout the world, they cannot but be subject to the law of change.”²

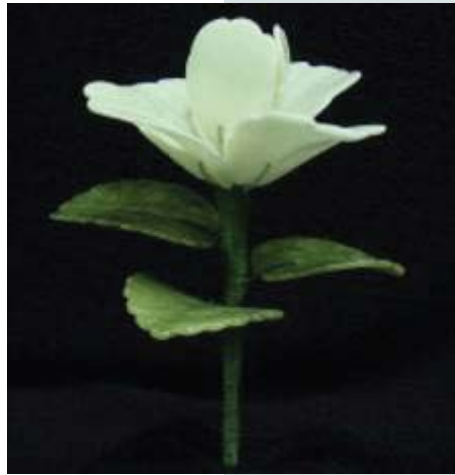
Following Yin Shun’s example, Zhao Hui cites the Four-Part Vinaya (the Chinese Sifenlü) in stating what she considers the six foremost reasons (artha—benefits) for the Vinaya’s creation: the Vinaya is meant to lead to “[communal] harmony, blissful [dwelling/peaceful settlement of the clerics], purification [of morality], edification [of lay people], [personal] realization [of the stopping of effluents/outflows], and the ultimate goal [of making Buddhадharma endure in the world].”³ As charters of the monastic constitution, these six reasons were understood by her as exhaustively encompassing the intended purposes of all meaningful monastic regulations.

In her lectures, Zhao Hui often follows an argument originally advanced by her teacher Yin Shun: considering the Buddha’s caution against attachment to rituals and moral injunctions that are irrelevant to personal and communal

ability, and pragmatism of the Vinaya, but also that it is the Saṅgha’s obligation to continuously revise the Vinaya through proper procedures as conditions change. In other words, the implication of Zhao Hui’s arguments is that the Vinaya is no longer a static but dynamic vehicle through which all qualified monastic members can perpetually review and revise the Vinaya. All ordained community members enjoy this right, and are enjoined to see that it is their duty, to oversee the wholesome evolution of the Saṅgha.⁵

Zhao Hui argues against the reactionary insistence on preserving the Vinaya as it is, in other words, “not establishing those rules which the Buddha did not establish in the first place, and not abandoning those rules the Buddha had elected.”⁵ She believes that blind conformity to ossified conventions would defeat the initial purpose of the Vinaya’s creation, which was first and foremost “to ensure the long survival of the Buddhадharma in the world.”⁷

Zhao Hui’s Vinaya scholarship primarily gears towards the abolition of the gurudharma. The gurudharmas are an addendum that bhikkunis are supposedly required to follow in addition to the Bhikkhuni precepts. Tradition has it that the gurudharmas were created in response to admitting Mahāprajāpatī, the first bhikkhuni-aspirant, into the monastic community. All other women who subsequently joined the Saṅgha would also be required to follow these rules, or so insist some traditions. Zhao Hui uses very strong language by referring to these gurudharmas as “unequal treat-



What Zhao Hui emphasizes is not only the flexibility, adaptability, and pragmatism of the Vinaya, but also that it is the Saṅgha’s obligation to continuously revise the Vinaya through proper procedures as conditions change. In other words, the implication of Zhao Hui’s arguments is that the Vinaya is no longer a static but dynamic vehicle through which all qualified monastic members can perpetually review and revise the Vinaya.

amelioration (śīlavrataparāmarṣa), all valid precepts of clerical moral training must be designed to conform to these six guiding principles. In other words, individual precepts should theoretically serve as vehicles for bringing about the stated goals of the Vinaya rather than as inherently inviolable dogmas. If they are not conducive to the benefits of the monastic community and are blindly and inflexibly followed, then these so-called precepts would degenerate into meaningless, ritualistic behavior.⁴

What Zhao Hui emphasizes is not only the flexibility, adapt-

ties” (bu pingdeng tiaoyue). Similarly, they are increasingly deemed objectionable by nuns everywhere.⁸

The gurudharmas have been described as “a covenant containing eight articles that subordinates nuns to monks,” and thus compels all nuns to “recognize the monks’ overriding leadership,” whether it is justified and deserved or not.⁹ Interestingly, not all recensions of the Vinaya contain or refer to the gurudharmas. The Vibhajyavāda and the Sarvāstivāda recensions of the Vinaya maintain that the gurudharmas were

the indispensable prerequisites for any woman to receive full ordination, while the Mahāsaṅghika and the Sammitiya versions fail to make any mention of them at all.¹⁰ To Yin Shun and Zhao Hui, this lack of consensus—this discrepancy between different versions of the Vinaya—implies the problematic status of the gurudharmas.¹¹

Now let us turn to the gurudharmas themselves. They are: (1) women are required to receive full ordination by both the bhikkhu and bhikkhuni assemblies (in contrast to men receiving it only once from the bhikkhu assembly); (2) nuns are required every half month to request instructions from monks and report the results of their poṣadha, or confession rite, to them;¹² (3) nuns should not dwell in a place without access to monks during the three-month rainy-season retreat (vārsika) in order that they may benefit from the monks' supervision and instruction; (4) after the rainy season retreat, nuns are required to perform pravāraṇā (the reporting of one's misdeeds) to both the bhikkhu and bhikkhuni assemblies (in contrast to monks performing this once to their own assembly); (5) even a nun with a century's seniority (C. shouju baisui) should properly venerate, salute, prostrate to a newly ordained monk with but one day in robes (in contrast to monks showing deference strictly by seniority alone); (6) a nun should not abuse or revile a monk; (7) a nun should not point out any infraction committed by a monk (in contrast to monks being obliged to perform such mutual inspection in a dutiful and forthright manner); (8) failure to comply to any of the gurudharmas should result in the punishment of "mānatva" (probation with penance for a period of two months to be overseen by both Assemblies).

Zhao Hui finds the last four of the gurudharmas to be the most objectionable. Given that they are worded quite differently in different recensions, she surmises that they were added at a later date than the first four. While the first four are allegedly intended to protect and assist nuns in the pre-modern environment where many might be hostile to their newly created community, Zhao Hui argues, the last four are more debilitating and subjugating to women.¹³

In addressing the fifth rule, Zhao Hui complains that it is contrary to the Buddha's spirit of offering reverence to people according to their virtues and conduct rather than to their backgrounds or inborn traits.¹⁴ The sixth rule is moot, too. The Vinaya clearly states that Buddhist clerics are refrained from scolding anyone to begin with—the inclusion of an additional proscription against nuns scolding monks is redundant and unnecessarily discriminatory.¹⁵

Zhao Hui finds the seventh rule particularly preposterous. It is vital for monastic peers to point out each other's errors during precept-recitation regardless of gender—such candid and mutually helpful behavior goes a long way to ensure the community's purity.¹⁶ Even lay women, Zhao Hui exclaims,

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are allowed to point out monk's infractions according to some sources, but with this gurudharma rule, somehow nuns are less eligible than lay women to perform this vital function?¹⁷ She cites the example of, again, Mahāprajāpatī, who on one occasion did point out some monks' improper behavior and reported them to the Buddha. In doing so, Mahāprajāpatī was apparently breaching the seventh rule, which was that a nun could not point out an infraction made by a monk. Zhao Hui interprets this incident as proof that even this pre-eminent nun did not bother to adhere to the gurudharmas. Further, Zhao Hui argues that instead of criticizing Mahāprajāpatī for not observing the gurudharmas, the Buddha rebuked those monks who acted in a conceited manner.¹⁸

In this case, story of the Buddha's response shows that he clearly sided with the person in the right rather than making any fuss about Mahāprajāpatī's failure to adhere to the seventh rule of the gurudharma. Zhao Hui infers that this particular rule was therefore not laid down by the Buddha himself, since the Buddha apparently did not stop Mahāprajāpatī from performing an otherwise perfectly permissible, if not encouraged, duty to admonish and counsel one's monastic peers, regardless their gender.¹⁹

In regard to the eighth gurudharma, which spells out the punishment for not properly observing all eight rules of the gurudharmas, Zhao Hui agrees with Yin Shun that the specified punishment is excessively harsh. For a senior nun to, say, fail to stand up and properly pay homage to an incoming male novice (which constitutes the breaking of the fifth gurudharma) and be punished for two months in both assemblies is definitely unreasonable and difficult to implement.²⁰

Zhao Hui's effort on this issue—which expands upon Yin Shun's enormous legacy—has contributed to changing trends on the island. The four largest Buddhist organizations in Taiwan—Foguangshan, Ciji, Zhongtai, and Dharma Drum—have



Bhikkhuni Zhao Hui

Zhao Hui's effort on this issue (of the abolition of the gurudharmas)—which expands upon Yin Shun's enormous legacy—has contributed to changing trends on the island. The four largest Buddhist organizations in Taiwan—Foguangshan, Ciji, Zhongtai, and Dharma Drum—have all virtually done away with the gurudharmas in their ordinations..

all virtually done away with the gurudharmas in their ordinations. These organizations have also uniformly indicated sympathy to foreign bhikkhuni-aspirants who struggle with gaining recognition of their full monastic status—their sympathy is evidenced by their willing ordination of foreign nuns with that unique quandary, and by their numerous public announcements and publications stating their position on the issue. Also, a panel was held in Taiwan in 2002 to discuss the abolition of the gurudharmas. Some of the most prominent Buddhist leaders on the island, including those of the four major organizations, participated and decided that it was “resolved” that the efforts should be made to re-establish the Bhikkhuni Sangha everywhere, that such efforts are completely justifiable and legitimate, and that the gurudharmas should be formally stricken from the ordination ceremony.²¹

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BHIKKHUNI DAY
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¹Though not a part of Theravada bhikkhuni ordination, all but three of the garudhammas do appear in the Theravada Vinaya but as mere Pacittiya/Expiation rules which only require a private confession to another bhikkhuni to clear a bhikkhuni of the offense. The garudhammas and their equivalent Pacittiyas are: Bhi Pac 56 = Gar 2; Bhi Pac 59 = Gar 3; Bhi Pac 57 = Gar 4; Bhi Pac 63 = Gar 6 (though not identical); and Bhi Pac 52 = Gar 7. The rules lacking a matching Pacittiya are Gar Nos. 1, 5, and 8.

²Yifofa yanjiu fofa, p. 3-5

³The six reasons were deduced from the ten listed in T22.570c. Cited in Yuanshi fojiao shengdian zhi jicheng, p. 194-205

⁴The six reasons were deduced from the ten listed in T22.570c. Cited in Yuanshi fojiao shengdian zhi jicheng, p. 194-205

⁵Lüxue jinquan, p. 10; see also p. 362

⁶T22.967b

⁷See T22.1015a;

⁸Lüxue jinquan, p. 352.

⁹Yuanshi fojiao shengdian zhi jicheng, p. 402.

¹⁰Yuanshi fojiao shengdian zhi jicheng, p. 407

¹¹Yuanshi fojiao shengdian zhi jicheng, p. 407.

¹²However, Nancy Barnes describes this rule as “Every half month the bhikkhuni must ask the bhikshu saṅgha when a monk will be sent to give them the exhortation to keep the eight rules and when the Uposatha ceremony should be performed”). See Barnes, “Buddhist Women and the Nuns’ Order in Asia,” in *Engaged Buddhism*, p. 261.

¹³Lüxue jinquan, p. 360-361

¹⁴Lüxue jinquan, p. 360-361

¹⁵Lüxue jinquan, p. 360-361

¹⁶Lüxue jinquan, p. 360-361

¹⁷Lüxue jinquan, p. 360-361

¹⁸T22.648. Cited in Zhao Hui. Lüxue jinquan, p. 360.

¹⁹Zhao Hui. Lüxue jinquan, p. 360.

²⁰Zhaohui. Lüxue jinquan, p. 371-372

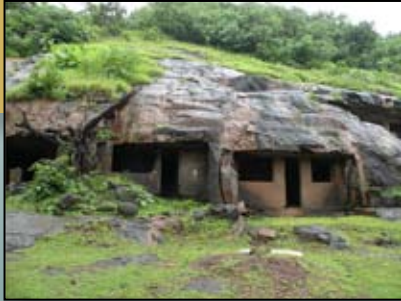
²¹Taiwan Ribao (Chinese L.A. Daily News), April, 21, 2002, p. A12

Unveiling Bhikkhunīs in Oblivion:

What Deccan Cave Inscriptions Reveal about the Ancient Bhikkhunī Sangha

Dr. Rupali Mokashi

M.Phil, Ph.D.



Kuda



Bedse Caves



Nashik



Nashik

Nuns as Part of the Fourfold Saṅgha

When Venerable Ānanda approached the Buddha on behalf of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī¹ and the Buddha agreed to let her ordain, the doors of organized religious life were opened for women in Buddhism. Women could aspire to higher spiritual goals, choosing to enter monastic life, or stay within family life and ardently follow the path of the Dhamma.

It was during the lifetime of the Buddha that the order of nuns crystallized. As stated in the Pāsādika Sutta, the Buddha expressed in very plain words his faith in the capability of the ordained monks and nuns as the torchbearers of the Dhamma in the future.² Nuns like Alavikā, Sōmā, Kisāgotami, Vajjirā, Vijayā, Uppalavanā, Śīsupācala, as recorded in the Bhikkhunī Samyutta (Book 5)³, vigilantly deterred the deceitful enticement of Māra. These episodes clearly attest to the nuns' sound grounding in the Dhamma and Vinaya. Additionally, the *Therīgāthā*, the ninth book of the *Khuddaka Nikāya*, consists of 73 poems — 522 stanzas in all — in which the early bhikkhunīs recount their struggles and accomplishments along the road to arahantship.

At that time of the Buddha's impending Mahāparinirvāṇa, bhikkhunīs like Subhadra, Upānaṇḍā, Sāgaramatī, along with their counterparts, were present in large numbers. They were all great arhants. Thus, as per the Buddha's wish expressed in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta⁴, his Fourfold Saṅgha⁵ was stably functioning and ready to meet the challenges of the future:

I will not pass away, O Evil One, until I have bhikkhu disciples... bhikkhunī disciples... layman disciples... laywomen disciples who are accomplished, disciplined, skilled, learned, expert in the Dhamma, practiced in accord with the Dhamma, properly practiced, living in accord with Dhamma, who, having learnt from their own teacher, expound, teach, declare, set out, explain, analyze it and make it clear; who are able to refute in accord with Dhamma other teachings that appear, and then teach the wonderful Dhamma.' (Digha Nikāya- Mahāparinibbāna Sutta)

Towards Lithic Records:

Although the origin of Buddhism predates the period from which the inscriptions are available, inscriptions, especially the votive epigraphs, constitute a significant and tangible source for the history of Buddhism in India from early times. Inscriptions also mark a transition from orality to literacy. Votive inscriptions can be read by posterity and give immortality to the donor.

The Order of Nuns as Gleaned through the Edicts of Emperor Aśoka:

The art of engraving inscriptions was popularized by Mauryan Emperor Aśoka in India in the third century B.C.E. and proliferated thereafter. Approximately thirty-five distinct inscriptions have been found within and outside the political frontiers of modern India, with the most important appearing in the Fourteen Rock Edicts and Seven Pillar Edicts series.⁶ Edicts of Aśoka, that he himself termed as Dhamma Lipī⁷ (Bhandarkar D. R. 2005: 35), describe his polity, administrative mechanism, human values and most importantly, the Dhamma he envisaged. During the first and second centuries after the Mahāparinirvāṇa of the Buddha, Buddhism could hardly be distinguished from other ascetic movements. It was evidently due to the endeavors of Emperor Aśoka that Buddhism emerged as a distinct religion with great potentialities for expansion.

Minor Rock Edict I⁸ (Rupnāth⁹ Version) records Emperor Aśoka's gradual commitment to Buddhism. The edict reads as follows: "...a little over two and half years have passed since I have become a lay disciple. But I was not initially very zealous. But for a little more than a year, I have drawn close to the saṅgha and have been very zealous." The inscription suggests that as an upāsaka, the emperor did little to promote Buddhism.¹⁰ However, he made significant contributions to its growth in later years, signified by the term 'saṅghama

Early Buddhist missionaries gravitated to the niches in Sahyādrī Mountains to suit their ideas of asceticism and the norms of monastic life. The Western Ghāṭa's topography with its flat-topped basalt hills, deep ravines, and sharp cliffs, was suited to their monastic requirements primarily for the Vassāvāsa (Rains Retreat). As a result of the expressions of faith in the Dhamma, rock-cut caityas (caves) such as those found at Kārlē, Bhājē, Kānhērī, and Nāsika, were carved into the Sahyādrī ranges and date back to the second century B.C.E.

upēṭe'.¹¹ He was not only interested in the propagation and maintenance of homogeneity within the saṅgha, but also took measures to avert the ideological differences leading to dissensions and schisms.

As recorded in lithic records, glimpses of the order of Buddhist nuns in ancient India can be found for the first time in the edicts of Emperor Aśoka. In this paper, three edicts need particular evaluation. Collectively they are called the Schism Edicts that were issued from Sānci, Sārnāth and Allāhābād-Kausambī.

The Sāncī¹² Minor Pillar Edict¹³ reads as follows:

...The saṅgha of the monks and nuns is made united as long as (my) sons and grandsons (shall reign and) as long as the sun and the moon (shall shine). The monk or nun, who shall break up the saṅgha, should be caused to put on white robes and reside in a non-residence¹⁴. For what is my desire? That the saṅgha may be united and be everlasting.

The Minor Pillar Edict at Sārnāth¹⁵ states:

... [thus ordains] His sacred & gracious majesty... The saṅgha cannot be divided by anyone whatsoever. Whoever, monk or nun, breaks up the saṅgha must be made to wear white garments & to take up abode in a place other than a monastery. Thus, should this order be made known in the saṅghas of bhikṣus as well as of bhikṣuṇīs¹⁶.

The Minor Pillar Edict at Allāhābād-Kausambī¹⁷ states¹⁸:

...Devānām Priya (Emperor Aśoka) commands thus to the Mahāmātrās of Kausambī ... whosoever, monk or nun, breaks up the saṅgha, should be caused to put on robes and to reside in a non-residence¹⁹.

A careful reading of these edicts reveals not only a deep concern on part of the emperor about the prevailing discord among the community of monks and nuns, but also the measures that he instructed to his *dharmamahāmātrās*,²⁰ religious ministers, to implement for the schismatic monks and nuns. This notion has been phrased in almost identical words in these three edicts, and the text of these edicts prescribes a

two-fold treatment for the apostate monks and nuns. First, such monks and nuns should be deprived of the *civara*²¹ and made to wear white garments as a part of the punishment; second, they should be expelled from the monastic residence.

Questions remain about the exact role of the religious ministers. In the Dhaulī²² Rock edict²³, Emperor Aśoka states the role and function of the *dharmamahāmātrās* as follows: "...now for a long time past previously, there were no *dharmamahāmātrās*. *Dharmamahāmātrās* were created by me when I had been consecrated thirteen years. They have been set to work among all sects for the establishment and promotion of the Dhamma ..."

Edicts of Aśoka refer to the *mahāmātrās* of Yavana, Kāmbōja, Gāṇḍhāra, Rāṣṭrika, Pāṭalīputra, Kausambī, Tōsālī, Saṃpanā, Suvarṇagiri, Isilā (Hazra 2002: 71) There were obviously more *dharmamahāmātrās* elsewhere in the empire who were instructed by the emperor to place the copies of these orders at places accessible to the laity. Did these officers have the right to find and blame the bellicose monk or the nun of schism, or was the dissension on the part of any individual monk or nun reported to them by the local saṅgha? Had the saṅgha, known for its democratic character, vested such ecclesiastic powers with the royal authority? Was the final verdict—within the jurisdiction of the king and the *dharmamahāmātrās*—acceptable to the apostate monks and the nuns as well as the saṅgha?

These three edicts also raise one more uncertainty. Emperor Aśoka, while elaborating at length about the Dhamma and his concern about the dissensions, refers to the saṅgha as a whole unit, but was it? Were his orders meant for all monastics, or a particular sect? Following the Buddha's *Mahāparinirvāṇa*, the First Buddhist Council was held at Rājagṛha, resulting in the codification of Dhamma and Vinaya rules. The Second Council was convened by King Kāśoka at Vaiśālī about a century later, at the behest of the Ven. Yasa over the issues of ten un-Vinayic points followed by the Vajjian monks of Vaiśālī. The verdict of the council was not acceptable to them. This was the beginning of the first major dissension, the Mahasanghika, the precursor of Mahayanism.

Emperor Aśoka understood the role of monks and nuns as the torchbearers of Dhamma. How could this task be accomplished unless they themselves were prepared? He strongly recommends certain texts²⁴ in his Bhābrā²⁵ Inscription: "Sirs, I desire that many groups of monks and nuns may repeatedly

As the ecclesiastic, lay, mercantile, and royal endowments grew, cave interiors changed from simple monastic dwellings to become more elaborate, with interior walls decorated with paintings, reliefs, and intricate carvings. Facades were added to the exteriors as the interiors became designated for specific uses as monasteries (vihāras) and worship halls (caityas). Over the centuries, simple caves became magnificent structures, needing formal design and highly skilled artisans and craftsmen to complete.

listen to these expositions of the Dhamma and may reflect (on them). I am having this engraved Sirs, so that you may know what I desire.”

The rule of Emperor Aśoka came to an end by c.232 B.C.E. The epigraphical sources corroborate that the order of nuns continued thereafter across ancient India.²⁶ With the help of votive inscriptions in the rock-cut caves of ancient Deccan dating back to the early centuries of the Christian era, an attempt will be made to identify and understand the valuable contributions of these ancient nuns.

Rise of Rock-cut Caves of Deccan:

People of Deccan were familiar with Buddhism since the pre-Mauryan times. Buddhist tradition identifies a wealthy merchant-converted monk, Punna of Surpāraka, as the great evangelist who introduced Buddhism to the land of Srōṇa-Aparāntaka. Literary accounts suggest that Buddhism had been launched in Western Ghats²⁷ by Bāvrī and his sixteen disciples. (Ray - Sinopoli 2004:115)

The Third Buddhist Council was convened by Emperor Aśoka at Pāṭaliputra under the leadership of the monk Moggaliputta Tissa. Elders came to a decision to send missionaries to preach Buddhism at several places in India and far flung places abroad. A yavana called Yōn Dharmarakṣita²⁸ was then sent to Aparānta²⁹ where he is said to have successfully converted a large number of people—including women and nobles—to Buddhism.⁰

Early Buddhist missionaries gravitated to the niches in Sahyādrī Mountains to suit their ideas of asceticism and the norms of monastic life. The Western Ghāṭa's topography with its flat-topped basalt hills, deep ravines, and sharp cliffs, was suited to their monastic requirements primarily for the Vassāvāsa (Rains Retreat). As a result of the expressions of faith in the Dhamma, rock-cut caityas³⁰ (caves) such as those found at Kārlē, Bhājē, Kānhērī, and Nāśika, were carved into the Sahyādrī ranges and date back to the second century B.C.E.

The commencement of missionary movement in coastal Deccan coincided with several favorable economic, political, and climatic factors.³¹ Except for a few passes, the Sahyādrī

ranges pose as a barrier of communication between the ports on the Arabian coast and the plateau. Most of these cave sites are located near such passes just before the caravans enter the difficult terrain.³² Hence, monasteries became stopovers for the caravan traffic.³³

As the ecclesiastic, lay, mercantile, and royal endowments grew, cave interiors changed from simple monastic dwellings to become more elaborate, with interior walls decorated with paintings, reliefs, and intricate carvings. Facades were added to the exteriors as the interiors became designated for specific uses as monasteries (vihāras) and worship halls (caityas). Over the centuries, simple caves became magnificent structures, needing formal design and highly skilled artisans and craftsmen to complete. Their expansion also made the acquisition of finances for construction and maintenance necessary.

Donations of Nuns at the Rock-cut Caves in Deccan:

The votive inscriptions in the rock-cut architecture of ancient Deccan have recorded donations of many nuns. They allow us to glean information about the order of nuns in Western India during the early centuries of Christian era. Though much scholarly literature is available on the rise and growth of Buddhism in ancient India through literary and archaeological data, the role of women as believers in the Dhamma, actively propagating Buddhism in ancient India in general and Western India in particular, needs more attention. In the superstructure of power and patronage, the role of nuns as benefactors of Buddhism needs to be highlighted. These nuns also showed a vision of immortalizing the details of their donations by engraving it in the caityas and vihāras, and by selecting visually more accessible surfaces.

Seventeen epigraphs that document the donations of nuns at Kānhērī, Kārlē, Kuḍā, Paunī, Junnar, Pitalakhōrē, and Śēlāravāḍī caves have been evaluated in this paper.

Kānhērī (Burgess Fergusson 2000:348)³⁴

In Cave Fifty-four³⁵, the donation of the nun Therī



Karle

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Antēvāsini Pavaītikā' Pōṇakiasaṇā, her sister (name not mentioned), and brothers who are identified as sramaṇa is recorded. Pōṇakiasaṇā was the disciple of Thēra Bhadanta Ghōṣa . She donated the leṇa (cave) and pāṇīyapōḍhī (water cistern) for the welfare and happiness of the whole world. Pōṇakiasaṇā has another title, therī (elder nun), indicating her superior status in the order. She donated 200 pieces of currency called Kārṣapaṇa as a perpetual endowment. Out of the interest accrued thereon, one-sixteenth share was meant for the clothes of the monks. (Gokhale1991:88 & Epigraphia Indica, X, p., 105, n. 1006) ³⁶

1. In Cave Ninety-eight³⁷, the donation of Bhikkhunī Damilā is recorded. She donated a cave and a water cistern. (Gokhale1991:147 & Epigraphia Indica, X p., 106, n. 1014)³⁸
2. In Cave Twenty-two³⁹, the donation of a water cistern by a nun and disciple of Bhadanta Sagha addressed as Antēvāsiniya Pavajitīkāyā (name lost) has been recorded. (Gokhale 1991:77)
4. In Cave Ninety-three⁴⁰, donation of a water cistern by Jamadēvikā, daughter of a goldsmith, Sivātana, along with Pavaītikā Jamanasā has been recorded. (Gokhale1991:147)
5. In Cave Sixty-five⁴¹, a leṇa and water cistern has been

donated by Pavaītikā Sāpā , who prefers to be identified as the daughter of Kulapriya Dhamaṇak of Dhenukākaṭ. She was the pupil of revered Thēra Bodhika. Sāpā's sister, Ratīnikā (no monastic attribute suggests that she was a laywoman), and many relatives (nātisambandhī) were co-donors. (Gokhale1991:91) This donation for the Aparāsēliya sect was expected to earn puṇya (religious merit) for the parents of Pavaītikā Sāpā.

6. Cave number eighty-one⁴², records the donation of a cave by merchant Navinaka and his mother Pavaītikā Damāryā for the welfare of all. (Gokhale 1991:102).

Kārlē ⁴³

1. An inscription⁴⁴ on the base of a veyikā to the left of the central door of the Great Caitya Hall records the donation of a rail by Bhikkhunī Kōḍī, the mother of Ghuṇika. (Burgess- Indrajī 1881:35 & Epigraphia Indica, VII, p. 1-12 and Epigraphia Indica, X, p. 119, n. 1104)
2. An inscription on the belt of a rail pattern on the inner face of the sill of the largest window of the Great Caitya Hall, records the donation of Bhikkhunī Asādhmitā⁴⁵ (Burgess- Indrajī 1881:33& Epigraphia Indica, X, p. 118, n. 1098, and Epigraphia Indica, VII, 1-12)
3. An inscription in a recess over a water cistern at the end of



Kārlē

These nuns have mostly financed the construction of water cisterns...and caves, indicating that all these sites were inhabited not only for the Vassāvāsa, but also throughout the year. All these sites are situated in the ranges of the Sahyādrī Mountains and receive very heavy rainfall during the months of monsoon, but a stark summer thereafter. Thus, the priority for the storage of water is amply justified.

Cave Thirteen records that women disciples (antēvāsini) of some bhadanta donated a cave and a water cistern.⁴⁶ (Burgess- Indrajī 1881:37 & Epigraphia Indica, X p. 120, n. 1107) As the record is much mutilated, only the name of Antēvāsini Usabahā can be read.

Kuḍā⁴⁷

1. An inscription in Cave Five (Burgess-Indrajī 1881:6, Burgess Fergusson 2000:206, Epigraphia Indica, X, p. 110, n. 1043)⁴⁸ records donation of Pavayitīkāya Paduminikā who is identified as the daughter of Pavayitīkā Naganikā and niece of Thēra Bhadant Patimit and Bhadant Agimīt along with Antēvāsini Bodhī and Antēvāsini Asalhamitā. Bodhī and Asalhamitā were perhaps the disciples of Paduminikā.
2. An inscription in Cave Six records the donation of Vyagrakā, a Śākyōpāsikā (disciple of Buddhā).⁴⁹ (Burgess-Indrajī 1881:8 & Epigraphia Indica, X, p.110, n. 1043)
3. In Cave Sixteen (Burgess- Indrajī 1881:18)⁵⁰, a donation of Antēvāsini Pavaītīkā Sāpilā, the disciple of Thēra Bhayaṇt Vijay along with Lohitā, Veṇhuyā and Antēvāsini Bodhī has been recorded. In the absence of any honorific titles, the status of Lohitā and Veṇhuyā cannot be ascertained.

Nāśik (Burgess Fergusson 2000:263)⁵¹

1. An inscription in Cave Seven on the back wall of the open front records that a Pavaītīkā Tāpasini, the disciple of Sawa, donated for the benefit of the monks from the four directions.⁵²(Epigraphia Indica, X, p. 125, n. 1128 & Nagaraju1980:343)

Junnar- Śivnērī (Dhavalikar1984:12)⁵³

1. An inscription in Cave Thirty-three⁵⁴, on the left of the cell door, records gift of a leṇa and water cistern by Patibhādak Giribhuti, son of Savāgiriya, a resident of Apāguriya and his wife, Śivapālnikāy. They also donated a permanent endowment for the nunnery of the Dhammottariya. (Burgess- Indrajī 1881:43)

Paunī (Koltē V.B.1987:4)⁵⁵

1. An inscription dated first century B.C.E.—second century C.E. in the Paunī caves record the donation of Bhikkhunī Haliyā. (Deo S. B.1984:256-261)

Pitalkhorē (Burgess- Indrajī 2000:242)⁵⁶

1. An inscription⁵⁷ dated second century B.C.E.—first century B.C.E., records donation of a pillar by a bhikkhunī (name lost).

Śēlarwādī (Burgess- Indrajī 2000:246)⁵⁸

1. An inscription in Cave Eight (Nagaraju1984:346)⁵⁹ records donation of a caitya by Pavaītīkā Gahparā, disciple of Thēra Bhayaṇt Simha to earn puṇya (religious merit) for her parents.

Précis

An attempt has been made in this paper to offer 'rightful space' to bhikkhunī in the annals of Buddhism.⁶⁰ As shown earlier in the paper, there has been a sustained and fruitful involvement of bhikkhunīs in the growth and development of Buddhism in ancient India.⁶¹ However a careful examination of scholarly works reveals a less encouraging scenario.⁶² Most of the published works fall in the realm of religious history. Such works are more concerned about the scriptures and development of the religion as gleaned through the texts and commentaries composed over vast times and places, leaving minimal space



Karle Front View

for the bhikkhunīs who made their presence felt by way of engraving inscriptions.⁶³ It is very true that epigraphical sources are available only after the third century B.C.E., and thus literary sources are indispensable until then, but thereafter, the epigraphical data cannot be neglected.⁶⁴ While searching for a solution to reconstruct the history of women in ancient India, there is a need for a corrective methodology⁶⁵ that looks beyond an altekarian⁶⁶ paradigm. These works do not specify the required methodology, which is to incorporate the epigraphical data.

- Though all the above mentioned seventeen inscriptions are undated, they are engraved in ancient Prākṛta - Brāhmī script that can be placed between the second century B.C.E. and the second century C.E. except one (number eleven). This is the only inscription engraved in Brāhmī - Sanskrit that can be dated to the fifth century C.E. on paleographic basis. This important inscription affirms the existence of a bhikkhunī tradition in Western India until a later date. It is also important to note that Vyāgrakā highlights the importance of the Śākya clan as associated with Buddhism.
- These rather short inscriptions have not mentioned any sectarian affiliations of the nuns. Two sects, namely the Aparāsēlila and Dharmottariya sects, have been referred to (numbers five and fourteen). Kārlē was a predominantly Mahāsaṅghika site, but three nuns who have recorded their donations at Kārlē do not confirm to any such affiliation (numbers seven, eight, and nine).
- These nuns have mostly financed the construction of water cisterns (numbers one, two, three, five, and nine) and caves, indicating that all these sites were inhabited not only for the Vassāvāsa, but also throughout the year. All these sites are situated in the ranges of the Sahyādri Mountains and receive very heavy rainfall during the months of monsoon, but a stark summer thereafter. Thus, the priority for the storage of water is amply justified. It is equally important to note that no nun has financed the erection of Buddha or Bodhisattva image, a feature that was to be a dominant feature of Buddhist sites and iconography.⁶⁷
- We do not find epigraphical reference of donations of nuns at the familiar and famous rock-cut caves of Ajañtā and Ellora, donations that continued up to the seventh century C.E. Probably the required finances were offered by the contemporary royal houses like Vākāṭaka. Only the site of Kānhērī stands as an exception to it. Though the site survived in the later centuries, we do not come across the donations by nuns after the second century C.E.
- The nuns have been addressed by three distinct terms⁶⁸,



Kānhērī

namely bhikkhunī, antēvāsini and pavaītikā. Only five nuns, namely Damilā (number two), Kōdi (number seven), Aṣādhmitā (number eight), Hāliyā (number fifteen), and a nun from Pitaḷkhorē (name lost, number sixteen) have been addressed as bhikkhunī which indicates their senior status. It was only Pōṇakiasaṇā (number one) from Kānhērī who has been awarded further superior title of thēri.

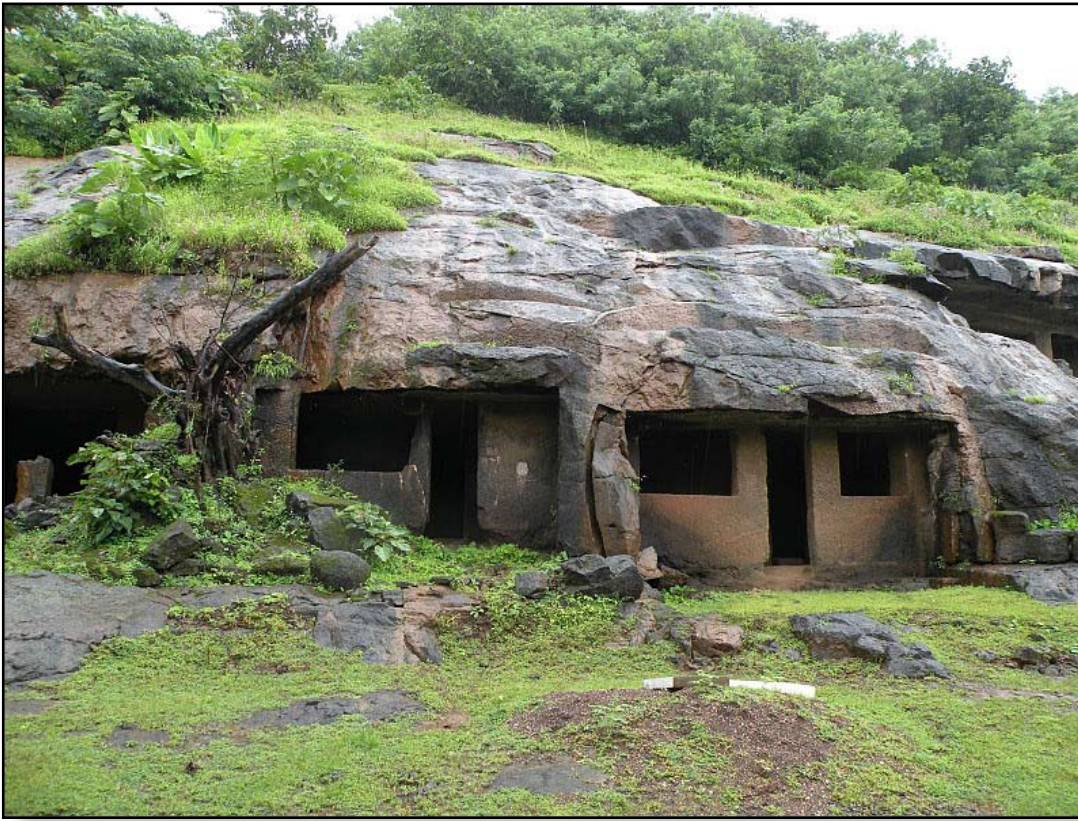
- The term pavaītikā was used to indicate one who was ordained (pravrajitā) but had not received the higher ordination (upasampadā). Antēvāsini can be decoded as female pupil.⁶⁹ Three female donors listed here, namely Pōṇakiasaṇā (number one), Sāpilā (number twelve) and one from Kānhērī (name lost, number three) are addressed with double title, that of pavaītikā as well as antēvāsini.
- Seven have been addressed as pavaītikā. They are Jamanasā (number four), Sāpā (number five), Damāryā (number six), Paduminikā (number ten), Nāganikā (number ten), Tāpasini (number thirteen), and Ghaparā (number fourteen). Whereas three have been addressed as antēvāsini. They are Usabhā (number fourteen), Bōdhī (number ten), Asālhamitā (number ten), and a group of antēvāsini (number nine) whose name cannot be read from Kārlē.

It is clear from these epigraphs that all the nuns, irrespective of their internal hierarchy, had a senior monk who is duly recognized in most of the inscriptions. The names of the senior monks like Thēra Bhadañt Ghōṣa (number one), Bhadañt

Saṅgha (number three), Thēra Bōdhik (number five), Thēra Vijay (number twelve), Sawas (number thirteen), Thēra Bhayat Simha (number seventeen) are duly recorded in these inscriptions.

- Only four nuns have given donations without referring to any familial ties or senior monks. They are Damilā (number two), Aṣādhmitā (number eight), and Hāliyā (number fifteen).
- There are only two cases where we learn the place of their residence of the nuns or their stopover at the time of making donations. Damilā (number two) categorically

It is after renouncing worldly possessions that these nuns have recorded their donations. As the inscriptions imply, if nuns were the sole donors and do not indicate the donations were an outcome of alms, other possibilities need to be considered. The nuns might have carried the strīdhana (her personal wealth) while entering the saṅgha. Inscriptions show that nuns were not cut off from the family, as there are joint family donations. The nuns could have retained their share in the ancestral property. Perhaps they were permitted to make one donation at the time of ordination.



Kuda

mentions Kalyāṇ, a suburb of Mumbaī, my hometown, in the inscription. In fact she does not give any other information apart from this. It must be noted that a large number of artisans, merchants, and women of Kalyāṇ have financed the construction of different caves at Kānhērī. Sāpā (number five) hails from Dhēnukākāṭa. A large number of men and women, including yavanas (only men) from Dhēnukākāṭa have donated for the construction of Kārle Caitya. Twenty-five nuns have donated at the Stūpas of Sāñcī. (Findley 2000:21)⁷⁰ Unlike the nuns in Deccan, here most of them have been identified not by their monastic title, but by places, where they perhaps resided or were present at the time of recording the donations⁷¹.

- A sole example from Junnar- Śivnērī (number fourteen) provides a very crucial reference to the existence of nunnery (Bhikkhunī Upāya)⁷² in Deccan. Patibhāḍak Girībhutī, and his wife, Sivapālnikāy, donated a permanent endowment for the nunnery of the Dharmōttariya, which should be in the vicinity of the ancient town of Junnar. The exact reference to the Dharmōttariya sect is also very crucial.
- Two important issues need to be discussed in the end. They are the family ties of the nuns, and the monetary factor involved in making these donations.
- Inscriptions suggest that after taking the vows, some nuns maintained ties with their families. While making donations they have identified themselves with their family members. Their familial relations are more prominent than the monastic identities in some inscriptions. Very large numbers of Buddhist lay donors have identified themselves as wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters-in-law. However, attachment and a deep concern for the spiritual gain of relatives by someone who has renounced

worldly affairs is an unusual occurrence. Passing on the merit of a religious act to someone, or sharing the puṇya with others—a popular concept in Hinduism—can be observed here. Thērī Ponakiasanna offers an interesting instance. She donated with her sister and brothers who are addressed as sramaṇas (number one). Sāpā prefers to be identified as the daughter of Kulapriya Dhamaṇak of Dhēnukākāṭa. Sāpā has added in her lay sister, Ratinikā, and many relatives. This entire exercise was meant to earn puṇya for her parents. This instance very clearly shows the affection of Sāpā for her parents, especially for her father, Kulapriya Dhamaṇak (number 5). Paduminikā has also identified herself as daughter, but in this case it is her mother,

Naganika. Paduminikā has also included her two maternal uncles, Patimīt and Agimīt, in this inscription. All of them have entered monastic order. These details very clearly indicate the influence of the maternal family and their religious inclinations on Paduminikā. The inscription is silent about Paduminikā's father and his religious inclinations. It is just possible that he believed in the Vedic tradition. Inscriptions revealed that such religious coexistence within a family was possible, and women were allowed to follow a religion of their choice in ancient Indian society. The trend of continuing the family tradition for two generations in monastic activities is sufficient to show the devotion of a family to Buddhism (number ten). In some other cases women who had taken the vows still preferred to be identified as mothers. The instances of Pravajitā Damāryā (number six) and Bhikkhunī Kōdī (number seven) can be cited in this respect.

- It is after renouncing worldly possessions that these nuns have recorded their donations. As the inscriptions imply, if nuns were the sole donors and do not indicate the donations were an outcome of alms, other possibilities need to be considered. The nuns might have carried the strīdhana⁷³ while entering the saṅgha. Inscriptions show that nuns were not cut off from the family, as there are joint family donations. The nuns could have retained their share in the ancestral property. Perhaps they were permitted to make one donation at the time of ordination. Though the individual ascetic was bound by his vows to own no property except the bare necessities, to touch no silver or gold, the monasteries grew rich on the alms of the faithful.
- Two donations (numbers one and fourteen) refer to

akhiyanivī or akshaynivī, terms meaning permanent endowment. The donors handed over the corpus to the trustees with desired guidelines. Whether this corpus was handled within the concerned cave site, or the authority was delegated to any local śrēṇī or guild is not known in these inscriptions. However, along with her spiritual awareness, Poṇakiasaṇā's economic vision must be appreciated.

The mammoth corpus of the sacred texts, composed in different languages at varied times and places, might not be accessible and comprehensible to all these benefactor nuns, but the deep-rooted faith becomes very evident in the donative inscriptions. These inscriptions not only resurrect the valuable contributions of the nuns in ancient Western India, but also allow us to glean much about the order of nuns in the formative centuries of Buddhism. The history of Buddhism will be incomplete if contributions of these nuns remain in oblivion.



Nashik

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¹ According to the canonical texts, before the Buddha allowed Pajāpatī into the Saṅgha, she had to agree to eight *garudhammas*, or grave rules, not required of men.

² http://tipitaka.wikia.com/wiki/Pasadika_Sutta.

³ <http://www.urbandharma.org/udharma/nunsuttas.html>.

⁴ Collected Wheel Publications Volume 5, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka, p. 159

⁵ It was a group of bhikkhunīs, bhikkhus, upasāṅkas, and upasāṅkas.

⁶ These edicts are located at various places on pillars, cave walls and boulders in India, Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

⁷ Righteousness Edict.

⁸ The edict at Rupnāth is a single flinty block of dark red sandstone lying at the foot of the Kaimūra range of hills just below the fertile plateau of Bahuribānd, 32 miles north of Jabalpur.

⁹ Corpus Inscriptinum Indicarum Vol.-I, p. 166 devānam piyē hēvā(m)ahā sati(ra)kēkāni aḍhāti(y)ani va ya sumī prakasa(sa) k(ē) nō chu bāḍhī pakātē satilēkē chu chhavāchhavē yā sumī hakā(m) sagh(a) up(ē)t ē

¹⁰ Emperor Aśoka developed remorse for warfare and was drawn towards the teachings of Dhamma after his victory over Kalinga country (c.265 B.C.E.) that was accompanied by enormous bloodshed and destruction. (Kalinga Rock Edict - XIII)

¹¹ This term used in the same inscription denotes meaning that "He took shelter in the saṅgha." There are variations in the reading of this term as saṅghē upeti and saṅgham upā ī. This term has also failed to gain a universally acceptable meaning from academics.

¹² Corpus Inscriptinum Indicarum Vol.-I, p. xxi, This pillar is located five and half miles from Bhilsā in Rāyasēna District, Madhya Pradesh. The pillar is only a fragment of a large polished shaft but near it lies a beautiful broken capital crowned by four lions which once surmounted it.

¹³ Ibid, 160-61...(y)a bhē(tā).....(gh)ē.....magē katē (bhi) khuna(m)cha bhi(khu)inam ch(a)ti(p)uta pabh(a)khati bhikhu vā bhikhunī va ōdtā nī dus(ān)ī sanam(dhapay)itu anā(vā) sāsī vā(sā)pētaviyē iccha hī mē kim ti sanghē chilā thikiyē siyā ti

¹⁴ Outside the monastic abode

¹⁵ Corpus Inscriptinum Indicarum Vol. I, p. xxi, This pillar is located three and half miles away from Benaras. Dēvā ...ē .. l... pata ...yē kēnāpī saṅghē bhētavē ē chum kho (bhikh)u (vā) (bhikh)unī vā saṅgham bh(akha)t(i) s(ē) ōdatani dus(ān)ī (sa) mnamḍhapayiyā anāvāsāsi

¹⁶ The emperor ordered in this edict to the Mahāmātras (of perhaps Paṭalīputra) that this edict should be submitted to both the saṅgha of monks and nuns. He further instructed to the Mahāmātras that it was their responsibility to circulate the order among the citizens as well.

¹⁷ Corpus Inscriptinum Indicarum Vol. I, p.xix, This pillar is a three-foot single shaft of polished sandstone. It contains four strata of records viz., Inscriptions of Emperor Aśoka, Inscription of Gupta Emperor Samudragupta, interlineations in Nāgarī characters and the inscription of Mughal Emperor Jahāngir. This edict was addressed to the Mahāmātras of Kausambī.

¹⁸ Dēvānām (p)iyē ānapayati Kōsāmbiyām mahām(a)tā (sa)mā (gē ka)t (ē) sa(m)gh(a)sī nō l(a)hiyē (saṅgham bhā)khatī bhikh(u) v(a) bhikh(u)ni vā(sēpī) (ō)dat(ā) dusanī (sa)namḍhapi yātu a(navā) sas(i) (ā)chav(ā)saiyiyē

¹⁹ Outside the monastic abode.

²⁰ The ministers in charge of religious affairs that were appointed by Emperor Aśoka.

²¹ Monastic clothing.

²² Corpus Inscriptinum Indicarum Vol.-I, p. xiii This edict is inscribed in three columns and located at Dhaulī, in the Purī district of Orissā state.

²³ Corpus Inscriptinum Indicarum Vol.-I, 105-106 na bhutpruvam dhamm mahāmātā nām (ē)t mayā traidasavāsābhisitēn dhammmhāmaā katā (ō)tē sawapāsaṇḍesu vyāpatā dhāmadhistāny

²⁴ These texts are: Vinaya –Samukasē (It is just possible that Vinaya-Samukasē may refer to the Old Commentary as well as to the Patimokkha, the basic Thēravāda code of monastic discipline, consisting of 227 rules for fully ordained bhikkhus and 311 for nuns), Aliya –Vasanī, Anagata-bhayani, Muni- gathā (Sutta Nipāta), Monēya –Sutē (Nalaka –Sutta), Upatisa-Pasina (Sariputta –Suta) and the sermon to Rāhula pronounced by the Buddha concerning falsehood.

²⁵ Corpus Inscriptum Indicarum Vol. I, 171-174.

²⁶ Abundant epigraphs in languages like Sanskrit and Pālī and scripts like Brāhmī from different sites such as Sanchi, Bharhut in north India and Sannati, Nagarjunkonda as well as the rock-cut caves lined up in the western coastal area.

²⁷ The Western Ghats are a mountain range in India that run parallel along the western frame of the Deccan Plateau and separate it from a narrow coastal plain along the Arabian Sea. Located in the mountain range of Western Ghats, Sahyādri Mountains are not just a geographical form and silent onlooker for the state of Mahārāṣṭra in India but has been an active partaker in the making of its history in general and Buddhism in particular.

²⁸ “The Thēra Dhammarakkhita the Yōna, being gone to Aparāntaka and having preached in the midst of the people the Aggikkhandhopama-sutta (of Aṅguttarnikāy) gave to drink of the nectar of truth to thirty-seven thousand living beings who had come together there, lie who perfectly understood truth and untruth. A thousand men and yet more women went forth from noble families and received the pabbajjā.” (Mahāvamsā-XII, Dīpavamsā-VIII.7)

²⁹ Literally meaning “the western end.” Aparānta seems to signify the western seaboard of India. As per to Sir R. G. Bhandarkar, Aparanta was the northern Kōkaṇa, the capital of which was Śūrpāraka (modern Sōpārā)

³⁰ There are all around 1500 rock-cut caves found in India. Out of these 1200 are carved in this era. 1000 are only in Mahārāṣṭra and 800 are carved in the Sātavāhana era.

³¹ From the fourth century B.C.E., climatic conditions became favorable for the Indian peninsula. The second wave of urbanization experienced the rise of urban centers like Junnar, Tēr, Pratiṣṭhāna etc. in Deccan. Greek sailor Hippalus discovered the monsoon around c. 45 C.E., and since then, the business of the western coast flourished with the Roman Empire. During this era, the Arabian coast was dotted with excellent ports between Bhaḍōca and Muziris. As a result of thriving overseas trade with the western world, the traders, skilled artisans, and farmers prospered in Deccan until the third century C.E. The cushion of political stability necessary to sustain the commercial and religious activities was offered by the Satavahana dynasty in Mahārāṣṭra. This dynasty sprung up in Mahārāṣṭra after the disintegration of Mauryan Empire around 230 B.C.E. and continued up to 220 C.E. Fortunately, the Sātavāhana rulers also unreservedly financed and supported these monasteries though their personal religious inclinations were different.

³² The Shēr and Taḷ ghāṭ (pass) connect Sōpārā with Nāsika; and

then inland. The Naṇēghāṭ links Kalyāṇ to Junnar and then to Paiṭhaṇ. Bhor Ghat connects Kalyāṇ to Karle and then to Ter. In addition there are smaller passes near Bhōr Ghāṭ that lead to the Port of Chaul. Naturally, they received liberal patronage from the mercantile class. The intimate connection between the caves and the trade routes has long been recognized. Rev. Abbot discovered the excavations at Naḍsūr as he was convinced of the existence of caves along the route linking Chaul to the interior.

³³ Thus the caityas and vihāras suited the commercial as well as the ecclesiastical needs of the newly emerged mercantile class which willingly financed for the construction of the same. It must be noted that the trader class which favored Buddhism was not only indigenous but also traders of Yavana descent.

³⁴ The ancient name of Kānherī was Kṛṣṇagiri. The Kānherī Buddhist Caves are situated in Borivalī, a suburban town of Mumbai. The earliest epigraph can be traced to the Sātavāhana Period. Most of the Kānherī caves are of a very simple type and the early Hināyāna sect excavated probably nearly all. However, later the influence of Mahāyāna sect is also very visible.

³⁵ Prākṛta Brāhmī, 200 C.E.

³⁶ Sidham thēraṇa bhayamta-Ghōṣānā antēvāsiniye pavaitikā a Poṇakiasaṇā thēraiya leṇaPaṇiyapōḍhī ch deyadhamma sahabhāginiya saha cha.... (bhātuhī) (Samanā) pāpākēhī chatudisē bhikkhusanghē patithāpita (tapitarō udi) sa akhyanivī cha sanghasa dina kahapaṇa satānī (bē) eto ciarika solakasa padiko masē cha utukalē sava Lokasa hitasugathā

³⁷ Prākṛta -Brāhmī, 200 C.E.

³⁸ Sidham Kaliyāṇakiya bhikhuniya Damiliya leṇa deyadhamam pōḍhī cha

³⁹ Prākṛta -Brāhmī c. 200 A.D. Sidham thērāṇam sagha..... antēvāsiniya pavajitikāya Deyadhama...sagham paṇiya (pōḍhī)

⁴⁰ Prākṛta -Brāhmī c. 200 A.D. Suvanakasa Sivātana saha bālikā Jamadevikasa Pavaitikā Jamanasā..... paṇiyapōḍhī (deyadhama) saha para (ri)umyasama pavanau

⁴¹ Prākṛta -Brāhmī c. 200 A.D. Sidham upāsakasa Dhēnukākaṭa yasa kula(piyasa)(Dha)maṇakasa dhutuya pavaitiyaka Sāpā (yā) (thē)rana bhadata Bodhikana Ponakanō antevasinī(ya) Leṇa deyadhama paṇiyapōḍhī cha saha bhāgi(nīya)Ratinikāya saha cha savēna natisabadhī (vagē)nā chatudisē bhikkhusanghē atha Apariselēsu Patithāpita mātāpitarō udisā sava (satāna) Hitasugathā bhikkusanghasa akhayanivī cha Dina etō cha (bhikhu) Saghana civaraka datava sōlakasa utukalē cha....The Aparasēliya School is included in the four schools (Haimavata, Rajaghirīya, Siddhatthaka, and Aparasēliya) that emerged out of the Mahāsanghikās.

⁴² Prākṛta -Brāhmī c. 200 A.D. Sa... pala navinakena vasa..... Tenattana cha vi....su.....mahā Atanasa saghartha cha nēgamā Navinakēnasaha Cha matuya pavachatikāya Damāyāya yēvā akhyanivī cha leṇam datānī savasatanam hitasu gharthā akhayanivī cha dina

⁴³ The ancient name of Kārlē was Vihārgaon or Valuraka. This caitya belongs to the first century B.C.E. and is the last of the finest type of Hinayana caves. The caitya contains a huge stūpa and thirty-seven richly decorated pillars. An inscription in the caitya states that this is the best cave in the entire Jambudvīpa and was completed by the moneylender Bhutapala of Vijayantī. (Vejayamtītō sēthina Bhutapalēna sēlaghara parinithāpita Ja(m)budipamnī uthama(m))

⁴⁴ Prākṛta -Brāhmī Kodiya Bhikhuīy Ghunikmātu veyika dāna (na)diken katām This donation can well be placed in the first century B.C. as the donation is meant for the architectural components of the main caitya.

⁴⁵ Prākṛta -Brāhmī first century B.C. Asāḍhamitāyē bhikkhunīyē.....

⁴⁶ (sawaccha)rē 5 hēmtān pakhē... (ētāy) puwāy (bh)yatahiṇam atēvāsiniṇ leṇa bhaginēsāwikāṇ sadigaghasu kālē pawaitāṇa saghay bu.....ch (dēy)dham poḍhī..... parivarēṇ upay antēvāsinihi Usabhāyē

⁴⁷ Kuḍā is a small village on the shore of the Rajāpurī Creek in the Maṅgaon Taluka, Raigad District. On a low hill there is group of twenty-six rock-cut caityas of the Hīnayāna faith, but the image of the Buddha carved in Cave Six, dated to the sixth century B.C.E., indicates the Mahāyāna occupation which occurred at a later date. Researchers have placed the inscriptions between the second to fourth centuries C.E.

⁴⁸ Prākṛta-Brāhmīśiddham thēraa(ṇam) bhadata Pa..timī-tana bhadaṇta Agimita(ta)na cha bhāgiṇēyīya pāvayitīkāya Nāganīkāya duhutaya pāvayitīkāya Padumanīkāya dyadhammam leṇa pōdhī cha saha antēvāsiniya Bōdhiya saha cha antēvāsiniya Asālhamitāya⁴⁹ Dēydharmōyam Śākyōpāsika Vyāghrakāyā yadatr puṇya tadbhavatu Mātāpitru purvāgamam kṛtvā sarvasatvānām anuttari dnyanāvāpaya

⁵⁰ Sidham thēraṇam bhayat Vijayāṇ ātivāvāsiniya pavaītikāy sapilāy deyadhamm leṇa sah sā Lōhitāhi veṇhuyāhi s(ha)ch ātivāvāsiniya Bōdhiy

⁵¹ The town is a place of great antiquity and sanctity being associated with the legend of Lord Rāma who is said to have spent part of his exile at Panchavati, a suburb of Nāśika. It was one of the important Hīnayāna centers and the caves, twenty four in number, contain important inscriptions of the Western Kṣatrapa and the Sātavāhana.

⁵² Prākṛta-Brāhmī Inscription second century B.C.E. Bhaymta Savasānam antēvāsiniya pavaītayā Tāpasiniya cha deyadhamma (leṇa) chatudisasa bhikkhusangha datam

⁵³ Junnar has the largest Hīnayāna establishment, comprised of 324 rock-cut excavations. Of these, ten are caitya grha, 174 vihāras, 115 cisterns, and the remaining unfinished excavations. They are nearly equally distributed in five different localities, making fifty-seven separate excavations altogether. After the Sātavāhana power eclipsed, Junnar also lost its importance as a religious and commercial center.

⁵⁴ Prākṛta -Brāhmī , Apāguriyān Savagiriyaśa putas Patibhadakas Giribhuti (sa) bhayāy Sivapālnikāy leṇam pōdhī ch nkarē ch Bhikkhunī Upāsāyō(y)s Dhammutariyān akhayanivī

⁵⁵ Paunī was an ancient and important Buddhist centre in Ancient India. A pillar edict of Mahākṣatrapa Rūpāmma discovered at Chāndā Dēvṭēk, district Chāndā, confirms antiquity of Paunī. On the paleographical basis these caves can be assigned to c. 2 B.C. to 2 A.D.

⁵⁶ Pitaḷkhōrē or the Brazen Glen is situated a mile and a half from the deserted village of Patna in Khandesh district.

⁵⁷ y bhicuniyā dānam th(bhō)

⁵⁸ This place is two miles north of the small town of Talegaon Dabhade near Pune. These excavations are found in the Gārōdī hill and are at a height of 400-500 feet above the plain.

⁵⁹ Prākṛta -Brāhmī c. 200 A.D. Sidham! thēraṇam bhayata Sihāṇa ateāsiniya pavaītikāya Ghap(rā) ya bālīkā saghāya Buddha a cha chetiyygharō deyadhama mātāpitā udisa sah(ch) savēhī bhikk(khu) kulēhī sahā ch āchari(ya)hi bhātvirāehī samāpitō

⁶⁰ This paper is inspired by my doctoral research ("Position of Women in Deccan as Gleaned Through Inscriptions: 200 B.C.-1200 A.D.") that compiles and evaluates more than 1500 women recorded in the inscriptions of ancient Deccan of which 333 are patrons of Buddhism—lay, nuns, royals as well as courtesans. Though this paper takes into account the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha dwelling only in the rock-cut caves of Western Deccan, there is an urgent need to compile, analyze, and present a holistic view of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in all of ancient India in the light of the epigraphical data. Duly recognizing the contributions and achievements of these remarkable yet very real women of India will help to claim the rightful space belonging to them.

⁶¹ A very early and brief monograph was written by B. C. Law (Bhikkshunis in Indian Inscriptions).

⁶² Gregory Schopen has expressed similar concern in the article, "On Monks, Nuns and the Vulgar Practices, the Introduction of the Image Cult into Indian Buddhism," in Bones, Stones and the Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India, 256.

⁶³ Arvind Sharma, "How and Why Did the Women in Ancient India Become Buddhist Nuns?", Sociological Analysis, Vol 38, Autumn 1977, 239-251. This article is solely based on the accounts narrated in the Thērigāthā. The article, "On Thēra and Thēri" (17-37), an article by Kumkum Roy, incorporated in the book The Power of Gender and the Gender of Power: Explorations in Early Indian History, also explores the Thērigāthā. Meena Talim, in her work, Women in Early Buddhism, and I.B. Horner, Women Under Primitive Buddhism, offer a similar treatment.

⁶⁴ Rekha Daswani, Buddhist Monasteries and Monastic Life in Ancient India (From the Third Century B.C. to the Seventh

Century A.D.), Āditya Prākāśan, New Delhi, 2006. In her work, Rekha Daswani takes care to elaborate all the aspects of early monastic life in ancient India, but once again bhikkhunīs fail to find required space in the work. Most of the attention is paid to the development of the Bhikkhu Saṅgha.

⁶⁵ Uma Chakravarty and Kumkum Roy in their article, “In Search of our Past: A Review of the Limitations and Possibilities of the Historiography of Women in Early India,” delve much into the development of the gender historiography of India and explain the socio-political conditions that perhaps resulted in the Altekarian paradigm. This term was explained by them as “glorification the Vedic Period of ancient India” by early historians like Altekar, Indra (The Status of Women in Ancient India. Motilal Banarasidass Publication, Benaras, 1955, (II Edition.), and Shakuntala Rao Shastri, Women in Vedic Age, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1954. Kumkum Roy in the elaborate introduction to the collected papers titled “Women in Early Indian Societies,” continues her search for the corrective methodology. Uma Charkravarti’s article (published in the same book, 73-81) “Beyond the Altekarian Paradigm: Towards a new Understanding of Gender Relations in Early Indian History,” is a continuation of the same problem. The bhikkhunīs once again fail to gain their rightful space in the succeeding articles in the book. It must be noted that all these works are concerned about the Vedic Civilization.

⁶⁶ Position of Women in Hindu Civilization by A. S. Altekar is a famous work on the history of women in India.

⁶⁷ Observations of Gregory Schopen in “On Monks, Nuns and Vulgar Practices: The Introduction of the Image Cult into Indian Buddhism” in Bones, Stones and the Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India, (238-257) can be compared in this respect.

⁶⁸ Inscriptions also reveal certain titles of the nuns. At Sānchī the titles used are Sutakitini (woman reciter of Suttanata or Sutras - Epigraphia Indica, X, p. 93), dhammakanthikā (woman reciter of the Dharma- Epigraphia Indica, X, p. 93), and pancanikāyikā (which also occurs at Bhārhut- Epigraphia Indica, X, p. 93 and which Dr. Hultzsch translates as one who knows the five Nikāyās).

⁶⁹ Epigraphia Indica, XXV, p.33

⁷⁰ Nancy Barnes, “The Nuns at the Stūpa: Inscriptional Evidence for the Lives and Activities of Early Buddhist Nuns in India,” in Women’s Buddhism Buddhism’s Women: Tradition, Revision, Renewal, ed. Ellison Banks Findley, Wisdom Publication, Boston, 2000, 17-36 A mention also can be made of an article, “Women and Men Donors at Sanchi: A Study of the Inscriptional Evidence at Sanchi,” (38-52) by Kumkum Roy in the book The Power of Gender and the Gender of Power: Explorations in Early Indian History, that again explores the votive inscriptions at Sanchi. Sanchi has attracted the attention of the researches because of its large repository of donative records.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 23

⁷² This inscription also mentions the nunnery of Sivayapālīka which closely reminds us of the Suī Vihāra Copper Plate Inscriptions (Corpus Inscriptinum Indicarum, II-I, n. LXXIV) and the donation of Princess Puṣyadattā. (Epigraphia Indica, XXVIII, p. 43). Both the donors refer to the vihāra financed by them as their property. In the first inscription, Bālānaṇḍī a Kuṭumbinī and an upāsikā who donated along with her mother, is recorded as “Vihāraswāminī.” In the Mathura Stone Image Inscription, Devatā is addressed as “Vihāraswāminī.” (Corpus Inscriptinum Indicarum -III 263-264)

⁷³ The word strīdhan is derived from the words strī meaning woman and dhana meaning property. Strīdhan is defined as that portion of a woman’s wealth over which she alone has the power to sell, gift, mortgage, lease or exchange—whole or in parts. Usually, strīdhan is passed from mother to daughter, unless the woman decides otherwise. Besides the ornaments and trousseau given at marriage, strīdhan also includes all the gifts of money, property, jewelry, and so on received by the woman before, during, and after marriage from her family, her husband’s family, friends, and even strangers.



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Bhikkhuni Nirodha on Ordaining and Renunciation

This article is reprinted with the kind permission of Bhikkhuni Nirodha and the Buddhist Fellowship (BF) to whom she granted this interview which is to appear in an upcoming issue of the Buddhist Fellowship Newsletter.

BF: Please tell us your background and what led you to take a Buddhist path.

Born in Austria in 1945, I arrived in Australia age twenty, newly married, and later divorced. We had no children. I enjoyed lots of travel, a relatively good life, but there slowly arose an increased awareness of no end of wanting and getting.

On a health retreat sometime in the late 1970's, feeling bored, trying to decide whether to play tennis or a card game of Bridge, a sudden deep moment of stillness arose, a sense of giving up the endless choices and mental activity. From within that depth a clear question arose in my mind: "Do I want to continue with this shallow, easy way of life, or do I want to look for the Truth?" Without hesitation there came the strong desperate answer and determination that I must look for the Truth; even more, I wanted to become the Truth.

After snapping out of this experience, life went on, but with a subtle shift in direction. I did not return to my childhood strong Christian roots, but remained open. One day in 1979, on a short visit to Sydney, my friend invited me to meet her Buddhist teacher, Anagarika Munindra-Ji, at an open-house gathering. My other plans for the day got cancelled, so on a whim, I went.

When I was introduced to the teacher, as a greeting, he said, "What are you doing?" For the first time, I understood on a deeper level, and thought, yes, I am doing nothing with my life. I answered, "I am doing nothing."

An hour or two later, when it was announced that in a few days this teacher would give a nine-day meditation retreat in a forest monastery outside of Sydney, I knew I had to go. The retreat would be at Wat Buddha Dhamma, co-led with Ven. Ayya Khema and Ven. Khantipalo. When I told my friend, she was aghast. She cried

out, "You know nothing about Buddhism! You can hardly even spell the word 'Buddha'!" She had studied extensively before starting her path.

Yet I went to the retreat, where I followed instructions and felt at home with the Buddha's teachings. My quest for the Truth had brought me to the Dhamma. From then on, I gratefully and happily participated in Buddhist activities as much as possible, first in Australia, then in Sri Lanka, USA, Burma, and Thailand, and now back in Australia.

BF: Venerable, please describe your feelings and thoughts when you received ordination as a nun.

Ordination was not just one experience, but three. First was the anagarika ceremony in 2001, undertaking Eight Precepts, shaving the head, and putting on white robes. There my ordinary householder life ended.

Next was the Ten Precept nun ordination in 2003,

gaining brown robes, and relinquishing all money and all assets, to the shock of my friends and family. Since considerable assets were involved, even the bank rang up to make sure I was of sound mind. My loved ones had slowly adjusted to my new direction in life, yet were still stunned that I carried out the final step, leaving everything behind—as this implied that the world has nothing to offer, ever. It made a big impact upon them.

Both of these ordinations were profound experiences for me, but the deepest one occurred in 2009 at my

higher ordination ceremony as a bhikkhuni. The male and female Maha-Sangha turned out in full force, even more than the needed number. Their full support was evident. From my heart I said these words, To end all suffering, to realize Nibbana, please raise me up out of compassion—that is, may they raise me into Sangha status. And they did, in Pali, reciting the same phrases that the Buddha used. An indescribable unique experience happened during my ordination, of linking up, as though being received into the pure Sangha realm, with all Sangha blessings. From that day on, I gratefully enjoy the complete lifestyle that the Buddha compassionately gave his ordained disciples, which is the greatest support for the mind's development.

BF: What does it mean to renounce? You mentioned in your talks that there are two levels of renunciation—external and internal. Please elaborate.

External renunciation is quite easy, once you start to see the burden of owning anything and see that you don't own it in the first place. "Owning" means in control—permanence. But are we really? Please contemplate this. If you see the truth, you may end up saying "thank you" to those who take away from you these burdensome possessions.



External renunciation is quite easy, once you start to see the burden of owning anything and see that you don't own it in the first place. "Owning" means in control—permanence. But are we really?

Personally, I was also struck by the question, "What good is it to sit on a pile of gold, and no one to give it to?" As someone dear to me used to say, "I prefer to give with a warm hand rather than with a cold one..."

Because of our so-ingrained sense of self, we are constantly seeking and being reconfirmed in the world on the appearance level, desperately trying to find a place of security in an inherently unstable, unsatisfactory existence. We then finally cling to our so-called inner world, the domain of ideas, perceptions, and so on, before realizing the dissolving of inner and outer mind-made boundaries.

Realizing more and more that ALL phenomena, whether we call it in or outside—or simply everything experienced—have three things in common: unsatisfactoriness, unsteadiness, and inability to claim ownership. The algebra of life experiences brings one to a simple equation: "Samsara is movement, stillness is Nibbana."

BF: Please give us an idea of what life is like in a monastery? What is your daily routine like?

Every monastery strikes some balance between group activities, work, and time for quiet reflection and meditation. The emphasis depends upon the priorities and circumstances of each monastery. The work load, for example, may be shared among a few residents or many, with or without helping hands from volunteers. The community's highest priority may be meditation, or teaching the Dhamma, or offering ceremonies, or guiding those who are newly ordained, or building infrastructure may be the priority at times.

At Dhammasara, we presently focus on developing the community, particularly guiding newly ordained members, while also teaching the Dhamma. Also a high priority is meditation time and retreat time for our community members; therefore we allow time for that. Right now, we also must focus on developing infrastructure to give our quickly-growing community a place to reside. Depending on donations received, the building phase may be long or short. A detailed programme of our daily activities can be found on our website, <http://www.dhammasara.org.au/>



Etam Santam: Etam Panitam

(This is Peaceful, This is Excellent)

Reflections on Monastic Life at Aranya Bodhi Hermitage, California, USA

By Marajina, Samaneri

Sitting above the canyon, the forest disappears into a breathing river of conifers and oak trees. Green is ubiquitous, blending seamlessly into silvers and ochers and browns. So much so that defining it with precision—to say that this is green here—is remarkably meaningless. Meaning, it turns out, is all made up anyway.

A profundity of warmth and blue sky may dominate the saddle, but the creek, sheltered hundreds of feet below, is green, shady, and cool. The ferns are bright and cheerful. Moss tucks a millennial root sculpture neatly into the sloping bank. Water bathes the rock bed in a chorus of ponytail waves. Though clocks continue ticking, time here has dropped vigilance.

Beside the creek, one can forget language altogether and watch meaning slip away with the current. It is humbling and awe-inspiring to merge into the creekside, just another natural formation.

Aranya Bodhi is like a rare and priceless jewel, a prism of potential within a big-hearted Pacific forest. Rare in the West and rare in its intention for Buddhist women, it is also rare in its physical beauty and extended community. Aranya Bodhi is a great occasion for the Fourfold Sangha. But the hermitage is still in a tender phase.

The forest teaches as the Buddha taught, with an open hand. It can be cold and harsh in northern California beside the Pacific Ocean. It can rain sideways for weeks on end. The wind can take before we let go. In a single day, every heater on the lower and upper landing can experience failure and there will be no warm place to enter; no way to dry our



rain-soaked robes. The majority of our cooking is done outdoors year-round, regardless of the weather. Our toilets are at ambient temperature.

None of this matters when sitting on a bed of wild ginger or walking in the creek after a light rain. Aranya Bodhi's tender phase is a phase of leaning into the precipice, scaling a landslide, sitting at the creek before dawn, walking without a torch after midnight on the new-moon night... there is a taste of freedom.

As a hermitage, we've yet

to be captured and defined. We abide with the unsettledness and uncertainty of wilderness living, knowing that plans change. Impermanent are all conditioned dhammas.

After completing our second Vassa Retreat, there is so much to Aranya Bodhi that cannot be grasped. Those indescribable moments connecting us to the forest, to forest beings and to each other, cut through our muscle and flesh and sinews...to our hearts. They arise with a taste of a skin-shedding freedom. They fall away without a trace. Amazing.

It is natural that our tender phase also includes sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair, union with the unpleasant, separation from the pleasant...these will arise in a coastal wilderness even for those with a coastal-wilderness affinity.

In walking meditation the other day, I was reflecting on the robe my preceptor, Ayya Tathaaloka, Theri gave me on my samaneri ordination. As I reflected that it is made up of mere elements and worn only to ward off insects and weather, the robe loosened and the sleeve came slightly

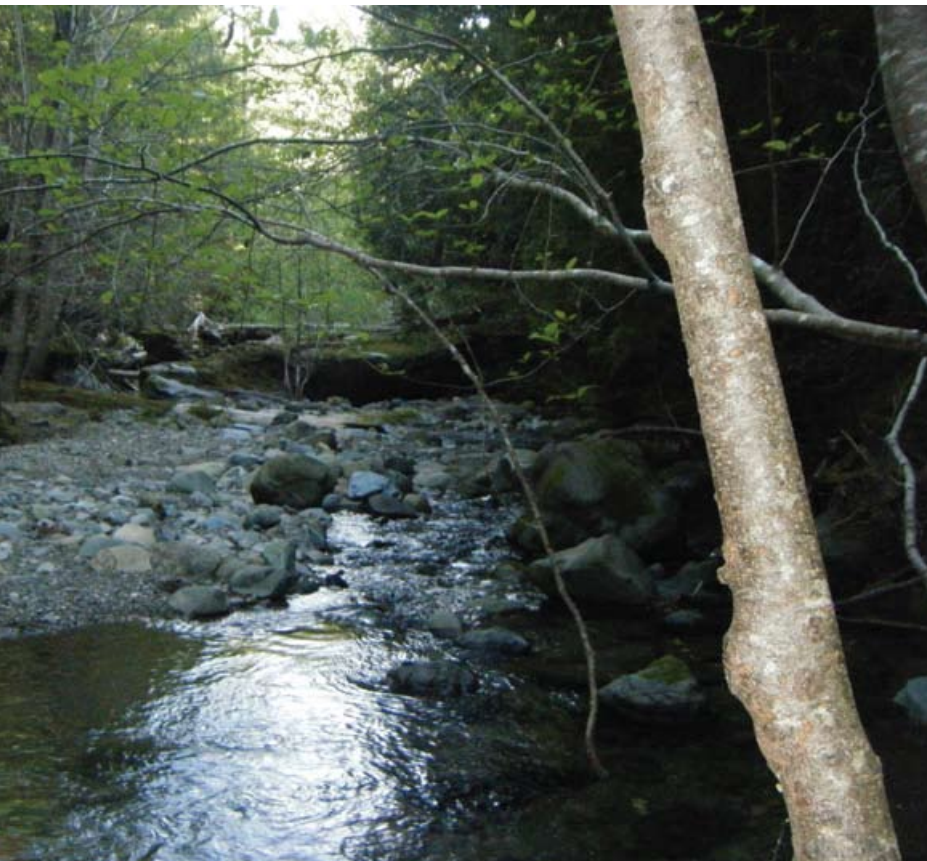
undone. I stood quietly on the early morning road, aware of the robe's inherently empty nature while I re-rolled it, thinking that it essentially had no meaning.

Looking up by chance to where the road arched over the hillside, I saw a shape in the distance. She was watching me roll the saffron robe. We watched each other quietly, a seeing of curiosity and goodwill. She saw the saffron robe of a Samana. I saw her seeing this. When I tossed the roll over my left arm, she turned toward the hillside and walked away, unhurriedly...a large doe.

To many, this robe is a sign of renunciation, harmless-



As a hermitage, we've yet to be captured and defined. We abide with the unsettledness and uncertainty of wilderness living, knowing that plans change. Impermanent are all conditioned dhammas.



ness, and goodwill. While in the final analysis it is inherently empty, it does not lack meaning in the world. So perhaps it is with Aranya Bodhi. To capture any of this...is not possible...but to hold it in a way that it is allowed to be all of this to every woman who is not only called to renunciate life but also to the traditions of the forest-dwellers. This is possible simply by abiding in the forest present, letting it be with a heart that matches the forest heart. Being content with this, desiring only this. How auspicious that there is a peaceful forest hermitage—still in its tender phase, with Theravada bhikkhunis living an ancient tradition in all its depth and significance—present in the world. There is meaning in this.

Samaneri Marajina resides at Aranya Bodhi Hermitage, California, USA. She is a former editor of Present and former board member of the Alliance for Bhikkhunis.

REFLECTIONS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

THE 1ST ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL BHIKKHUNI DAY

September 17, 2011

I think the most meaningful thing about the 1st Annual International Bhikkhuni Day is that it happened in the West at Sravasti Abbey. We are, as far as I know, the only monastic community for Westerners that supports and prepares women for Bhikkhuni ordination and the training is given by a qualified elder of the Vinaya, Bhikkhuni Thubten Chodron, our abbess. I also am deeply grateful and encouraged by the enthusiasm of the laity to know about and understand the importance of having fully ordained monks and nuns in the world and to support that undertaking.

Ven. Thubten Semkye, Sravasti Abbey, Newport, Washington, USA



Venerable Semkye carefully cleaning the glass.

My experience of participating in International Bhikkhuni Day was transformative. I sat with a group led by Susan

Pembroke, president of the Alliance for Bhikkhunis and the creative spark behind this event. We practiced metta meditation throughout the day in thirty-minute sits. And although I have meditated for ten years, I was knocked out by what I experienced in those meditations—deep, profound, and extremely powerful. I think it will take me a long time to digest what happened on September 17th, but one thought comes to mind: the world is in critical need of loving feminine energy. I always knew that women were powerful, spiritual beings—I grew up with two—but I had no idea just how powerful! I am humbled by bhikkhuni energy and grateful to the women around the world who continue to follow this path. May they be safe, at peace, healthy, and happy.

Peggy McInerny, Santa Barbara, California, USA



In 2010, I chose to set the parameter of my study and practice to include retreats, books, music, Dhamma talks, magazine articles exclusively by women as a way to deepen my experience of the female voice, essence, inspiration and wisdom. In 2011, I realized that there are multiple and rich opportunities to continue this adventure in and around Spokane which made our celebration of the 1st Annual International Bhikkhuni Day so beautiful for me. Gathering together for Dhammas discussion, friendship, and lunch at Sravasti Abbey with Tibetan Buddhist monastics and residents, Theravada lay teachers, and sangha members, created new understanding of our shared commitment to serving and awakening as well as supporting the essential role of bhikkhunis in the Fourfold Sangha past, present, and future.

Dori Langevin, Spokane, Washington, USA





Bhikkhuni Upekkha

Thank you so very much, for initiating this idea of International Bhikkhuni Day. I feel that it gave the Theravada nuns a great opportunity to raise awareness to the public about the challenges of females who are spiritually inclined and keen to walk in the Buddha's footsteps. The feedback received after our celebration was most encouraging and reassuring. Many had not heard about the struggle of the bhikkhunis. For some of those present, it was the first time they had seen a Theravada nun in Singapore. A few said they were moved to tears after hearing about the great effort put in by the venerable ajahns, ayyas, upasakas, and upasikas for the revival of the Theravada bhikkhuni lineage. Many were touched by how determined the nuns are in their training and practice despite the initial weak support. Thankfully, the situation is slowly improving. We were blessed to have the participation of Venerable Bhikkhu Dr. K. Gu-

naratana and Mahayana Dhamma Sister, Venerable Bhikkhuni Shi Faxun on this meaningful and auspicious day.

Bhikkhuni Upekkha, Singapore, Malaysia

The 1st Annual International Bhikkhuni Day felt like one of those precious, eye-opening, heart-opening, shifts in awareness. Although I'd had a brief contact with female monastics, to be given the gift of a day with the nuns (and monk) at Sravasti Abbey, was life-changing. As three Dhamma teachers from Spokane, we toured the main hall, meditation hall, offices, and nuns' dormitory (where a beautiful stained glass of Mahapajapati resides). Later, we had tea and discussion with Ven. Chodron, the abbess who created this remarkable community—the only abbey in the US where men and women monastics train together in the dharma. I knew that the nuns kept a strict meditation schedule from early morning to late night, but surprised to find that much of their contemplation occurs while they quietly perform their many chores—their days are very full! As Ven. Chonyi said to me, "The fact that we don't speak frivolously allows us a quiet mind." Ven. Chodron

gave a Dhamma talk (televised daily from the abbey), and afterwards we had a beautiful meal in silence. Then, each monastic answered the question, "Why are bhikkhunis important in today's world?" Every monastic spoke extemporaneously, but it was clear that each one had reflected deeply on this question, giving answers that rang with clarity and ardor. Their work keeping their monastic community afloat, their work with homeless teens in Newport, with prisoners, and as Dhamma teachers with the laity, were just a few clues of their devotion. The joy and freedom in their faces were another. Until this day, I had no real sense of the commitment and sacrifice required of monastics. The experience cemented my own path in the Dhamma as well as the mission of the Alliance for Bhikkhunis.

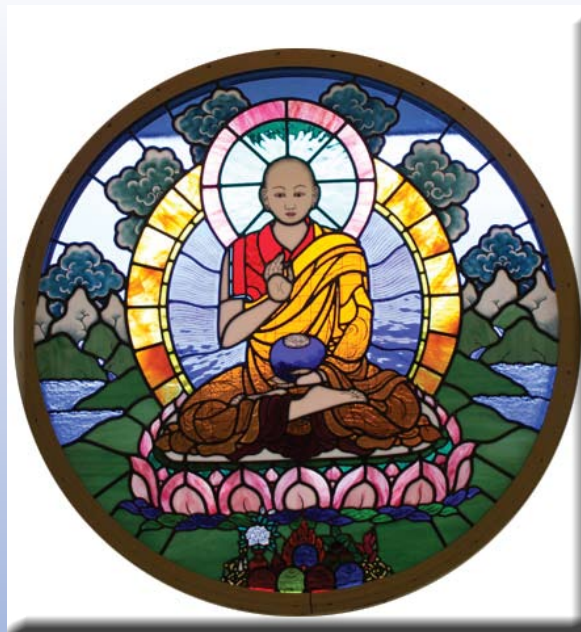
Sarah Conover, Spokane, Washington, USA



To honor the 1st Annual International Bhikkhuni Day, I shared the story of Mahapajapati Theri put together by Susan Pembroke. Everyone was happy to hear it and felt they learned more about the Buddha's birth mother as well as his stepmother, Pajapati. The story really humanizes Pajapati and Siddhartha. Many of us were struck by the psychological aspects of the loss of his mother at such an early age to the young Siddhartha and the fact that Pajapati would give up her own son to nurse him. We agreed it was a beautiful story whether all the "facts" were

correct or not. The story opened the way for a discussion of the recent bhikkhuni ordinations as well. This was very fruitful. Many people are not aware of the loss of the Bhikkhuni Sangha in the Theravada tradition nor of recent events restoring the Four-fold Sangha. Our time together was a chance to see our tradition realistically, its patriarchal past, and to acknowledge the incredible changes that are happening by women empowering themselves while they also gain new respect and honor from the Bhikkhu Sangha.

Berget Jelane, lay Buddhist minister, San Jose Insight Meditation, San Jose, California, USA



Mahaprajapati Gotami, Sravasti Abbey

**2ND ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL
BHIKKHUNI DAY
SEPTEMBER 29, 2012**

President's Letter

FURTHER THOUGHTS ON THE 1ST ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL BHIKKHUNI DAY SEPTEMBER 17, 2011

Converging streams of benevolence and sheer altruism produced the 1st Annual International Bhikkhuni Day (IBD), a day of celebrating women's spiritual accomplishments. After all was said and done, IBD proved to be an astonishing patchwork quilt. Once assembled, the overall design could not have been predicted by the isolated, donated scraps of material from around the globe. For me, it became a lesson on the power of community, of how good-hearted people coming together can create something no one person could singly imagine or do. The day confirmed why it is so critical for women to live in communities. The synergy and dynamism of the group surpass any solo effort.

Jacqueline Kramer, Alliance for Bhikkhunis (AfB) former vice president and current Executive Editor of its online magazine *Present*, out of deep concern for the plight of monastic women, conceived the idea of a national holiday to commemorate bhikkhunis. Bhikkhuni Tathaaloka Theri suggested the month of September since the founder of the Bhikkhuni Sangha, Mahapajapati, ordained on a full moon in September. Ayya Tathaaloka would later offer us a sumptuous article on the ancient and highly accomplished Bhikkhuni Uppalavana, one of the gifts marking the day. Bhikkhuni Amma Thanasanti proposed the annual event should be international, not national. She also wrote a revealing article on extraordinary women who influenced her. They included her sisters in robes, her mother, and the famed laywoman teacher Dipa Ma. All of the IBD articles can be found in the AfB digital Library.

And so it went, people adding their talents and ideas, extravagant in their giving of time, while trusting that something good would develop but not sure what it might be or how the finished product would look. In retrospect, the entire event was a collective act of faith. Ven. Bhikkhu Anālayo offered two scholarly papers, one on Mahāpajāpati's going forth

and the other on Bhikkhuni Dhammānā. Melanie Abhassara stirred our emotions through her exquisite chanting of the "Recollections of the Foremost Arahant Bhikkhunis." Bhikkhuni Karma Leshe Tsomo and AfB's board member Donna McCarthy created an informative power point on bhikkhuni history. Carol Annable searched out Dhamma talks and managed the evolving site, with bhikkhunis making suggestions on which of their talks would be most fitting for the event.

One of the earliest questions in planning the 1st Annual International Bhikkhuni Day was where to hold the event. What country or city would be ideal? In the U.S., for instance, there are still precious few bhikkhunis. It quickly became apparent there was no there, there, no central place where people could easily assemble for there were only a smattering of bhikkhunis in Southern California, a handful in Northern California, some in the Midwest, the East Coast, and Florida. It made sense to create a portable, downloadable, do-it-yourself retreat-workshop that anyone could quickly and effortlessly assemble and imple-

ment in their living room or backyard. There were simply too few bhikkhunis, too far apart, to lead local retreats.

Wonderfully, amazingly, people around the globe began planning events. Some worked with our Firstgiving site. Some designed days that worked for their unique setting or group.

In Ventura, California where I live, I organized a small, intimate event. A dear friend opened her home where eight of us met. We meditated inside as well as in her lush garden, bursting with flowers in the shape of white trumpets and ripe tomatoes grown from seeds imported from Italy. Hummingbirds and over a dozen Monarch butterflies watched over us and did their best to keep us entertained during walking meditation.

Alternating between periods of sitting and sharing, we used the downloads from the AfB site and talked about the women who impacted us. We honored mothers and grandmothers as well as Dhamma teachers. One man recalled a Santa Barbara Vajrayana nun who introduced him to Buddhism and meditation. I recounted stories of Ayya Khema as well as my Slovakian grandmother who walked miles to Mass every morning, whispered the rosary every night, and never passed a beggar on the street without depositing a coin. Her entire life a tender, loving prayer.

One woman spoke of breaking the news to her husband's aunt that they were divorcing. After relaying a few details, the woman reflexively tensed as she waited for the older woman's response, a woman who had over the years become a beloved aunt to her as well and someone she feared losing in the divorce. After a moment, in a thick Swedish accent, with absolute conviction, the older woman matter-of-factly stated, "Ooooh, he's such an asshole!" We all laughed. Aging aunts aren't supposed to talk like that, but it was a pitch-perfect response. Tears of affection and gratitude streamed down the meditator's face as she passed around a photo of the aunt who in a second or two let her know that she was not only there for her, but would be a fierce protector as well.

One of the women in our circle, a college English instructor, in thinking about influential female figures in her life, thought of Maya Angelou, the brilliant poet who writes with razor-sharp precision about the poignant history of African Americans. What she brought to share was Angelou's poem "Still I Rise." Almost at once I could see parallels between the African-American experience and the struggle of Buddhist women to ordain. One subject in the poem was the propaganda campaign launched against people of color. Angelou writes:

*You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.*

These lines could just as easily apply to the untruths spread about bhikkhunis and their history. Despite the avalanche of distortions and deception, bit by bit, bhikkhuni legacy is being recovered, thanks to the dedicated work of many men and women.

*Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.*

There are many forces currently unfolding, propelling bhikkhunis forward, their movement toward ordination destined, irrepressible, unstoppable, and essential—each woman's desire for full awakening the ultimate driver.

As waves of women ordain each year and take their rightful place in the monastic Sangha, there is a palpable joy and optimism, the hopefulness infectious. If the words "the slave" in the following lines were replaced with "women," this stanza could be used to describe the courage, confidence, and determination of many women who have and continue to reject a second-class status and insist on equality, on being seen as well as heard.

*Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of (the slave) women.
I rise
I rise
I rise.*

More and more bhikkhunis, inspired by their ancestors' gifts, rise among us.

Truly a reason to celebrate each September!

Susan Pembroke

Temporary Samaneri Ordination in Thailand Nirotharam Bhikkhuni Arama

To commemorate Buddha Jayanti (2600 years since the Buddha's enlightenment) and the King of Thailand's 84th year, a temporary 9-day samaneri ordination program was offered to women who might not otherwise have the chance to ordain, giving them an opportunity to briefly experience monastic life and realize its value. Fifty-one women took part.

The program was also held in conjunction with the celebration (October 16) of the arama's newly completed uposatha (ordination) hall, attended by a delegation of Sri Lankan bhikkhus and bhikkhunis, including pavattini (preceptor) Ven Padukke Sumithra who performed the samaneri ordinations.

In other news, neither of Nirotharam's branch monasteries was affected by Thailand's major flooding following this year's monsoon season. A flood scare from the risk of a nearby dam overflowing resulted in the sisters having to move possessions upstairs (then downstairs again) as a precaution, but fortunately, everyone remained safe and no harm was done.

However, large parts of Thailand have been severely hit, and the water has yet to recede in many areas. For more information on how to help alleviate the suffering of the flood victims, please visit the Thai Red Cross.

The Bodhi Grows in Australia

Bomaluwa Temple
Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka
November 4, 2011

The co-abbots of Dhammasara Buddhist Nuns' Monastery (Western Australia), Venerables Nirodha and Hasapanna, along with newly ordained Samaneri Karunika (formerly Anagarika Kemanthi) and lay supporter Mrs. Ber Sun, traveled to Bomaluwa Temple (Sri Lanka) to receive a precious sapling from a seed of the great Sri Maha Bodhi Tree of Anuradhapura. Elder Sri Lankan monk, Venerable Dr. Pallegama Sirinivasa Atamasthanadhipathi Nayaka Thero, offered the gift to honor the Bhikkhuni Sangha. Before a large crowd and amid news coverage, the two bhikkhunis formally received the sapling.

Having passed a biological examination and quarantine of Australian Customs, the auspicious Bodhi tree will be planted at the Dhammasara Monastery.

[Photos from the ceremony in Sri Lanka can be seen here:](#)

[Sanghamittaram Celebrates the 1st Annual International Bhikkhuni Day](#) [Sanghamittarama Bhikkhuni Residence](#) [Victoria, Australia](#)



Sanghamittarama had a successful gathering at this year's 1st Annual International Bhikkhuni Day celebration, September 17, 2011. A Dhamma talk was offered by Ven. Bhikkhu Janagatha, followed by discussion about the bhikkhuni



Sanghamittaram Shaving Head of Ana

[Photos from the ceremony planting the sapling at the Centre for Rhizobium studies glasshouse \(Murdoch University, Perth, Australia\) can be seen here:](#)

tradition and the difficulties it faces. Eminent women in Buddhism, such as Upasika Dipa Ma and Ven. Ayya Khema, two notable meditation teachers of the late 20th century, were also discussed. Funds were raised to witness the head being shaved of a long term supporter, Ana. Many people left the event inspired after learning more about the female aspect of Buddhism and the bhikkhuni movement in the Theravada tradition.



In other news, Ven. Bhikkhuni Vijitananda, a senior bhikkhuni abbess of the Sakyadhita Nuns' Training Centre in Sri Lanka, has been invited to stay and give teachings at Sanghamittarama during 2012. She will be in residence along with Ayya Dhammananda and Ayya Upekkha from Singapore.



Ayya Upekkha

[Singapore Participates in the 1st Annual International Bhikkhuni Day](#) [Singapore Buddhist Fellowship, Singapore](#)

Ayya Upekkha led the celebration for the 1st Annual International Bhikkhuni Day with the support of the Singapore Buddhist Fellowship. They were also honored to have Bhante K. Gunaratana (West Virginia, USA) and Venerable Bhikkhuni Faxun (Singapore) join in the celebration, along with many devotees. (Please see the feature article on "Reflections from Around the World on the 1st Annual International Bhikkhuni Day" in this issue to read about Ayya Upekkha's experience that day.)

Tea and Dharma Discussion at Sravasti Abbey Washington State, USA September 2011

The monastic community of Sravasti Abbey shared the dharma over lunch and tea with visitors, including a member of the Alliance for Bhikkhunis editorial board, Sarah Conover. Each monastic spoke about why bhikkhunis are important in the world, and their sharing was inspirational to all.

Venerable Thubten Semkye took wonderful



Sravasti Stained Glass Window

photos of the visit which included the Abbey's beautiful stained glass window of the founder of the Bhikkhuni Sangha, Mahapajapati Gotami to whom the 1st Annual International Bhikkhuni Day was dedicated. The piece was made by artist Beverly Brecht and modeled from the original artwork by Tibetan painter, Rigdol Oshoe.

Proposed Bhikkhuni Training Center in Sri Lanka

Sadaham Sevana

Center for the Study and Research of Buddhism
Colombo, Sri Lanka

Venerable Bhikkhuni Kusuma's (Sri Lanka) project to build a Bhikkhuni Training Center in Colombo, Sri Lanka was recently the recipient of a large monetary donation. Upon completion, the center will be able to offer in-house training facilities for approximately 20-30 nuns. There is also a desire to build a community kitchen that would offer rice and simple meals to residents and those in need.

Theravada Bhikkhuni Ordination, India 2012

Mahapajapati Nunnery (Vietnamese Temple)

Vaishali, Bihar, India

June 30, 2012

Venerable Bhikkhuni Lieu Phab (Vietnam) has announced there will be an international bhikkhuni ordination in Vaishali, India, the place where the Buddha first ordained women. Eligible candidates must have a minimum of two years of samaneri training. The ordination will take place on June 30, 2012. The preceptors will be Sri Lankan bhikkhus and bhikkhunis. Following the ordination, candidates will receive a three-month training as bhikkhunis.

For further information, please contact Venerable Lieu Phab at lieuphab@yahoo.com or lieuphab@gmail.com.

13th Sakyadhita International Conference

Vaishali, India

Vaishali, India will be the location for the 13th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women, January 2013. [Click here.](#)

Anenja Vihara Celebrates Its 5th Year

Anenja Vihara

Germany

On April 1, 2012, Anenja Vihara will celebrate the 5th Anniversary of its official inauguration. "Anenja" means "imperturbable," an important prompt and reminder to the Sangha of Ayya Sucinta (German), Samaneri Viveka (German,) along with devoted lay supporters who have been maintaining the monastery since the leaving of its founder, Ayya Mudita, in the summer of 2010. Anagarika Madalina (Rumania) also joined the community in September, 2011. The resident community, supported by laywomen, will be in winter retreat in January and February, 2012.

Bhikkhuni Sudinna Joining the Mahapajapati Monastery

Mahapajapati Monastery

Pioneertown, California, USA

2011

Mahapajapati Monastery has invited Bhikkhuni Sudinna to stay and practice with their resident community. She has accepted. Her ten years of experience as a bhikkhuni will be most welcomed. Born in Sri Lanka, Ayya Sudinna was ordained as a samaneri in 1999 by Bhante Gunaratana at the Bhavana Society (West Virginia, USA). She received higher ordination in 2002 in Sri Lanka.

Congratulations to Samaneri Aloka

Mahapajapati Monastery

Pioneertown, California, USA

2011

Mahapajapati Monastery is pleased to announce the samaneri ordination of Anagarika Aloka, formerly Brenda Batke-Hirschmann and past vice-president of the Alliance for Bhikkhunis and Executive Editor of its online magazine Present. Samaneri



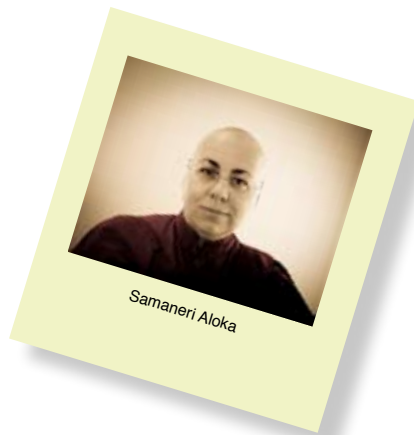
Anenja Vihara Wood Building



Anenja Vihara Buddha

Aloka ordained at Dharma Vijaya Vihara in Los Angeles on Oct 24, 2011.

Venerable Dr. Walpola Piyananda Nayaka Thero acted as preceptor, alongside a Sangha of six distinguished senior bhikkhus and three bhikkhunis: Ven. Weihene Pannaloka Nayaka Thero, Ven. Sumangala Maha Thero, Ven. Kalyanawansa Thero, Ven. Kassapa Thero, Ven. Dhammajothi Thero, Ven. Wimalasara Thero, Ven. Gunasari Bhikkhuni, Ven. Uttama Bhikkhuni, and Ven. Susila Bhikkhuni.



[Workshops on Working with Emotions](#) [Great Determination Buddhist Hermitage](#) [Ohio, USA](#)

Venerable Madika Bhikkhuni offers workshops on learning how to deal with difficult emotions in a way that brings peace and balance instead of agitation and anger. She has been working on *The Missing Peace: Freedom From Disturbing Emotions*, a companion book for her workshops which will be published in early 2012.

For more information on scheduling a workshop, please email jusanwareagle@yahoo.com or call 740-591-2778.



Spirit Rock Bhikkhuni Ordination

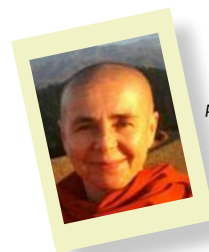
Spirit Rock Meditation Center
Woodacre, CA, USA
October 17, 2011

Please see the feature article "A Sima of Flowers" which appears in this issue of *Present* for details of the ordination and events leading to these women ordaining.

Aloka Vihara San Francisco, CA, USA

Established in 2009, Aloka Vihara is now the residence for two bhikkhunis in the Theravada Forest Tradition, Ayya Anandabodhi and Ayya Santacitta. After 18 years of training with the Siladhara Order in England, the nuns received bhikkhuni ordination with Ayya Tathaaloka Theri as preceptor on October 17th 2011, at the Spirit Rock Meditation Center, Woodacre, California.

From January 9th through March 6th 2012, the community of Aloka Vihara will be in silent retreat. Next Spring the Saranaloka Foundation will begin looking for rural property in the wider Bay Area for the nuns to begin a training monastery.



Spirit Rock Ordination Group

PRACTICAL DHARMA AND OUR KOREAN SISTERS

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARTINE BATCHELOR

by Jacqueline Kramer



Martine Batchelor is a well-respected Dhamma teacher and writer living with her husband, Stephen Batchelor, in France and teaching throughout the world. Martine started on her path as a young activist with a heartfelt desire to change the world for the better. In her late teens she came upon a copy of the Dhammapada and was struck by the advice that in order to transform the world, you need to first transform your own consciousness. Upon reading this she took up the challenge to transform her own consciousness and embarked on a journey to the East. By accident, she ended up in Korea, and there she stayed, studying and practicing as a nun in a Korean monastery for ten years. It is this Korean perspective of fully empowered nuns that she brings to us, reminding us of places where women are spiritually supported and empowered.

Jacqueline: Can you trace back your first inclination towards Buddhism?

Martine: From a very young age, I was more political. I wanted to save the world, I wanted to change the world. When I was eighteen, I got a copy of the Dhammapada. In it there was one passage that said something like, before you can change the world, you have to change yourself. That really hit me. I was really idealistic and that didn't work. Then I stopped the political thing and became in-

terested in meditation. This was in the 70's. I traveled to the East. Getting to Korea was really an accident. I was going to go from Bangkok to Tokyo via Kyoto. Instead the plane stopped in Seoul and then I met a Korean monk in Bangkok who told me there was a lot of meditation in Korea. So I decided to go to Korea for a month, and stayed ten years.

Jacqueline: I've heard that the Korean monasticism is quite female friendly. Could you tell me about that?

PERSONALLY, I FEEL THAT ANY BUDDHIST MEDITATION IS A COMBINATION OF CONCENTRA- TION AND LOOKING DEEPLY, OR EXPERIENTIAL INQUIRY.

Martine: I would say the Korean system, of all the systems, is the one that is the most equal. Korea is in a Confucianism society so there is some hierarchy of male over female, but I would say it is 95% equal. Women monastics get the double ordination, they have their own temples, their own seminaries for nuns, they have their own teachers. So they're quite autonomous.

Jacqueline: Do the Korean monastics have any commerce, such as selling the food they grow?

Martine: No, they are just supported by the people, but this is Chinese style. If your temple is in the countryside, or in the mountains, then you will grow food, not to sell but to eat yourself. In the Chinese Zen tradition, there is the saying about a day without work goes without food. If you want to eat, you have to work the fields. So that's where they changed the precepts. Although they have the Vinaya, what is more important, actually, are the Bodhisattva Precepts. What you are told is not to till the soil during the month when it is most dangerous for the animals, or to light fires when they are the most dangerous. The system is a little different. The monks and the nuns can handle money and they don't need an assistant to be with them. Before they become monks or nuns they are postulants for at least a year. Then for three years they are 10-precept nuns and then they take the full bhikkhuni ordination. So they are very strong nuns. When the Sakyadhita conference happened in Korea, which I went to, everyone was amazed by these Korean nuns.

Jacqueline: I had the opportunity to meet Korean nuns at the Outstanding Women in Buddhism awards. I was impressed with how fully in their power these women were. They were like mountains, so strong.

Martine: Exactly.

Jacqueline: Do you still practice like you did when you were in Korea? What's your practice like now?

Martine: The practice in Korea, although it was in the Rinzai Zen tradition, was more the style from China than the style from Japan. Hakuin introduced in the 17th century the tradition of passing koans. In Korea it's

more following the practice of the huatou suggested by the 12th century Chinese Zen master Ta Hui. He taught that, what was more important than the koan, was the main point of the koan, which is called the huatou in Chinese and the hwadu in Korea. So you are given a question (hwadu) and if you break through that question, then you break through all the koans, so you don't change koans. One of the question you can be given is, "What is this?" The idea of asking the question is that you develop a sensation of questioning. That was my practice for ten years. When I left, when I stopped being a nun and returned to England, I met people who did vipassana. Then I did a few retreats as a participant to see what it was like. I thought, "This is a good method, this being aware of the breath, being aware of the body, etc." In terms of my own practice, over time what I am doing is sensation of questioning and then I might actually complement it with awareness of the breath, or the body, or listening. So this is a kind of combination.

Jacqueline: How interesting to combine these things. Do you do regular retreats?

Martine: I am a meditation teacher so I teach either weekend retreats or week-long retreats about once a month. When I teach, I do all the sitting like everyone else, unless there is an emergency. This is my practice, to sit when I do retreats. We did a month-long as well when we were trying out the Forest Refuge at Barre. When I'm home, I do maybe thirty minutes of sitting everyday unless we are traveling and tired. Then I do less formal practice while lying down or going for walks. My practice is just to be aware, to be compassionate. Nowadays I help out more with my mother, getting her to the doctor, helping out when there is an emergency and things like that remaining—kind and open, that's my practice.

Jacqueline: There's a question that's been coming up in my own practice. With vipassana there is the practice of cultivating wholesome mind states and weeding out negative mind states. With Rinzai Zen, there is teaching to welcome all thoughts as guests and allow them to dissipate in their own way and time. Since you have experi-

RITUAL NEEDS TO HAVE MEANING. FOR EXAMPLE, IN KOREA, YOU LIGHT A CANDLE, YOU BURN IN- CENSE, YOU PUT OUT WATER. THIS IS A SYMBOL OF AWAKENING. WE CAN REFLECT ON THAT.

ence in both traditions, I wonder if you have anything to say about these two different perspectives?

Martine: When I was in Korea and we were doing the questioning, one of the things the teacher said was “songsong jokjok” which meant, cultivate together deep calm and clear awareness. Then after doing a little vipassana, I realized that what he was talking about was samatha and vipassana. Personally, I feel that any Buddhist meditation is a combination of concentration and looking deeply, or experiential inquiry. I think it doesn’t matter what one does as long as these two elements are cultivated together. I see it as focusing on something with a wide open awareness. I think of the concentration I develop as inclusive concentration. I’m focusing on the questioning and in the background I might have the breath or I might have everything else. Or, I might put the breath in the foreground and then the questioning will go in the background. Or I might do the body scanning and everything else in the background. So I see meditation as cultivating the two elements, through different tools of awareness. All these things: the breath, the listening, the body scanning, the inquiry, really are a means to cultivate quietness and clarity. Whether you do it the Zen way or the Theravadan way, it ends up in the same place if you don’t hold it too tight. I think what is problematic is when you have too much of a framing. For example if you do this or that system, this or that is what is supposed to happen. The problem with that is it frames you in. Personally, what I like to do is have a more open framework.

Jacqueline: The wonderful thing about Buddhism in the West is that we are exposed to so many meditation technologies offering us a lot of freedom to get to the heart of the practice.

Martine: Yes. And what I think meditation is really about is de-grasping, about releasing. Of course we have meditative experiences, but I think what is more important is the subtle effect. Even if we do not have the greatest meditation, we still manage to concentrate a bit, to look deeply a little, and that has a freeing effect. That is more important than the technique. The way I think concentration works is that when you come back from distracted thoughts, you’re actually not feeding your mental habits, for example. You’re dissolving their powers. And then they can come back to their creative functioning. So I see the concentration as really helping us to create

space. Space is arising because you have less grasping. You have thoughts, feelings, and sensations arising, but you have more space around them. And then there is vipassana or looking deeply, that is to be aware of change, to be aware of conditionality. It counteracts our tendency to permanentize, if “I have a headache” to think straightaway that it will last a long time, that if “I have a problem,” it’s always like that. And then to be aware of feelings and sensations as they arise and pass away, dissolves the pattern we have to grasp, to amplify, and to exaggerate. Concentration and inquiry together make us devel-

I THINK MEDITATION IS REALLY ABOUT DE-GRASPING, ABOUT RELEASING. OF COURSE, WE HAVE MEDITATIVE EXPERIENCES, BUT I THINK WHAT IS MORE IMPORTANT IS THE SUBTLE EFFECT.

op quietness, spaciousness on one side and brightness and openness on the other side. And together it enables us to develop this creative awareness, which then will manifest as wisdom and compassion.

Jacqueline: Well put. I experience that with my practice of shikantaza. Do you and Stephen share this practice, or do your practices differ?

Martine: Very likely we don’t do exactly the same thing when we sit on the cushion, but we both cultivate the sensation of questioning. We do similar things but each person is very individual, but we are on the same wave length.

Jacqueline: It must be nice to live with another practitioner, to share practice.

Martine: Oh yes, I feel very lucky. We have similar background experiences. We were both monks and nuns for ten years. We have the same aspirations. We are both more interested in a living, modern Buddhism. We are very much on the same wavelength. He’s more philosophical. I’m more practical, but with both of us going in the same direction.

Jacqueline: Lovely. As you know, Present is an arm of the Alliance for Bhikkhunis which was created by lay people to support female monasticism. Leaving aside any assertions that male or female spiritual capacity is either inferior or superior, do you see any differences in how the female psyche approaches unfoldment and how the male psyche approaches unfoldment?

Martine: The first thing I want to say is when I did my book, *Walking on Lotus Flowers*, about women on the Buddhist path, there were two questions I asked the

women and then I stopped asking them. The first one was about the problem of men and women in terms of bhikkhus and bhikkhunis. After a number of times I got the same answer, that bhikkhus and bhikkhunis were two wings of the same bird. So it was very clear that they felt an equality. And then the other thing I asked them was what is it that inspires you. I thought they were going to answer these great teachers or whatever. Again, I asked them two or three times and then I stopped because whenever I asked they would say, “Who inspires me? I inspire myself.” After hearing this a few times, I thought, I don’t need to ask this question.

Jacqueline: How interesting!

Martine: It was really interesting, the autonomy they had, the strength that they had. I was really inspired by that. Because what’s interesting in Korea is that it’s a Confucian society and, often in the past, not so much now, women who wanted to have their own lives became nuns so that they would not have to be the daughter of so-and-so or the wife of so-and-so or the mother of so-and-so, being defined by the male in their lives. They would become nuns in order to become their own women. In Korea, I met a lot of women who became nuns because of that. They wanted to have their own life, to explore their own potential, not be restricted by a certain role in society. Then, in terms of practicing differently, when I interviewed forty nuns and laywomen, Westerners and Easterners, for my book, what I saw was actually the only possible difference (compared to men)—and I would even question that generalization—is that all the women I interviewed talked about their experiences. I came out with something quite practical, quite pragmatic, something that was not too abstract or philosophical. While at the same time I know women who are very philosophical and men who are very practical. I would not make too much of a generalization there. In terms of practice, in that I teach men and women, I really don’t see any difference. When you are in meditation, you are just a human being, a human being who has pleasant or unpleasant feelings. I really don’t see difference there. The difference we might see is one of culture. If you have a Zen retreat, often you’ll have a bit more men than women. If you do an awareness retreat, you might have more women. I think this is not so much about the teaching itself than the format.



Jacqueline: How do you see the difference in format?

Martine: Some men might go for something that is really kind of tough and a woman might think, why do I need to go through that? More pragmatic like, do I have to do boot camp Buddhism? You’ll find women who can sit for hours on end too, who are great ascetics, but there may not be much into the macho thing. But one has to be careful with generalizations. Personally, I don’t see much difference in terms of difficulty with the practice. It appears to be quite the same.

Jacqueline: That’s an important qualifier. I’m wondering, how do you feel about the need for ritual? There are people who think that ritual is an unnecessary appendage and others who value it highly. What is your perspective?

Martine: I think it’s a question of sensibility. For example, if you have somebody with a really beautiful voice, that person is more likely to do chanting because they do that very well and they enjoy it. Me, I sing like “pans” as we say in French, like “casseroles.” I can never get the tone right. I am tone deaf so I’m not going to do lots of chanting. Then you have the bowing.

Some people are really into bowing. Me, I have trouble with my knees and my back. I don’t mind bowing, but it is physically tough. But if I go to a temple in Korea, I am happy to sing and bow. I have nothing against it. I really love Korea because the rituals there are very short. In the morning, you have thirteen minutes at the most, lunchtime fifteen minutes, evening seven minutes. This is my kind of thing. I am happy with this. And there is even less ritual in the meditation hall. Three bows in the morning, fifteen minutes of chanting at lunchtime, and three bows in the evening, and this is it, very little ritual. Then you also have the Bodhisattva Precepts. To me, the Bodhisattva Precepts are very interesting. Once every two weeks, we would recite the Bodhisattva Precepts or the Vinaya. As we recited the Bodhisattva Precepts, or someone else recited them and we listened, then over time I understood what they were as my Korean improved. Then I saw what people did in the monastery was according to the Bodhisattva Precepts. Finally, I translated them because I thought they were very interesting. So personally,

I would prefer, if there is ritual, to keep it to a minimum so that people who don't like it won't have too much and people who like it will have enough of it. Ritual is for coming together as a group or if you are the devotional type who likes to do this activity. If you do it as an activity, as a practice, than you choose what you do. If you do it as a group, it seems to me you need to do something that most people can agree with and can do. If you chant anything, it needs to be in English so that people can understand what you are saying.

Jacqueline: Chanting doesn't have the same power behind it if you're saying words you don't understand.

Martine: That's it. I would do a ceremony every day because I had a little place, that was my job, but I knew what I was saying. I knew the Korean. I wrote down all the Chinese. I studied the text. I knew what I was saying. It was not just words. Ritual needs to have meaning. For example, in Korea, you light a candle, you burn incense, you put out water. This is a symbol of awakening. We can reflect on that. The incense disappears and creates fragrances. It is the symbol of selflessness. The candle disappears as it gives light and the water reflects and can adapt to any situation. So, are we doing ritual strictly to imitate something or are these aids to the practice? In a ritual, everybody comes together in some way. In a way sitting in meditation is a ritual too, but it's a silent ritual. When everybody sits together in silence, that's a ritual. When you listen to the teaching of someone, that's a ritual. When you have a discussion, if you do it each week, that's a ritual. What kind of ritual do you decide on? If you have a potluck dinner once a month, that's a ritual for the sangha. You think, what's the aim for the ritual, to imitate the tradition? To look like we're doing the right thing? Or is it to fulfill the needs of the individual, or the group, or to cultivate practice?

Jacqueline: I really like the practicality of your approach to ritual. It makes a lot of sense and those metaphors are beautiful. Is there anything else you would like to share with our readers?

Martine: I'd like to say something about the bhikkhunis because I'm really all for the bhikkhunis and the nuns. It's not that everybody must be a nun or bhikkhuni, but I think it's important that women have the opportunity to do that. You have wonderful nuns, like Tenzin Palmo, who is one of our elder nuns. It's wonderful to have

the example of such a great nun. If you go to Asia, you also have great nuns. It's important to have examples of people who have dedicated their lives to this. I think in terms of the teachers of the tradition. It's important that they are respected and supported. What's wonderful in

Korea is that the nuns and the monks are supported equally. Often the nuns are seen as very ethical, very virtuous, even more than the monks. There is a word for a bad monk who breaks the rules but there is no word for being a bad nun who breaks the rules. The lay people in Korea recognize this so if you go in the temple in Korea, the

nunneries are as beautiful as the monasteries.

Jacqueline: How wonderful! I can see an entirely different vision for bhikkhunis in this model.

Martine: What is wonderful in Korea is that now the nuns, because they have more opportunity, are doing a lot of social work. They're doing a lot of really interesting things. They are really creative. At the conference in Korea, you could see the nuns being in the modern world. They were using all the technology. They were showing us all the power points. They were doing Zen cookery on the TV, working in the hospitals, all kinds of things. I knew it was like that but it was wonderful to see the nuns who are also practicing, teaching the precepts, and taking care of the laypeople. They did everything. The role of the bhikkhuni can be multi-professional. If you have a good foundation, a good support for the nuns, then they can really use their potential. Then you can have different nuns expressing themselves in different aspects, always, of course, teaching the precepts, etc. To me that was one of the greatest examples of living in Korea, these amazing nuns. After I left and then returned in 2003, I was impressed by how the nuns have developed. The Korean people were richer so they could give them more money and with that money they are doing a lot of good things. They are exploring many things. Of course they have the tradition of meditation in addition to creatively engaging with the modernity as a nun. To me this was really inspiring, going to that conference and seeing them all in action, showing us what they did.

Jacqueline: This is really a joyful thing to hear, and a wonderful addition to our Winter issue, which is featuring the ordination of three new bhikkhunis.

Martine: If these new nuns have support, they can do wonderful things.

Jacqueline: At Alliance for Bhikkhunis, we are working to develop a support system for the bhikkhunis. At this time, being able to afford things like health insurance and strong working monasteries is challenging. These new bhikkhunis are amazing pioneers, cutting their way through the brambles to make a clearing, eking out an existence. They are rugged. I would love to see more support for them.

Martine: I think what is important is for people to see that it's wonderful nowadays that we have lots of laywomen teachers. I think that's wonderful because we show that women have the same possibility as men. It's beneficial for the world to see women who are empowered spiritually, but I think it's also important for people to see that it's good that there are female monastics who are also empowered to benefit the world. In order to do that, they need the four requisites: food, clothes, shelter, and medicine.

Jacqueline: There's a lot of work to do to build up this sort of cushion for bhikkhunis in the United States. It's helpful to see another perspective, to see how beautifully female monasticism works in Korea. It gives heart to our process. It's so helpful to hear you talk about this and give

such cogent details about what it's like to be a nun in Korea. There are many lay Buddhist teachers in the United States but the public has not yet been educated about the importance of monasticism. We can see what fully supported female monasticism looks like by watching Korea. Thank you so much for taking the time to share your perspective with us.



Jacqueline Kramer is Executive Editor for Alliance for Bhikkhunis online magazine Present and the director of the [Hearth Foundation](#), where she teaches Buddhism to mothers online.



Photo courtesy of Dhamma Wiki

The 2nd Annual International Bhikkhuni Day Meditation Pledge-a-thon September 29, 2012

This second annual global celebration and fundraiser will honor Sanghamitta Theri, the enlightened bhikkhuni who brought the Bhikkhuni Sangha to Sri Lanka. From this island nation, the Bhikkhuni Sangha has spread to distant countries and survives to this day. All ordained women remain in Sanghamitta's debt.

In addition to learning about Sanghamitta Theri and her courageous journey, we will also be honoring prominent bhikkhunis as well as laywomen who have inspired us.

Please visit our [site](#) in the coming months for talks and articles, designed to foster a memorable day of meditation, reflection, and discussion. Similar to last year, we will give you all the tools needed to construct a portable, do-it-yourself retreat or workshop that anyone can create in their center, temple, living room, or backyard.

Please mark your calendar now to join our expanding global community. Only through a combined effort can we safeguard the Bhikkhuni Sangha and ensure that it flourishes!

Excerpts from An Unentangled Knowing
Teachings of the Thai Buddhist Laywoman
Upasika Kee Nanayon
translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu



AWARE RIGHT AT AWARENESS

November 3, 1975

The mind, if mindfulness and awareness are watching over it, won't meet with any suffering as the result of its actions. If suffering does arise, we'll be immediately aware of it and able to put it out. This is one point of the practice we can work at constantly. And we can test ourselves by seeing how refined and subtle our all-around awareness is inside the mind. Whenever the mind slips away and goes out to receive external sensory

contact: Can it maintain its basic stance of mindfulness or internal awareness? The practice we need to work at in our everyday life is to have constant mindfulness, constant all-around present awareness like this. This is something we work at in every posture: sitting, standing, walking, and lying down. Make sure that your mindfulness stays continuous.

Living in this world—the mental and physical phenomena of these five aggregates—gives us plenty to contemplate. We must try to watch them, to contemplate them, so that we can understand them—because the truths we must learn how to read in this body and mind are here to be read with every moment. We don't have to get wrapped up with any other extraneous themes, because all the themes we need are right here in the body and mind. As long as we can keep the mind constantly aware all around, we can contemplate them.

If you contemplate mental and physical events to see how they arise and disband right in the here and now, and don't get involved with external things—like sights making contact with the eyes, or sounds with the ears—then there really aren't a lot of issues. The mind can be at normalcy, at equilibrium—calm and undisturbed by defilement or the stresses that come from sensory contact. It can look after itself and maintain its balance. You'll come to sense that if you're aware right at awareness in and of itself, without going out to get involved in external things like the mental labels and thoughts that will tend to arise, the mind will see their constant arising and disbanding—and won't be embroiled in anything. This way it can be disengaged, empty, and free. But if it goes out to label things as good or evil, as "me" or "mine," or gets attached to anything, it'll become unsettled and disturbed.

You have to know that if the mind can be still, totally and presently aware, and capable of contemplating with every activity, then blatant forms of suffering and stress will dissolve away. Even if they start to form, you can be alert to them and disperse them immediately. Once you see this actually happening—even in only the beginning stages—it can disperse a lot of the confusion and turmoil in your heart. In other words, don't let yourself dwell on the past or latch onto thoughts of the future. As for the events arising and passing away in the present, you have to leave them alone. Whatever your duties, simply do them as you

If the mind can stay with itself and not go out looking for things to criticize or latch onto, it can maintain a natural form of stillness. So this is something we have to try for in our every activity.

have to—and the mind won't get worked up about anything. It will be able, to at least some extent, to be empty and still.

This one thing is something you have to be very careful

about. You have to see this for yourself: *that if your mindfulness and discernment are constantly in charge, the truths of the arising and disbanding of mental and physical phenomena are always there for you to see, always there for you to know.* If you look at the body, you'll have to see it simply as physical properties. If you look at feelings, you'll have to see them as changing and inconstant: pleasure, pain, neither pleasure nor pain. To see these things is to see the truth within yourself. Don't let yourself get caught up with your external duties. Simply keep watch in this way inside. If your awareness is the sort that lets you read yourself correctly, the mind will be able to stay at normalcy, at equilibrium, at stillness, without any resistance.

If the mind can stay with itself and not go out looking for things to criticize or latch onto, it can maintain a natural form of stillness. So this is something we have to try for in our every activity. Keep your conversations to a minimum, and there won't be a whole lot of issues. Keep watch right at the mind. When you keep watch at the mind and your mindfulness is continuous, your senses can stay restrained.

Being mindful to keep watch in this way is something you have to work at. Try it and see: Can you keep this sort of awareness continuous? What sort of things can still get the mind engaged? What sorts of thoughts and labels of good and bad, me and mine, does it think up? Then look to see if these things arise and disband.

The sensations that arise from external contact and internal contact all have the same sorts of characteristics. You have to look till you can see this. If you know how to look, you'll see it—and the mind will grow calm.

So the point we have to practice in this latter stage doesn't have a whole lot of issues. There's nothing you have to do, nothing you have to label, nothing you have to think a whole lot about. Simply look carefully and contemplate, and in this very lifetime you'll have a chance to be calm and at peace, to know yourself more profoundly within. You'll come to see that the Dhamma is amazing right here in your own heart. Don't go searching for the Dhamma outside, for it lies within. Peace lies within, but we have to contemplate so that we're aware all around—subtly, deep down. If you look just on the surface, you won't understand anything. Even if the mind is at normalcy on the ordinary, everyday level, you won't understand much of anything at all.

You have to contemplate so that you're aware all around

in a skillful way. The word "skillful" is something you can't explain with words, but you can know for yourself when you see the way in which awareness within the heart becomes special,

when you see what this special awareness is about. This is something you can know for yourself.

And there's not really much to it: simply arising, persisting, disbanding. Look until this becomes plain—really, really plain—and everything disappears. All suppositions, all conventional formulations, all those aggregates and properties get swept away, leaving nothing but awareness pure and simple, not involved with anything at all—and there's nothing you have to do to it. Simply stay still and watch, be aware, letting go with every moment.

Simply watching this one thing is enough to do away with all sorts of defilements, all sorts of suffering and stress. If you don't know how to watch it, the mind is sure to get disturbed. It's sure to label things and concoct thoughts. As soon as there's contact at the senses, it'll go looking for things to latch onto, liking and disliking the objects it meets in the present and then getting involved with

the past and future, spinning a web to entangle itself.

If you truly look at each moment in the present, there's really nothing at all. You'll see with every mental moment that things disband, disband, disband—really nothing at all. The important point is that you don't go forming issues out of nothing. The physical elements perform their duties in line with their elementary physical nature. The mental elements keep sensing in line with their own affairs. But our stupidity is what goes looking for issues to cook up, to label, to think about. It goes looking for things to latch onto and then gets the mind into a turmoil. This point is all we really have to see for ourselves. This is the problem we have to solve for ourselves. If things are left to their nature, pure and simple, there's no "us," no "them." This is a singular truth that will arise for us to know and see. There's nothing else we can know or see that can match it in any way. Once you know and see this one thing, it extinguishes all suffering and stress. The mind will be empty and free, with no meanings, no attachments, for anything at all.

This is why looking inward is so special in so many ways. Whatever arises, simply stop still to look at it. Don't get excited by it. If you become excited when any special intuitions arise when the mind is still, you'll get the mind worked up into a turmoil. If you become afraid that this or that will happen, that too will get you in a turmoil. So you have to stop and look, stop and know. The first thing is simply to look. The first thing is simply to know. And don't latch onto what you know—because whatever it is, it's simply a phenomenon that arises and dis-



All suppositions, all conventional formulations, all those aggregates and properties get swept away, leaving nothing but awareness pure and simple, not involved with anything at all—and there's nothing you have to do to it. Simply stay still and watch, be aware, letting go with every moment.

bands, arises and disbands, changing as part of its nature.

So your awareness has to take a firm stance right at the mind in and of itself. In the beginning stages, you have to know that when mindfulness is standing firm, the mind won't be affected by the objects of sensory contact. Keep working at maintaining this stance, holding firm to this stance. If you gain a sense of this for yourself, really knowing and seeing for yourself, your mindfulness will become even more firm. If anything arises in any way at all, you'll be able to let it go—and all the many troubles and turmoils of the mind will dissolve away.

If mindfulness slips and the mind goes out giving meanings to anything, latching onto anything, troubles will arise, so you have to keep checking on this with every moment. There's nothing else that's so worth checking on. You have to keep check on the mind in and of itself, contemplating the mind in and of itself. Or else you can

I started to take my hands and feet out of the meditation posture, but at the moment I had unfolded one leg but had yet to unfold the other, I could see that my mind was like a pendulum swinging more and more slowly, more and more slowly—until it stopped.

contemplate the body in and of itself, feelings in and of themselves, or the phenomenon of arising and disbanding—i.e., the Dhamma—in and of itself. All of these things are themes you can keep track of entirely within yourself. You don't have to keep track of a lot of themes, because having a lot of themes is what will make you restless and distracted. First you'll practice this theme, then you'll practice that, then you'll make comparisons, all of which will keep the mind from growing still.

If you can take your stance at awareness, if you're skilled at looking, the mind can be at peace. You'll know how things arise and disband. First practice keeping awareness right within yourself so that your mindfulness can be firm, without being affected by the objects of sensory contact, so that it won't label things as good or bad, pleasing or displeasing. You have to keep checking to see that when the mind can be at normalcy, centered and neutral as its primary stance, then—whatever it knows or sees—it will be able to contemplate and let go.

The sensations in the mind that we explain at such length are still on the level of labels. Only when there can be awareness right at awareness will you really be able to know that the mind that is aware of awareness in this way doesn't send its knowing outside of this awareness. There are no issues. Nothing can be concocted in the mind when it knows in this way. In other words,

An inward-staying
unentangled knowing,
All outward-going knowing
cast aside.

SABBE DHAMMA ANATTA

July 9, 1971

One night I was sitting in meditation outside in the open air—my back straight as an arrow—firmly determined to make the mind quiet, but even after a long time it wouldn't settle down. So I thought, "I've been working at this for many days now, and yet my mind won't settle down at all. It's time to stop being so determined and to simply be aware of the mind." I started to take my hands and feet out of the meditation posture, but at the moment I had unfolded one leg but had yet to unfold the other, I could see that my mind was like a pendulum swinging more and more slowly, more and more slowly—until it stopped.

Then there arose an awareness that was sustained by itself.

Slowly I put my legs and hands back into position. At the same time, the mind was in a state of awareness absolutely and solidly still, seeing clearly into the elementary phenomena of existence as they arose and disbanded, changing in line with their nature—and also seeing a separate condition inside, with no arising, disbanding, or changing, a condition beyond birth and death: something very difficult to put clearly into words, because it was a realization of the elementary phenomena of nature, completely internal and individual.



After a while I slowly got up and lay down to rest. This state of mind re-

mained there as a stillness that sustained itself deep down inside. Eventually the mind came out of this state and gradually returned to normal.

From this I was able to observe how practice consisting of nothing but fierce desire simply upsets the mind and keeps it from being still. But when one's awareness of the mind is just right, an inner awareness will arise naturally of its own accord. Because of this clear inner awareness, I was able to continue knowing the facts of what's true and false, right and wrong, from that point on, and it enabled me to know that the moment when the mind let go of everything was a clear awareness of the elementary phenomena of nature, because it was an awareness that knew within and saw within of its own accord—not something you can know or see by wanting.

For this reason the Buddha's teaching, "*Sabbe dhamma anatta*—All phenomena are not-self," tells us not to latch onto any of the phenomena of nature, whether conditioned or unconditioned. From that point on I was able to understand things and let go of attachments step by step.

Upasika Kee Nanayon (K. Khao-suan-luang), 1901-1979, was one of the foremost women Dhamma teachers in Thailand. Her teachings continue to be cherished and studied widely.



THE ISLAND (OSTROV)

DIRECTED BY PAVEL LUNGIN, 2007

Review by SARAH CONOVER

Looking for movies that might have relevance for monastics and the spiritually inclined, I stumbled upon this gem of a film. It could be my tendency to steer towards what Netflix categorizes (and now recommends to me) as “cerebral, dark, and understated.” Substituting “thoughtful and deep” for “dark” would be closer to the truth. Russian film and literature master this niche, and the Island, when it was released, swept all their top film awards.

The Island launches with a scene from World War Two: a young, frightened, Russian soldier is forced to make a terrible choice between a horrific, immoral act and losing his life. When the Nazis blow up his ship, he finds himself surprised to be alive, washed upon the shore of a Russian Orthodox monastery on a remote island in the White Sea. He joins the order, and we next meet him thirty years later as Father Anatoli, still trying to find redemption for his sin.

This may not sound like a compelling plot, but wait. Father Anatoli turns out to be an astonishing iconoclast, the hidden heart of the orderly monastery. Refusing to indulge in the comfort of the monastery proper, he lives in the filthy boiler room as the stoker, sleeping on a pile of coal. At any

moment of the day or night he may sing a loud ditty from the bell tower. He won't wear the carefully ironed vestments of the order—choosing instead to wear rags. He won't follow the church rituals in ceremonies, but manages to disrupt the set sequence of prayers and ablutions by always doing the opposite of everyone else. His fellow brethren, trying their best to hide their foibles and past sins with placid facades, are constantly pushed to the edge of their tolerance.

At first, in the midst of the politics and positioning for power in the monastery, Father Anatoli antics seem random and haphazard. Yet slowly, over time, we begin to see that his mischievousness might be the sword aimed right at the heart of hypocrisy and spiritual materialism. In one of my favorite scenes, he locks the head abbot in the boiler room for the night (with himself), until the abbot comes to realize that his life is a sham of superficial wants and greed.

Is Father Anatoli a madman or a holy man? For most of the film we aren't really sure. By the time the movie ends, we've likely made a decision. His role in monastery life reminded me of a few similar stories. Whether accurate or not, the anecdotes teach similar lessons to those of the Island.

The first, from the legends of twentieth-century spiritual guru, George Gurdjieff, tells that he paid an irascible student to live in their midst and constantly annoy students. The trickster legends of Patrul Rinpoche also come to mind. Despite being a learned Buddhist scholar, he dismissed religious trappings and instead wandered through the mountains of Tibet, disguised in rags, playing pranks to convey sharp wisdom.

Of course, all along, the simple townsfolk have realized that Father Anatoli is an authentic spiritual presence, and line up for healings and prophecies. This is portrayed very matter-of-fact, as part of daily life, not with Hollywood hyperbole. Although gruff, Father Anatoli has the heart of a Bodhisatva. The director, Pavel Lungin, speaking of the central character's self-awareness, says he doesn't regard Father Anatoli as being clever or spiritual, but blessed "in the sense that he is an exposed nerve, which connects to the pains of this world. His absolute power is a reaction to the pain of those people who come to it."

The film is so authentically and believably acted by Pyotr Mamonov, that I had to look into his personal history. It turns out that the film loosely parallels his real life. Mamonov was one of Russia's few rock stars, but had a sudden conversion to Orthodox Christianity in the 1990s. Now he lives as a recluse in a isolated village far from civilization. The director, Lungin quipped, "To a large extent, he played himself."

The stark landscape, the humble simplicity of Father Anatoli, the remoteness of the monastery on the White Sea, and the miracles of his redemption converge into a timeless snapshot of lived spirituality. The Patriarch of Moscow, Alexei II, praised *The Island, Ostrov*, for its profound depiction of faith and monastic life.

Sarah Conover has studied Buddhism with the Recollective Awareness sangha for the past fifteen years. She is the author of numerous books on world wisdom traditions and an enthusiastic supporter of the Alliance for Bhikkhunis.



Photo courtesy of Dhamma Wiki

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Into the Heart of Life

Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo

foreword by H.H. the Gyalwang Drukpa
Snow Lion Publications, Ithaca, New York, 2011

By Bonnie Schwab

Who has not been faced with the torturous request to recommend one book that could successfully introduce Buddhism to an inquiring mind? *Into the Heart of Life*, a new book by Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, the most senior Western Tibetan Buddhist nun alive today, just may be the solution to this quandary.

This series of well-edited Dharma talks followed by brief Q&A, is highly readable, intentionally practical, and short (under 200 pages). *Into the Heart of Life* offers page after page of core Buddhist teachings that are relevant for anybody who seeks greater sanity and ease in daily life. Tenzin Palmo repeatedly asserts that the real test of Buddhist practice is found in the stuff of daily life, which she illustrates with elegant examples from her “ordinary extraordinary” life.

“Challenges are the spiritual path,” she states throughout the book. She reviews essential topics such as impermanence, karma, renunciation, the six perfections, lojong, faith, and devotion with the trademark humor and good cheer of the highest Buddhist teachers.

The Buddha identified monkey mind long before there was television, she says, and the eight worldly concerns should be called “the eight worldly hang-ups!” She makes the teachings accessible, vital, and contemporary. But the book’s simplicity belies a distillation of sophisticated teachings that will serve even the most experienced practitioner.

The brilliance of this book is almost overshadowed by the story of its author. *Cave in the Snow*, the internationally bestselling biography by Vicki Mackenzie, tells the story of Tenzin Palmo’s journey from a London childhood to her arrival in India in 1964 to her twelve-year retreat, beginning in 1976, in a small cave at 13,200 feet. The rest is truly history.

While *Cave in the Snow* is not prerequisite reading for *Into the Heart of Life*, it deepens one’s appreciation for Tenzin Palmo’s courage and dedication. Her accomplishments are vast, not just her spiritual warriorship in meeting the

rigors of intensive retreats, but in enduring hardships and isolation when she challenged the male hierarchy of Tibetan Buddhism. Despite numerous obstructions, she was determined to receive the teachings directly from her guru, the Drukpa Kagyu lama, Dongyu Nyima, H.E. the Eighth Khamtrul Rinpoche.

The story of her sheer survival and now-famous retreat in that remote Himalayan cave rank among the finest works in the literary genre of armchair spirituality.

Tenzin Palmo’s achievement as a Western woman carries double significance in the development of women’s recognition within a deeply rooted patriarchal tradition, but also as further testimony that even Westerners are capable of unwavering commitment and formidable accomplishment on the Dharma path.

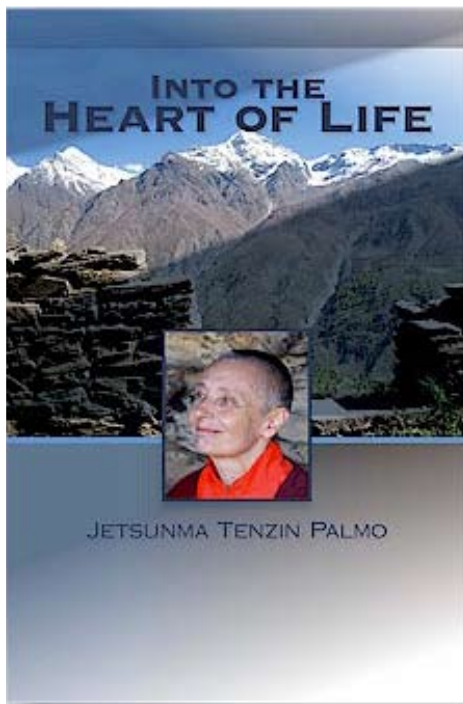
Stories of Westerners who embrace teachings of the Dharma and achieve even glimmers of illumination are few and far between. It is common for many Western students who encounter teachers born into Eastern spiritual lineages to willingly suspend our disbelief about the fact of their enlightenment because it was their birthright. Easy for them, right?

But we Westerners typically hold on to a sliver of doubt regarding our own potential.

Tenzin Palmo’s vow “to achieve enlightenment in female form—no matter how many lifetimes it takes,” is as historically significant as it is culturally profound.

Ordained in a Chinese temple, she is a fully ordained bhikkhuni. Full ordination for nuns of the Bhikkhuni Order, which traces its origins to the time of the Buddha, has been accepted in China and Korea but not in Tibet. The majority of Tibetan nuns are perpetual novices and relegated to second-class status behind the monks.²

Tenzin Palmo’s voice has been influential in efforts to introduce full ordination for women in the Tibetan tradition, noting that resistance is often based on cultural attitudes towards women, rather than the Buddha’s teachings. According to scripture, the Buddha said, “women are equal to men



in their potential to achieve enlightenment.”³

According to Karma Lekshe Tsomo, Associate Professor of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of San Diego, president of Sakyadhita: International Association of Buddhist Women, and director of Jamyang Foundation, which provides educational opportunities for Himalayan women, the issue of bhikshuni ordination in the Tibetan tradition remains unresolved. She said Tenzin Palmo serves on the Committee on Bhikshuni Ordination in the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition under the administration of H.H. Dalai Lama, which he organized in 2005.

For the last fifteen years, Tenzin Palmo has worked to promote the education of Himalayan women. In 2000, she founded the Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery in Tashi Jong, India, for young nuns of the Drukpa Kagyu lineage. There are currently twenty-one nuns who received their novice initiation as Togdenmas, which means realized ones. They are among the few in the region who have an opportunity to follow their dreams for spiritual development with institutional support and formal teachings.

In February 2008, Tenzin Palmo was given the rare title of Jetsunma,™ which means Venerable Master, by H.H. the 12th Gualwang Drukpa, Drukpa Kagyu lineage head, in recognition of her spiritual achievements and her efforts to improve the status of female practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism.

Into the Heart of Life is a book to share with everybody who is curious about Dharma practice or who would benefit from practical wisdom that addresses the tasks of daily life. In Louis Malle’s 1981 film classic, *My Dinner With Andre*, Andre Gregory recounts his exotic global adventures in search of spiritual awakening. His friend, trenchant New Yorker Wallace Shawn, asks Andre about the possibility of meaningful experience for the rest of us, since “everybody can’t be taken to Everest!” In the same way that most of us will not endeavor an undertaking such as Tenzin Palmo’s cave retreat, her book *Into the Heart of Life* may serve us almost as well.

¹ Resurgence Magazine, August, 2006.

² For more information about the restoration of ordination for Buddhist nuns, see *Dignity and Discipline-Reviving Full Ordination for Buddhist Nuns* by Thea Mohr and Ven. Jampa Tsedroen, which reviews the 2007 conference in Hamburg, Germany convened by H.H. Dalai Lama that drew scholars and monastics from around the world.)

³ See Roseanne Freese’s article, [Turning Back Towards Freedom](#)—November 2007: The First Recitation of the Bhikkhuni Patimokkha within the Theravada Bhikkhuni Lineage in North America, Present, Winter, 2011.



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A review of The Best Buddhist Writing 2011

Book Review by Sarah Conover

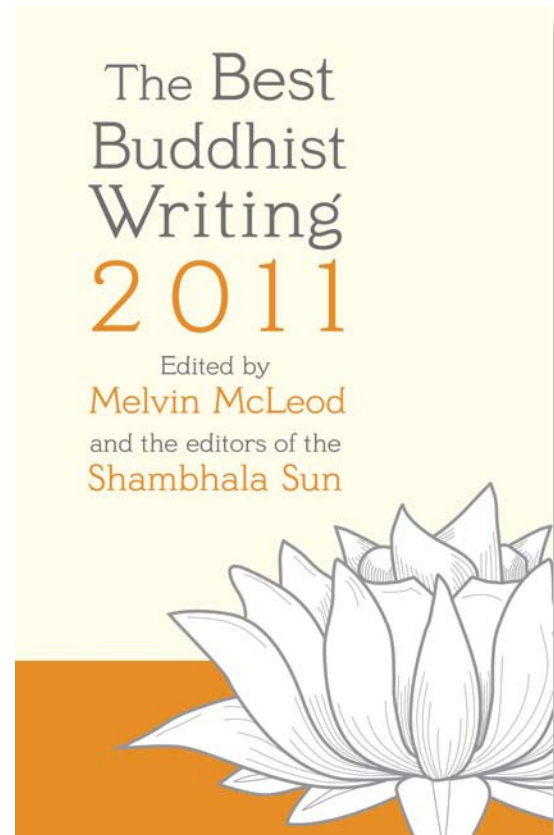
Like a daily sitting practice, my journey through this anthology was both deeply rewarding and a bit troubling. Troubling in a good way, the kind of troubling that pushes one, like it or not, toward enquiry.

On the very rewarding side, the book delivers fully on the first half of its promise in the introduction: “These writings reflect an increasingly natural integration of Buddhist practice and philosophy into modern life.” The collection wavers in delivering on its second aim stated in the same sentence: “...while remaining true to the depth and integrity of Buddhist tradition.”

The title alone—The Best Buddhist Writing 2011—presents a koan worth puzzling over. What makes a piece of writing Buddhist? Must it have several terms of Sanskrit, Tibetan or Pali in it? Must it have a sub-narrative of East meets West? Should it be a dharma talk? What if a personal narrative makes no reference at all to the dharma, can it still be Buddhist? Should the editor of a book wielding such a title proceed cautiously, not congealing all traditions into one? The book reveals a microcosm of issues for its readers that, reflected upon, may catalyze some growing pains for Buddhist practitioners, writers and publishers.

The anthology showcases a rich arc of essays—personal narratives by lay practitioners as well as teachers, straight-up dharma lectures, and a few essays offering panoramic views by well-known figures in contemporary Buddhism. My favorite personal essays proved funny as well as dear, deflating any pretentiousness in the cultural ideal of the Perfect Buddhist. You can hear it among the titles: “Dead Like Me,” by Ira Sukrungruang; “This is Getting Old,” by Susan Moon; “Rustbelt Dharma,” by Richard Eskow; “I’m Loving It,” by Genine Lentine.

As the introduction promises, we’re returned again and again to the thick stew of contemporary life: broken hearts, work, cars, money, aging, washing dishes, adoptions, sex, marriage, and children. In truth, my copy of The Best Buddhist Writing 2011 is a mess of penciled-in underlines, exclamation points and stars. Almost all of the personal narratives found a way to utilize the unique light of the dharma explicitly; Seven essays managed to do it implicitly, without



once mentioning the author’s tradition nor using any of the foreign terms so familiar to sangha circles. In both cases, bravo for the normalizing of Buddhism!

I would have gleaned much from these essays years ago, but reading them now, after decades of practice, my appreciation is more nuanced. In her essay “Hand Wash Cold,” Karen Maezen Miller ponders the stealthy ways in which fear taints relationships: “When we think we know someone, you see, we are already half-way to disappointment, and no one needs a head start on that.” A newbie to Buddhism could benefit from that statement as much as the practitioner who ties it to construction of self and other. In Lentine’s “I’m Loving It,” she remembers taking orders at a fast-food chain and reflects: “In these quick encounters, I could feel the palpable difference between seeing the person before me and just looking through them to the next transaction; I learned the trick that paying attention doesn’t take extra time, it actually gives you more time.” Again, although that directive might be found in a collection of Buddhist kitchen wisdom, there’s no stopping a serious practitioner from working with it for a year. I know when today’s provisional truths are superseded by deeper understandings, I could happily read the anthology again.

The dharma astonishes in its ability to be a forward-leading investigation. A great piece in the book, “The Power of an Open Question,” by Elizabeth Mattis-Namgyel hones in on this specifically—the dharma as an open, questioning encounter with experience. Perhaps one requisite of popular, “Buddhist Writing” is life reflected upon through this exploratory lens,

the practice of the Eightfold path as a dialogue with experience.

One of my favorite essayists inside or outside of Buddhist circles, Pico Iyer, gives us a grounded sense of the Dalai Lama through their decades-long relationship as teacher and student. The book also offers plenty of expository essays and teachings by some of Buddhism's rock stars: Matthieu Riccard, Jack Kornfield, and Thich Nhat Hanh among them. The Dalai Lama's "Toward a Kinship of Faiths," an essay about religious pluralism, is dazzling in its thesis and precision of language and should be required reading for every person on the planet.

So, what troubled me about this rich and varied anthology entitled, *The Best Buddhist Writing of 2011*? (A pardon to our Buddhist academic friends: may the best of your good work also find such popular venues). A quote from Nanavira Thera, a Theravadan monk and author of *Clearing the Path* summarizes some of what I stumbled over. The terms Buddhism and Buddhist had for him "A slightly displeasing air about them—they are too much like labels one sticks on the outside of packages regardless of what the packages contain."

When I read the first paragraph in the introduction to *The Best Buddhist Writing of 2011*, I knew I was in for a ride. The opening paragraph, the setup for the tone and context of all the writing to follow, featured a Vajrayana doctrine—albeit a beautiful one. Unfortunately for me and my fellow Theravadans, many essays were also introduced with the same slant. I also counted the provenance of the essays: twenty from Mahayana traditions (including Vajrayana, Zen and Tibetan), seven—as I mentioned above—not identifiable, and two from the Theravadan camp.

All Buddhisms are not identical and perhaps these writings would be better off not contextualized from a particular slant. Let each author speak for herself or himself. In the Dalai Lama's essay in the anthology, "Toward a True Kinship of Faiths," he speaks of three key aspects of religions: 1) ethical teachings 2) doctrines and metaphysics 3) culture-specific attitudes and images. The three overlap generously in Buddhism, but the view of reality—the sticky metaphysics and philosophy aspect—differ significantly. One might argue that cultivating the Eightfold Path, which blurs these distinctions between Buddhist denominations, remains central to all. Yes. And yet...

After more than six decades of weaving into Western culture, Buddhism can come out of the closet and dialogue with our reading audience about differences—we can do this as discernment, and even celebration—not judgment. Our "packages" do contain dissimilar items: various schools promise and believe a number of contradictory, and sometimes incompatible things. There. I've said it.

In that same essay, the Dalai Lama declares: "The possibility of genuine interreligious understanding and harmony should not be, and need not be, contingent upon proving the ultimate oneness of all religions." It's true in the macrocosm of world faiths, and true in the microcosm of Buddhism. Let's discern

the variations and learn from them, not try and present a homogenized, idealized public face. In fact, one of the purposes of *Present Magazine* is to bring to light some of those differences and disagreements, especially those that curb the aspirations of female monastics.

Along the same vein, some of the essays in the anthology make sweeping claims, and this too, can have a blender effect. One piece offers to summarize all of Buddhism in one phrase; another asks and answers what is the ultimate of all realizations. In the famous sutta addressing the Kalamas, the Buddha refuses to answer such a query: he hands it right back to the questioner, and sets them on a path of self-reflection and investigation.

I recommend *The Best Buddhist Writing of 2011* to you whole-heartedly. I'm looking forward to reading it many times in the future. I also encourage the Fourfold Sangha—nuns and monks, laywomen and laymen—to attend to the public face of Buddhism with a rigor that is fundamental to the path of the dharma. Doing so might sell fewer books, and it might find fewer people drawn to certain sanghas, but Buddhism, for now at least, seems firmly planted in the West. As our practices move forward, we have the ability to dialogue with practitioners of various denominations, to learn about and celebrate our remarkable differences as well as our similarities, and to ensure that the Eightfold Path matures as a creative act of inquiry.



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