

Publisher
INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF
ENGAGED BUDDHISTS (INEB)

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Distributed by
Suksit Siam
113-115 Fuangnakorn Rd.,
Bangkok 10200
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Baht 100 per issue
Suggested annual subscription US \$50

- Payment info:
- A cheque payable to "INEB"
Personal cheques from the UK, US,
and Euro are accepted.
 - Paypal, please go to the INEB website

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Seeds of Peace is published thrice annually in January, May and September, in order to promote the aims and objectives of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) and its members around the world, and the organizations under SNF including Spirit in Education Movement (SEM) and the School for Wellbeing Studies and Research.

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Editorial Notes

We have been very saddened by the injuries, loss of life, and destruction caused by the major earthquakes that shook Nepal in April and May of this year. From our members and affiliate organizations in Nepal we have learned that official government policies have sometimes created obstacles for delivery of aid, and that certain groups, such as indigenous Buddhist communities, have often been overlooked by official agencies. This has made the grassroots organizing and relief efforts of our affiliates and members, often led by local monastics, more crucial than ever in getting aid to those who need it most. The relief work is urgent and ongoing, and much long-term assistance will be needed for rebuilding.

INEB is proud to have assisted in organizing the second successful international conference of the Inter-religious Climate and Ecology Network (ICE), which took place in South Korea this year. The themes of climate change, sustainability, and resilience brought together participants and speakers from 25 countries from the 24th of April to the 2nd of May. The conference was an important step forward in networking, sharing of information, and planting the seeds of collaboration between very diverse communities of faith from around the world. For further information, readers can look forward to a full report in the next issue of Seeds of Peace.

Since January of this year INEB staff have continued to prepare the ground for two new institutions of higher learning that will build on INEB's long history of creating alternative training and educational opportunities for grassroots activists. The first of these is the School of English for Social Service, which we hope to begin in late January of 2016. This will be a three- to four-month program that will help to take the English skills of grassroots social activists to an advanced level. Students will learn English while also studying the key personal and social challenges that characterize our world at present. Students will receive instruction in meditation and other life skills, visit with monastics and intellectuals, and undertake cooperative work projects, all in an English language medium.

INEB's second project is a master's program in Socially Engaged Buddhism. This will be a program for young adults who want to dedicate their energies towards both personal growth and social transformation, and to exploring how they can best integrate the two, using the entire history of socially engaged Buddhism as the focal point of study. Students will not only study texts but also meet with engaged Buddhist in four sites across Asia, while also putting the skills of meditation, listening, and open inquiry into practice. We hope to begin this program in August of 2016.

In regard to upcoming events, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who has been a patron of INEB since its inception, will celebrate his 80th birthday on July 6th of this year. We are grateful for the outstanding example he has given the world of a monastic who has come to stand for wisdom and compassion as a result of his acts of intellectual integrity, his simplicity, and his kindness. We wish him good health, a long life, and many more years of moral and spiritual leadership.

Finally, the INEB biennial conference will take place from the 15th to 20th of January 2016 in Sri Lanka. The conference will focus on holistic development from a variety of Buddhist perspectives. 2016 will be the first year of actively working towards the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, which are in turn a continuation of the Millennium Development Goals. We see this as an ideal time to reflect on the last 15 years, to look at how successful the Millennium Development Goals have been, and to bring the views and practices of Buddhist social activists into more active dialog with these goals. Hopefully, doing so can contribute new perspectives and dimensions to public understandings of these goals, and lead towards greater collaboration as we enter a new phase in working to realize them. Please contact the INEB secretariat or visit the INEB website for further information.

relationships take hold—or by suggesting that people who are attracted to the opposite sex are more likely to understand the Dharma. Buddhism denies any discussions about sex, and those with non-normative behavior are systemically excluded because of this.

TClJ: If we want to change the view of Thai Buddhists on this, how do we do it?

Phra Chai: It can't be done. The best we can do is to keep talking about it. Since I've started doing this work more than ten years ago, I've come to realize that things can't be changed, but we can still express our opinions so that those who are willing to listen and agree with us will understand the right approach to this matter.

TClJ: Do you think Buddhism is keeping up with the times?

Phra Chai: If we look at the big picture, I can't say. There

are some schools, such as Phra Paisal's, that try to apply the core of Buddhism to contemporary issues, but in general Buddhism in Thailand is varied. You can say Buddhism has adapted enough. You can also argue otherwise. I think it is more likely the latter. However, I must admit that Buddhist schools are focused more on practice than on semantics when compared to the 1950s. You would find that back then, there weren't that many schools that focus on the practice itself. Today, more people understand the foundations of mindfulness. On the other hand, there's also an increasing presence of the trendy materialistic form of Buddhism, where you paste gold leaf on the Buddha statues or sacred marker spheres (Luuk Nimit). So, it's hard to tell whether Buddhism has adapted quickly enough, but I can say for certain that there are many areas in which it hasn't done so.

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Women in Buddhism

Bhikṣuṇī Jampa Tsedroen (Dr. Carola Roloff), Senior Researcher in the field of Buddhism, Academy of World Religions, University of Hamburg, Germany

Speech at the Governing Council Meeting of the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC)

December 11 2014, Rajgir, Bihar, India

Dear Venerables, most respected friends in the Dharma,
First of all, I would like to thank our Secretary General, the Most Ven. Lama Lobzang and his “core group” for giving me the opportunity to briefly speak on the subject of Women in Buddhism. Over the next ten minutes, I will touch upon three topics:

1. The role of Buddhist women according to the Buddhist canonical texts
2. The present situation of Buddhist women in the three mainstream traditions of Buddhism
3. The possible role of IBC with regard to women's empowerment

Yesterday was International Human Rights Day, and I think it was an auspicious sign that HRH Ashi Kesang Wangmo, Princess of Bhutan, served as our president. Many in the assembly expressed the opinion that Buddhism in the 21st century must include gender equity.

The Role of Buddhist Women According to the Tripitaka

In brief, among the World Religions, Buddhism can be proud that 2600 years ago Lord Buddha, the Awakened One, considered the issue of gender equity to be important. The Buddha was far ahead of his time. In the Aṅguttara Nikāya 8.29 the Buddha explains what makes a human rebirth precious. That is, a birth that is free from the eight inopportune circumstances that are not conducive to living the spiritual

life (aṭṭha akkhaṇā asamayā brahmacariyavāsāya). One of these eight inopportune circumstances is to be born in a place where one does not find bhikkhunīs, bhikkhus, upāsikās, and upāsakas. The Buddha decided to establish the four-fold community. He did not adopt the caste system into which he himself was born, but said for example in Sutta Nipāta 1.7, verse 142¹ :

*One is not an outcaste by birth, by birth one is not a priest (brahmin),
by deeds one becomes an outcaste, one becomes a priest (brahmin) by deeds.*

What counts are our deeds, not what we are. The Buddha did not intend to create two new castes, a caste of men and a caste of women. He did not distinguish between a precious male or female birth, but spoke about a precious human rebirth, and how we can make best use of this human potential, without harming others or discriminating against others.

The Present Situation of Buddhist Women in the Three Mainstream Traditions of Buddhism

During our First Founding Members Conclave in 2013, we agreed that although Buddhist women have more educational opportunities today, the low position of women within the world's Buddhist communities is one of the greatest challenges Buddhism faces at present. Why? Favoritism towards males, and gender stereotyping, still persist in many Buddhist societies. Women cannot participate equally in the study, practice or teaching of Buddhism in all Buddhist traditions. Gender equity needs to be recognized, and circumstances changed, so that women and men's opportunities and status will fully accord with Buddhist principles of equanimity.

The most pressing issue relating to women in Buddhism is the lack of full ordination of nuns in the Theravāda and Tibetan traditions. Sri Lanka, like India, had a strong bhikkhunī tradition up until the 11th/12th century. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the bhikkhunī order was first revived in Sri Lanka. Now there are more than 1,200 bhikkhunīs in Sri Lanka. Progress is also being made in Thailand. On November 29, 2014, the first bhikkhunī

ordination in Thailand took place in Songkhla. Eight bhikkhunīs were ordained. Maha Nayaka Mahindavamsa Maha Thero, the preceptor, made an announcement in front of the assembly of 20 bhikkhus and 18 bhikkhunīs that he had appointed Ven. Dhammananda bhikkhunī as the first pavattinī of Thailand. A pavattinī is a senior bhikkhunī who has at least 12 vassas (Pāli: "rains") and is entitled to give full ordination. In Sri Lanka, the highest position is Maha Nayaka. All the three sects of the Sri Lankan Theravāda tradition have Maha Nayakas. Mahindavamsa is the Maha Nayaka of Amarapura. He has a close relationship with the Thai Royal family. Prince Prising, son of King Rama III, was once the abbot at the temple where Mahindavamsa is now abbot. Among the 20 bhikkhus who took part in the ordination, 17 were Thai monks from the south. All the bhikkhunīs were the most senior in Thailand.

In Tibetan Buddhism, the number of bhikṣuṇīs is growing, but so far the novice nuns, who were first ordained by Tibetan Mūlasarvāstivāda bhikṣus, have not been fully ordained in that Vinaya tradition, but in the Dharmaguptaka tradition. We discussed this very difficult situation in detail with H.H. the Dalai Lama and leading bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs from all Buddhist traditions during the First International Congress on Buddhist Women's Role in the Saṅgha in 2007 at the University of Hamburg. This discussion, and all the 68 papers delivered, were published in 2010, and are available for anyone who has an interest². On an academic level, we have gathered a lot of information, but it has not reached the Buddhist communities on the grass-roots level. Many wrong views concerning women and the issue of ordination continue to be perpetuated. Therefore, educational campaigns are needed to communicate the most important facts.

Some of the well-educated śrāmaṇerikās (novice nuns) practicing Tibetan Buddhism are very interested in receiving full ordination, but they want to receive it from their Tibetan lamas. All the heads of the various Tibetan Buddhist nikāyas are supportive, and have expressed their support in letters, which are published in Tibetan and English on the internet.³ But unlike in the Theravāda tradition, to date, no leader in the Tibetan tradition has taken action and conducted an ordination. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is looking for international support and agreement on this

¹ Na jaccā vasalo hoti, na jaccā hoti brāhmaṇo, kammanā vasalo hoti kammanā hoti brāhmaṇo.

² See: <http://www.congress-on-buddhist-women.org/> [23.12.2014].

issue, and has suggested that we should have a second conference, but this time in India, either in Bodhgaya or Sarnath, or in Delhi or somewhere like that. This leads me to my third and last point:

The Possible Role of IBC with Regard to Women’s Empowerment

In 2013 we agreed that IBC should provide gender education and training to its members, and should practice true gender equality in all aspects of its planning, and empower both genders to bear its responsibilities equally and not trivialize culturally and socially constructed gender biases. Why empower both genders? Are men not already powerful enough? The point is: Women and men both need empowerment. we can see this if we take the IBC as an example. If nuns are not explicitly invited to become members of the IBC, they cannot participate and you will have no women whom you can elect. In my view this is a kind of structural violence. Ajahn Sulak Sivaraksa and Ven. Samdhong Rinpoche may consider it cultural violence. The fact is that we are missing women’s perspectives in the IBC. Gender studies show that when women make up at least one third of an organization, not only the structure, but also the quality and effectiveness of that organization starts changing and are improved. So it must be the IBC goal to reach at least a level of one third female members’ participation in the general assembly and its governing body in the near term. From the past thirteen International Sakyadhita Buddhist women’s conferences, we know that there are many, very capable and well-educated Buddhist women, especially in the Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese traditions. They are running huge temples. Also in the West, it is mainly the women who are running or co-running most of the Dharma centers. And, for example, the world’s largest Buddhist welfare organization, the Tzu Chi Foundation, was started by a Buddhist nun. Imagine all this potential benefitting the Buddha Dharma! To empower women we need female role models. Yesterday, I went through this IBC Governing Body leaflet. It does not give the impression that women are truly included or important:

- Council of Patrons: 11 male, no female
- Supreme Dharma Council: 26 male, 2 female
- Presidium: 8 presidents—one of them HRH Ashi Kesang Wangmo Wangchuk, the Princess of Bhutan

- Vice Presidents: 11 male, no female
- Secretary General male
- Deputy Secretary Generals 9 male, 2 female
- Executive members 23 elected, the nominated executive members are not listed, among those listed there is 1 female
- Global envoys 3 male, 2 female
- Advisory committee 2 male, 2 female

In total, among the 102 members listed, there are only about 10 women — 10%. Our goal must be to at least triple that number in the near future. This does not mean that men will lose their posts. We just have to increase the number—as you suggested yesterday.

When I received the agenda for this meeting, I was very happy to see that the organizers had planned for a discussion about the formation of new standing committees on women’s empowerment, and interfaith and intra-Buddhist dialogue. These are important matters, but unfortunately we did not have the time to discuss them this time.

So, please, I request that the new working group take this issue seriously and try very hard to get women’s organizations involved: the Tibetan Nuns Project, the Ladakh Nuns Association, the Bhutan nuns foundation, the huge bhikkhunī associations of Taiwan and Vietnam, as well as the bhikkhunī association of the Jogye order in Korea and so on. I am sure that Sakyadhita International would be most happy to provide you with their respective contact information. The new President is Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo. I suggest that you make her one of the advisors and ask her to help encourage the nuns and laywomen to join you. There is a long list of work that needs to be done. And there are many young nuns and laywomen who are very devoted to Buddhism. So we should try to make use of their great potential to serve the Dharma wherever needed.

I hope that at our next meeting enough time will be given for the formation of new standing committees on women’s empowerment, and interfaith and intra-Buddhist dialogue. It is not enough to pass resolutions. We need to give Buddhism a female face if Buddhism is to remain relevant in the 21st century.

Thank you very much for your kind attention!

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³ See: http://www.bhiksuniordination.org/letters_support.html [24.12.2014].