

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.

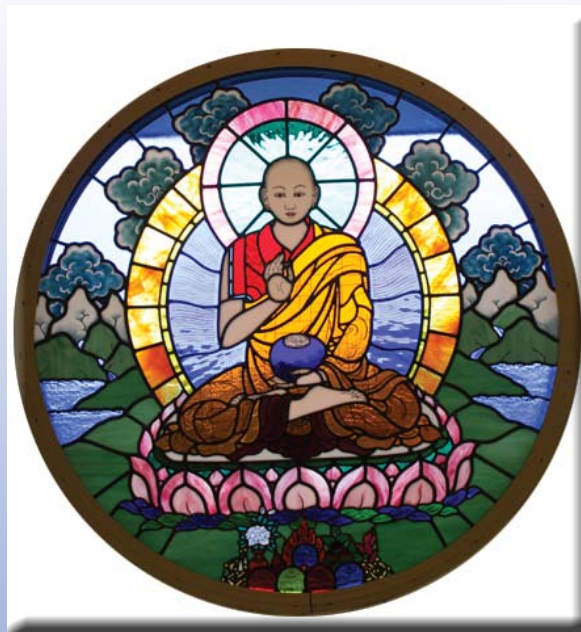
Sarah Conover, Spokane, Washington, USA



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**