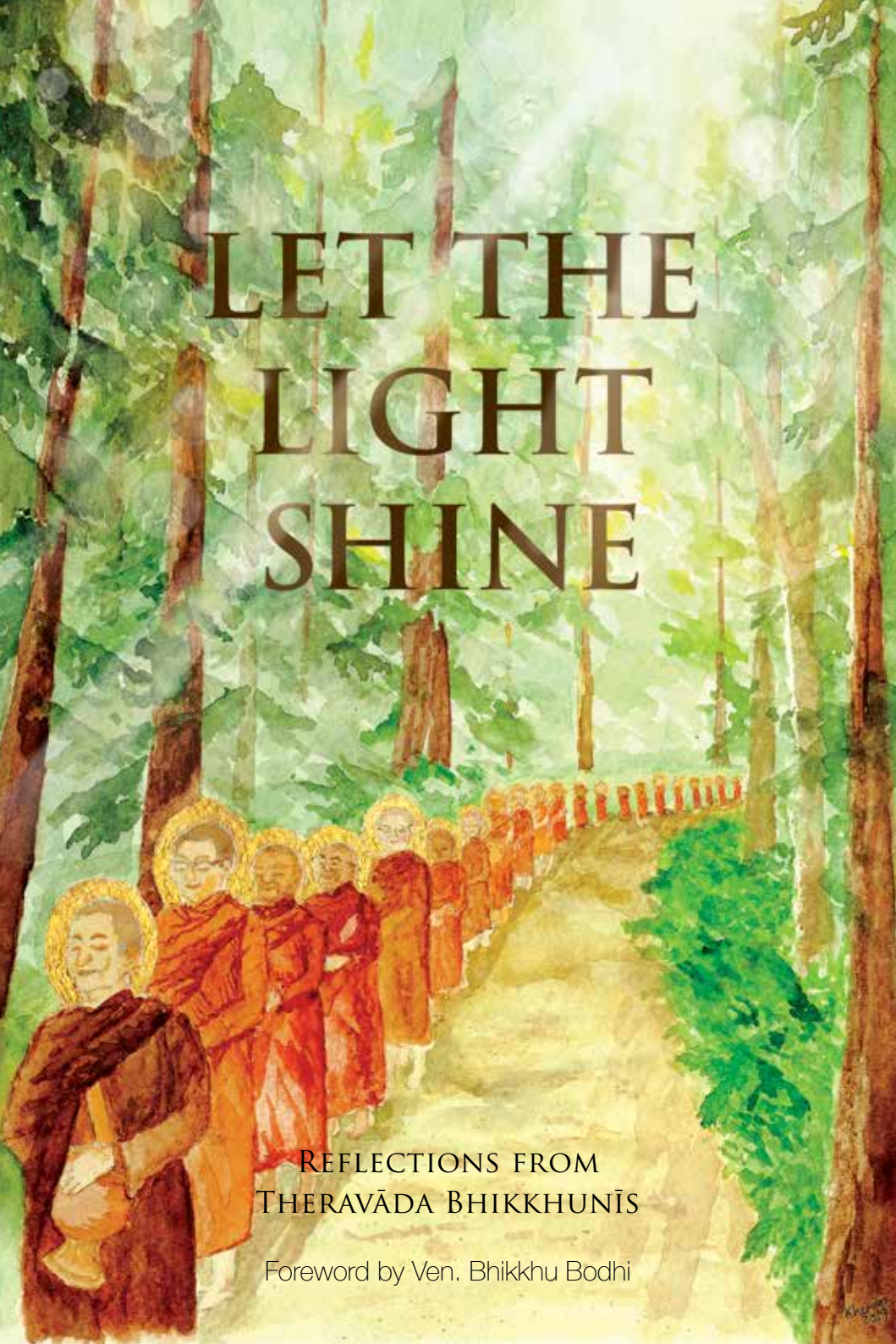
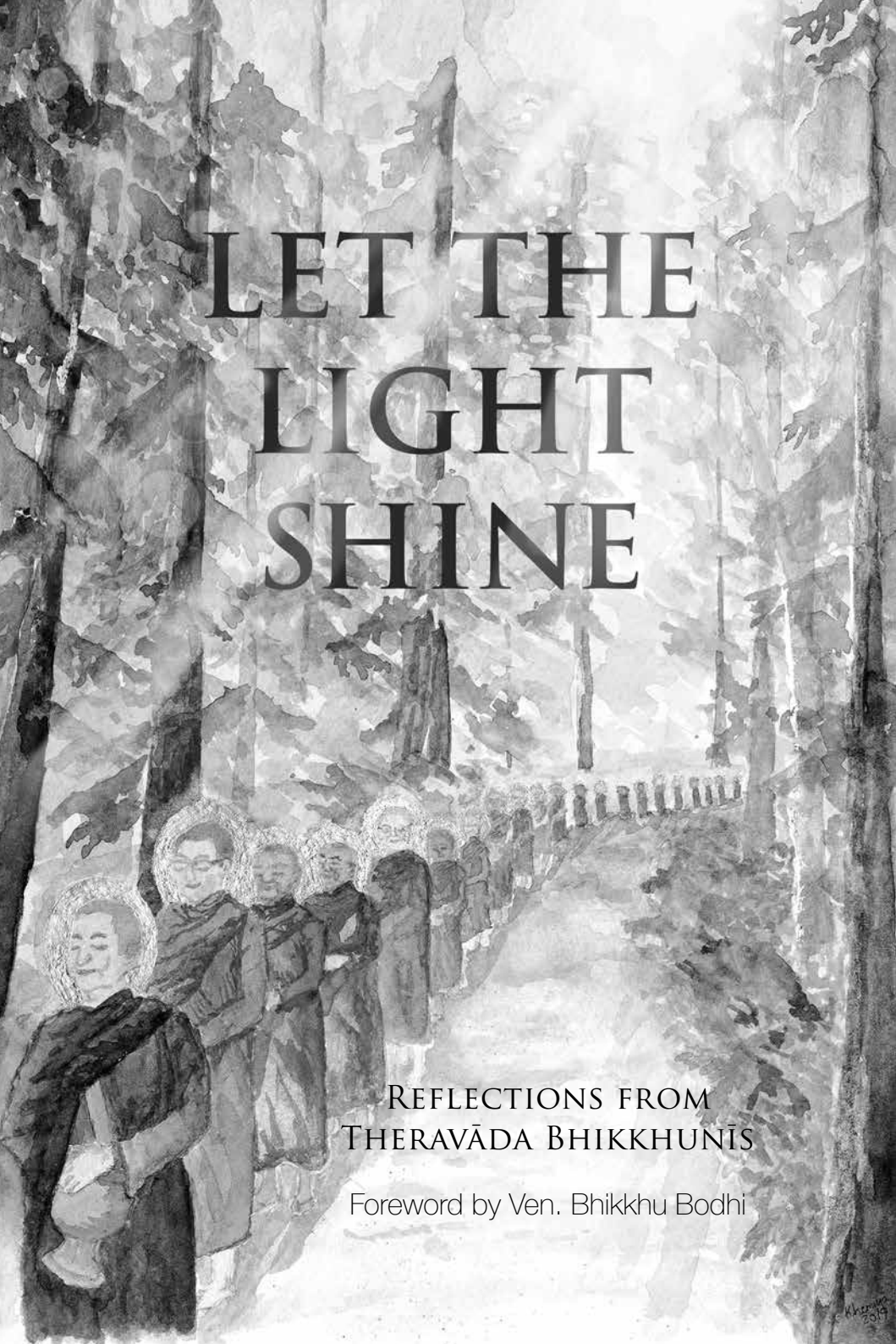
LET THE LIGHT SHINE



Reflections from
Theravāda Bhikkhunīs

Foreword by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi



LET THE LIGHT SHINE

Reflections from Theravāda Bhikkhunīs

Foreword by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi

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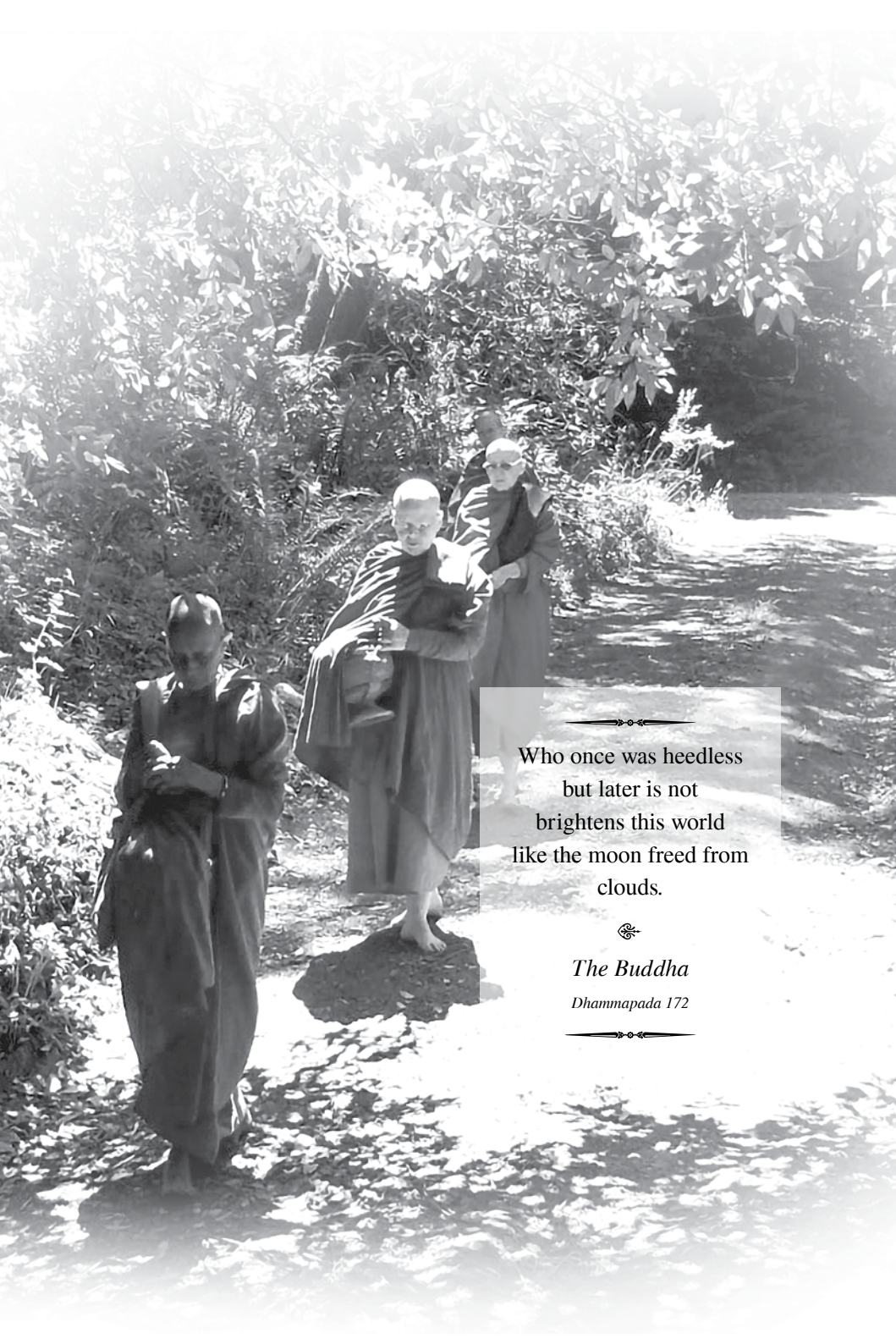
Dedication

With gratitude to all bhikkhunī pioneers, visionaries,
leaders, and teachers



Who once was heedless
but later is not
brightens this world
like the moon freed from
clouds.

The Buddha

Dhammapada 172

Contents

Foreword 8

Acknowledgments 13

Abbreviations 14

Introduction 15

Making the Most of Each Day 19
Bhikkhunī Khemā Mahātherī

The Ideal Place 26
Bhikkhunī Tathālokā Mahātherī

Death and Stream-Entry 33
Bhikkhunī Sudinnā Therī

Some Last Advice 38
Bhikkhunī Sudhammā Therī

Determined to Do It 51
Bhikkhunī Guṇasārī Therī

Reflection on Repulsiveness 63
Bhikkhunī Satimā Therī

A Handful of Poems 68
Bhikkhunī Medhānandī Therī

Happiness 74
Bhikkhunī Vāyāmā Therī

Ordaining and Renunciation 85
Bhikkhunī Nirodhā Therī

Do Not Judge Yourself 90
Bhikkhunī Hāsapaññā Therī

Spiritual Warrior 95
Bhikkhunī Serī Therī

Discoveries in Meditation 102
Ammā Thānasantī

My Going Forth 106
Bhikkhunī Adhimuttī

Liberation of Mind Through Loving-Kindness 111
Bhikkhunī Suvijjānā

Living as a Bhikkhunī in Thailand 118
Bhikkhunī Phalañāṇī

Process of Awakening 125
Bhikkhunī Ānandabodhī

The Heart Wish 132
Bhikkhunī Santacittā

The Challenge of Change 140
Bhikkhunī Dhammadhīrā

Going Nature's Way 146
Bhikkhunī Dīpā

The Good Life 153
Bhikkhunī Santussikā

Reflections on Bhikkhunī Ordination 158
Bhikkhunī Jāyatī

Contact Information 162

Foreword

Back in the early 1980s, when I was living in Sri Lanka, we Western bhikkhus would occasionally discuss the question whether it was possible for the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha, the order of fully ordained women, to be re-established in the Theravāda Buddhist tradition. The answer we always arrived at was a negative one. The ordination procedure laid down in the Vinaya, the monastic discipline, stipulated that for a woman to become a bhikkhunī both the Bhikkhu Saṅgha and the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha had to participate in the ordination procedure. Since the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha had died out centuries ago, it seemed there was simply no chance at all for it to be brought back to life. As we saw the matter then, attempting such a revival would have been like trying to square the circle, make time flow backward, or get parallel lines to meet.

Although we did not see an opportunity for reviving the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha within the boundaries of the Vinaya, we thought it pitiful that such an insurmountable roadblock stood in the way of full ordination for women. In the modern world, women were playing prominent roles in almost all spheres of human activity, from law to medicine to business to government to academia. Sri Lanka itself had been governed by a woman prime minister and later by a woman president. But full ordination as a bhikkhunī was out of reach, prevented by a technical snag in the Vinaya. Women, of course, could receive makeshift types of monastic status, such as the *silmātā* of Sri Lanka, the *thilashin* of Myanmar, and the *mae chee* of Thailand. But these were not positions created by the Buddha and they did not include full participation in the life of the Saṅgha.

However, where there is a will there is a way. In Sri Lanka, scholars, both lay and monastic, had been exploring means by which the

Bhikkhunī Saṅgha could be revived and had come up with several ideas, among which two were considered preferable. One stemmed from the recognition that in the countries of East Asia—China, Taiwan, Korea, and Vietnam—an order of bhikkhunīs had survived down to the present. Its Vinaya lineage was not of the Theravāda school but from the Dharmaguptakas, a school of Early Buddhism that had close ancestral connections with the Theravāda. Both were branches of the old Vibhajjavāda school, and the bhikkhunīs of the East Asian countries still followed the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya. On this ground, the idea was mooted of bringing over bhikkhunīs from East Asia to fulfill the requirement for a valid Theravāda ordination.

The other proposal drew upon the fact that, during the earliest stage in the formation of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha, the Buddha had instructed the bhikkhus on their own to ordain women. Although, once the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha reached maturity, he instituted a dual-ordination procedure involving both bhikkhunīs and bhikkhus, he never actually abrogated the earlier procedure. Thus some scholars—including the eminent Burmese scholar-monk, the Mingun Jetavan Sayadaw—advocated reviving the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha through an ordination conducted by the bhikkhus alone. They saw the Buddha's allowance as applicable not only at the beginning of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha but at any time this order becomes extinct.

By the late 1990s the idea of reviving bhikkhunī ordination had gathered support among a sizable section of Sri Lankan Buddhists, as well as Western Buddhists, with monks from Sri Lanka playing an instrumental role in shifting public opinion. In relation to future developments, perhaps the most decisive step in the emergence of a resuscitated Bhikkhunī Saṅgha was the grand ordination ceremony held in Bodhgaya in February 1998. The ceremony was convened by the Taiwan-based organization Fo Guang Shan 佛光山. Women from many countries came to receive ordination, including women from Sri Lanka and Nepal who followed the Theravāda tradition.

The officiating bhikkhunīs had come from Taiwan and the ceremony was conducted in Chinese according to the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya. Technically, this made the women bhikkhunīs of the Dharmaguptaka tradition, as it had been transmitted in China and later in Taiwan. But shortly afterward the newly ordained bhikkhunīs traveled to Sarnath, where they underwent a second ordination conducted in Pāli by Theravāda bhikkhus from Sri Lanka. The monks performed this act on the basis of the Buddha's proclamation permitting bhikkhus to ordain bhikkhunīs. The act admitted the women to the Theravāda Saṅgha and entitled them to observe the Theravāda Vinaya.

This event, one might say, marked the effective rebirth of the Theravāda Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in the modern age. Since then, women from many countries, both Asian and Western, have received bhikkhunī ordination. While the validity of this procedure has been disputed by a number of Theravāda bhikkhus, many monks have welcomed the revival and given it their wholehearted blessing. Almost everywhere the bhikkhunīs are enthusiastically supported by the lay community, who recognize the value of having female monastics together with the long-established male monastics.

As time goes by, we can expect to see a stronger female presence in the ranks of the Saṅgha and a more articulate voice of women monastics. A glance through the Nikāyas or Discourse Collections of the Theravāda tradition shows a markedly masculine bent. In the suttas we usually see the Buddha addressing bhikkhus, either individually or as a group; only seldom does he address both bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs together, and even more infrequently does he speak to an individual bhikkhunī. Nevertheless, the Pāli Canon contains three remarkable collections ascribed to bhikkhunīs. One is a short chapter in the *Saṁyutta Nikāya* called the "Bhikkhunī Saṁyutta", a group of ten suttas that tell the stories of how ten bhikkhunīs, all arahants, rebuffed the attempts by Māra the Tempter to lead them astray. A second is the *Therīgāthā*, a much larger

collection of poems by the arahant bhikkhunīs in which they relate, sometimes in detail, the stories of their spiritual quest, their efforts in practice, and their attainment of arahantship. And the third is the *Therī-apadāna*, poems in which eminent bhikkhunīs speak of the meritorious deeds they performed in earlier lives, deeds that sowed the seeds for their subsequent attainment of arahantship under the Buddha Gotama.

At present, now that bhikkhunī ordination has been revived, it is inevitable that fully ordained women will again take their proper place as exponents and teachers of the Dhamma, sharing in the task of expounding the teachings as well as in training other women for ordination. The present volume brings together short essays and reflections by a number of contemporary bhikkhunīs. The voices heard here include both Asian bhikkhunīs—originally from Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and Myanmar, but all living in the West—and Western bhikkhunīs, from the U.S., Great Britain, Continental Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. Their contributions are as diverse as their backgrounds and personalities. Some are transcripts of discourses, in which the women offer their interpretations of the Dhamma or speak about their modes of practice. Others are reflections on themes of the Dhamma. And in still other essays, they reveal in more personal terms their motivations in seeking, and eventually obtaining, ordination. The essays of this latter type testify to the urgency of their need, the earnestness of their search, and the strength of their determination.

An excellent example is the piece by Ayyā Guṇasārī. Although, as a Burmese woman, she grew up in a Buddhist culture, in her youth and even into her adult years, preoccupied with her education and family, she showed little interest in religion. The transformation came after she had been living in the United States for some years, when chaos in her home life raised disturbing questions in her mind about the meaning of happiness and material success. These

questions led her to meditation practice and eventually to aspire for a life of renunciation. However, she did not want to settle for the life of a thilashin, the mode of female renunciation available to women in Myanmar. She knew that the Buddha had bhikkhunī disciples, and she was determined to become a bhikkhunī herself. Although at the time such a step seemed impossible, her resolve was firm and led her, in the face of immense obstacles, to the fulfillment of her heart's ideal.

The present book shows us, in multiple ways, how the Dhamma, while universal in its appeal, can take on different nuances when expressed by feminine voices. As time goes by and bhikkhunī ordination spreads to wider circles in a literate and well educated female population, we can expect to see an ever larger output of writings from fully ordained Buddhist women. These will testify, as the present volume does, to the feminine appropriation of the Dhamma and offer us still more feminine perspectives on the meaning and applications of the teachings.

Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi
Vesak 2019

Acknowledgments

We extend our gratitude to all the pioneering bhikkhunīs whose dedication to Dhamma inspired us to bring this book into existence. Like the American hero Rosa Parks, mother of the freedom movement, you have given us a model of fearlessness and commitment to truth.

We've been very fortunate to receive ongoing guidance from bhikkhunī elder Ayyā Tathālokā during the different phases of this book. Her patience and willingness to advise us on various points have been invaluable.

Without generous and skillful volunteers, this project would never have come to completion. We would like to express our deep appreciation to Dennis Crean, Hisayo Suzuki, Alison and Hugo Hoffmann, Ruby Grad, and Madeleine Fahrenwald, Bhikkhunī Niyyānikā, Sāmaṇerī Somā and Anāgārika Kaccāyana, together with Esther Thien, for their skill and care in helping with the manuscript.

We would like to thank the Abbot of Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery 光明山普觉禅寺, the Venerable Sik Kwang Sheng 广声大和尚, and Awaken Publishing of Singapore for publication of this book.

And lastly, we thank each other—for the patience and determination to complete this project.

Bhikkhunī Adhimuttī
Pamela C. Kirby

Abbreviations

AN	Aṅguttara Nikāya
Dhp	Dhammapada
DN	Dīgha Nikāya
MN	Majjhima Nikāya
SN	Saṃyutta Nikāya
Thig	Therīgāthā
Vism	Visuddhimagga

Introduction

It is an honor and joy to introduce this first book of Theravāda bhikkhunī reflections in the English language. Reminiscent of the ancient Indian *Therīgāthā (Verses of the Women Elders)* and the Chinese *Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼传 *(Lives of the Bhikkhunīs)*, the path reflections and life stories gathered here reveal insights of bhikkhunī pioneers of the present as the Buddha's teaching and practice break new ground in new lands.

The venerable bhikkhunī teachers who contributed to this book hail from East, West, and points in-between—the traditionally Buddhist lands of south and southeast Asia and the Buddhist Saṅgha in Europe, Australasia, and North America. Some have decades of experience on the Buddhist path, while others are new Buddhist teachers. All have lived, practiced, or taught in the West, and all have received the *bhikkhunī upasampadā*, the full acceptance and entry into communion and the shared base of training we call "higher ordination" in Buddhism. They are fully ordained women in the ancient Buddhist lineage of awakened women teachers, leaders, saints, and sages.

Living on the cusp of the Theravāda Bhikkhunī Saṅgha revival, it has been a joy to know personally most of these fine monastic women, to see their paths unfold and blossom, and to offer an open rather than closed door so that they may receive the full inheritance from the blessed Buddha and make good with it.

Like the unique variety of characters in the ancient bhikkhunī texts, you will find in this book a treasure trove of knowledge, vision, and understanding gleaned from the heart of the practice—each reflection a doorway that shines light upon the path. May that light illuminate the brilliance of your heart. May our world not be short of awakening and awakened ones. May we do everything we can

to cultivate, nurture, support, and enable unfolding of the path—*amhākaṃ dīgharattaṃ hitāya sukhāya*—for our long-lasting benefit and the happiness it gives us.

May the words contained herein be a blessing for your practice, a lamp and a guide, offering encouragement, solace, insight, and light.

Tathālokā Therī

Bhikkhunī Khemā Mahātherī
1923 – 1997

In the twentieth century, **Ayyā Khemā** was the first female Theravāda monastic to emerge as a renowned international Buddhist meditation teacher and a member of the very first group of Theravāda nuns to receive bhikkhunī ordination.

Born in Berlin in 1923 to Jewish German parents, in 1938, following anti-Jewish pogroms, she and her parents escaped from Germany separately, and were later reunited in Shanghai. At age twenty-two, she married and gave birth to a daughter. She and her family fled to San Francisco as the People's Liberation Army were on the cusp of taking Shanghai, and in California she gave birth to a son. Feeling something was missing, she began to explore alternate spiritual paths, divorced and remarried. She, her new husband and son began traveling the world as seekers.

In Australia, she was introduced to Buddhism by Phra Khantipālo. Inspired by the clarity of the Buddhist teachings, she traveled to northern California, Burma, Thailand, and Sri Lanka, studying meditation. In Sri Lanka she met the late meditation master Venerable Matara Srī Ñāṇarāma Thera of Mithrigale Nissaraṇa Vanaya, who inspired her to teach jhāna meditation.

Her experiences led her to enter Buddhist monastic life as a ten-precept-nun in Sri Lanka in 1979, Venerable Nārada Thera giving her the name "Khemā," which means "Peace." After ten years of

intensive study and practice, Ayyā Khemā began to teach meditation herself throughout Europe, America, and Australia.

In 1978, Ayyā Khemā established Wat Buddha Dhamma, a forest monastery near Sydney, Australia, with Phra Khantipālo. In Colombo, Sri Lanka, she set up the International Buddhist Women's Center as a training center for Sri Lankan nuns, and Parappuduwa Nuns' Island for Sri Lankan and Western women who wanted to practice intensively and/or ordain as nuns.

In 1987, Ayyā Khemā coordinated the first international conference of Buddhist nuns in history, which resulted in the creation of Sakyadhītā International Association of Buddhist Women. In 1988, she traveled to southern California where, with the support of the late Most Venerable Dr. Havanpola Ratanasāra Nāyaka Mahā Thero, together with the very first international group of twenty Theravāda women renunciates, she received higher ordination as a bhikkhunī at Fo Guang Shan Hsi Lai Temple 佛光山西来寺.

In 1989 Buddha Haus was founded in Germany under her auspices, where she served as spiritual director. In 1997, Ayyā Khemā founded Mettā Vihāra, a thriving monastery not far from Buddha Haus. After living, practicing and teaching with breast cancer for fourteen years, Ayyā Khemā passed away on November 2, 1997, at Buddha Haus, at the age of 74.

Holding high the lamp of the Dhamma, she left a legacy of over two dozen books on meditation and the Buddha's teaching in English and German, and numerous dedicated students, both monastic and non-monastic. Her students have also become eminent teachers, including several of the next generation of groundbreaking Theravāda bhikkhunīs.

Making the Most of Each Day

Bhikkhunī Khemā Mahātherī

Who knows whether there is much time in this life? This is the only life we can take responsibility for. Here we have some control over how we spend our day. The future is nonexistent. "I'm going to meditate tomorrow" is foolish. There is no tomorrow; there is only *now*. When the next life comes, it's this life—actually, this is our next life. Finding lots of reasons not to practice today is always possible: the children, the weather, the husband, the wife, the business, the economy, the food, anything will do. What kind of priorities we have is strictly of our own making.

If the future does not exist and the past is gone, what do we have left? This very fleeting moment. It passes more quickly than we can say, but by using each moment skillfully, we can eventually have moment-to-moment awareness, which results in deep insight.

When getting up in the morning, the first thing would be a determination to be mindful. Becoming aware of opening our eyes is the beginning of the day and the beginning of mindfulness. If we have opened our eyes before becoming aware of that, we can close them and start all over again. We will gain an understanding of mindfulness and what it means, and then we can let the mind be flooded with gratitude that we have another whole day at our disposal, for one purpose only: not to cook a better meal, not to buy new things, but to draw nearer to *Nibbāna*.

Being grateful brings the mind to a state of receptivity and joyful expectation of "What am I going to do with this day?" The first thing would be to sit down to meditate, maybe having to get up a little earlier. If we have a whole hour available for meditation, that's fine. At least let us not practice under half an hour because the mind needs time to become calm and collected. The morning hour is often the best for many people because during the night, the mind is not bombarded with as many conscious impressions as it is during the day and is therefore comparatively calm. If we meditate for half an hour and slowly increase it until we reach a whole hour, that's a good program. Each week we could add ten minutes to the daily practice.

After the meditation, we can contemplate the five daily recollections. Now the mind is calm and collected and has more ability to reach an inner depth:

> I am of the nature to decay;
> I have not gone beyond decay.
>
> I am of the nature to be diseased;
> I have not gone beyond disease.
>
> I am of the nature to die;
> I have not gone beyond death.
>
> All that is mine, dear and delightful, will change and vanish.
> I am the owner of my kamma;
> I am born of my kamma;
> I am related to my kamma;
> I live supported by my kamma.
> Any kamma I will do, good or evil, that I will inherit.

Another recollection is about having a loving and kind attitude toward oneself and others and protecting one's own happiness and wishing the same for all beings:

> May I be free from enmity.
> May I be free from hurtfulness.
> May I be free from troubles of mind and body.
> May I be able to protect my own happiness.
>
> Whatever beings there are,
> May they be free from enmity.
>
> Whatever beings there are,
> May they be free from hurtfulness.
>
> Whatever beings there are,
> May they be free from troubles of mind and body.
>
> Whatever beings there are,
> May they be able to protect their own happiness.

If we start each day with these considerations and contemplations, we will tend toward not being overly concerned with ourselves and will try to think of others. Naturally, there is always the possibility of accidents: accidents of non-mindfulness, of not being attentive to what we are doing, accidents of impetuous, instinctive replies, or accidents in feeling sorry for ourselves. These occasions must be seen for what they are: accidents, a lack of awareness. We can just see that at that moment, we were not mindful and try to remedy it in the next moment.

The Buddha did not teach expression or suppression. Instead, he taught the only worthwhile emotions are the four supreme emotions *(brahma vihāras)* Everything else needs to be noticed and allowed

to subside again.[1] If anger arises, it doesn't help to suppress or to express it. We just have to know that the anger has arisen.

If we keep our attention focused, we will know that wholesome emotions and thoughts bring peace and happiness, whereas unwholesome ones bring the opposite. We try to eliminate all unwholesomeness in our thinking and emotions and substitute the wholesome. We are the makers of our own happiness and unhappiness, and we can learn to have control over that. The better the meditation becomes, the easier it will be because the mind needs muscle power to do this. A distracted mind has no strength, no power. If we look back after only one or two days, we may find nothing new within. It's like growing vegetables. If we put seeds in the ground and dig them up the next day, all we will find is a seed. But if we tend the seeds and wait some time, we will find a sprout or a plant.

At the end of each day, it can be a good practice to make a balance sheet, possibly even in writing. Any good shopkeeper will check the merchandise at the end of the day and see what was well-accepted by the customers and what stayed on the shelves. We can check our actions and reactions during the day and see which ones were conducive to happiness for us and others, and which ones were not. If we do that night after night, we will always find the same actions accepted or rejected. Kindness, warmth, interest in others, helpfulness, concern, and care are always accepted. Self-interest, dislike, rejection, arguments, and jealousy are always rejected.

Before going to sleep, it's useful to practice loving-kindness meditation. Having done that the last thing at night, it will be in one's mind first thing in the morning. The Buddha's words about

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[1] The four supreme efforts *(padhāna)* are to avoid unwholesome states of mind; to overcome unwholesome states of mind; to develop wholesome states of mind; to maintain wholesome states of mind.

loving-kindness were, “One goes to sleep happily, one dreams no evil dreams, and one wakes happily.” What more can one ask for? Applying the same principles day after day, there is no reason our lives should not be harmonious. As for our meditation practice, we must not allow it to slide. Whenever that happens, we must start all over again. If we keep doing it every day, we can at least keep the standard attained in retreat and possibly improve on it. Just like an athlete who stops training and has to start all over again, in the same way, the mind needs discipline and attention. This is a sketch of how to use our day-to-day activity and practice. We must never think that Dhamma is for meditation courses or special days. It is, rather, a way of life where we do not forget the impermanence and unsatisfactoriness of the world. We realize these truths within our own hearts. If we practice every day in this way, we will find relief and release from our cares and worries because these are always connected with the world. The Dhamma transcends the world.

*Excerpted and adapted from (*To Be Seen) Here and Now: Ten Dhamma Talks*, Access to Insight (Legacy Edition).*

Bhikkhunī Tathālokā Mahātherī

Ayyā Tathālokā is the founder of the Dhammadhāriṇī monastic community and the first contemporary Western woman to be appointed a bhikkhunī preceptor. She entered monastic life as a teen and has served in the vanguard of the reemergent Therāvada Bhikkhunī Saṅgha.

Born in Washington, DC in 1968, Ayyā Tathālokā was largely raised in the US's Pacific Northwest. She learned to meditate in children's camp at age ten. A near-death experience in high school changed her priorities in life, and she began practicing meditation regularly while in university apprenticing in naturopathic medicine. In 1988, at age nineteen, she left her studies and made her way first to Europe and then India, entering monastic life as a white-robed anāgārikā and later undertaking ten-precept ordination.

After several years searching among East Asian bhikkhunīs' traditions, she found her female mentor in Buddhist monastic life in South Korea, Bhikkhunī Elder Venerable Myeong Seong 和法界 明星, under whose guidance she trained for ten years. Ven. Tathālokā received "going forth" 出家 *(pabbajjā)* and dependency with her bhikkhunī mentor 恩师 *(nissāya ācariyā)* in 1993, receiving the Dharma name Tathā-ālokā 如光, and she received the sāmaṇerī precepts with her mentor's advocacy at Haein-sa on Gayā Mountain 伽倻山 海印寺 in 1995.

Expatriated to the US in 1996, with her bhikkhunī mentor's blessings and the organization of Ven. Kāruna Dharma, she was accepted for bhikkhunī upasampadā in 1997 in Los Angeles with the Sri Lankan bhikkhu saṅgha led by her preceptor *(upajjhāya)*, the chief prelate of the Western Hemisphere, Venerable Dr. Havanpola Ratanasāra Nāyaka Mahā Thero.

Since then, Ayyā Tathālokā has focused on meditation together with study and practice of Dhamma and Vinaya. Post-ordination, she made a commitment to study Bhikkhunī Vinaya for a standard five years. Finding no ready resource in English, she began in-depth research of her own, both in Comparative Bhikkhunī Vinaya and World Bhikkhunī Saṅgha History, topics on which she has written widely.

Ven. Tathālokā's meditation training in Theravāda Buddhism has been largely with masters of Thai Forest traditions, together with Burmese Mindfulness and Insight masters. Her practice and teaching are profoundly influenced by the Early Buddhist suttas.

With her bhikkhunī mentor's direction and the injunction of several Theravāda bhikkhu teachers, early in the 21st century, Ayyā Tathālokā became active in supporting opportunities for others to enter the Theravāda Bhikkhunī Saṅgha. In 2005, Dhammadhāriṇī, the first monastic community for Theravāda bhikkhunīs in the Americas, was founded, and in 2008, Arañña Bodhi Hermitage on the Sonoma Coast. In 2009-2010, she was appointed bhikkhunī preceptor for the first all-Theravāda bhikkhunī ordinations in Australia and USA. In 2016-2017, Ayyā Tathālokā and her community went on to establish Dhammadhāriṇī Monastery in the Sonoma Mountain area of California, and celebrated the 2600th anniversary of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha with the motto "from Revival to Renaissance."

The Ideal Place

Bhikkhunī Tathālokā Mahātherī

According to Buddhist traditions, our best chance for enlightenment is not in a heavenly realm, but here in the midst of elements and aggregates: within these bodies that age and sicken, among the earth, rain, wind, fire, space, and consciousness elements. We wake up here, not in another ideal place. *This is the ideal place*.

Vulnerability is such an important part of the holy life. There is this unique interplay between vulnerability and true equanimity, safety, and security. As freedom from *dukkha* can only come from having the heart to fully see and know it, true fearlessness and security can only come from deeply seeing, knowing, and experiencing our vulnerability.

I very much relate to the passage in the Bible where Jesus tells his disciples that to follow him they must leave everything, including their money, and keep no more than the clothes on their backs. It sounds similar to what is asked of us in *pabbajjā*—going forth and becoming homeless to become a true bhikkhu or bhikkhunī, not just in name and form, not by rite or ritual, but in the utterly deep and complete recognition that we all come into this world in the same way.

We are vulnerable and at one another's mercy. These bodies and all structures of this world, no matter how pious-appearing, are no refuge—it is all vanity. Nothing is left but the core of the heart laid bare,

whether smoldering with fire or having gone through the burning. This is radical and touches deep in the heart and is fundamental to the spirit of early Buddhism. A saint (or saint-to-be) can any day turn up outside your door because he or she is called to be there.

Although the Buddha and the early monastics lived in a society where *piṇḍapāta* (almsround) was known and monastics were (sometimes) honored, there were ample days of receiving the throw-out slops aimed for the compost pile, little or unfavorable almsfood, or nothing. Our whole life is piṇḍapāta.

It can take a while to realize the depth of what it means that everything is piṇḍapāta—that most of everything we are receiving, including the mind we use to see, know, and meet our experiences is a product of our kamma. It is happening according to fixed laws of nature. Every bit of our experience is colored by the state of our mind. Our practice of *saṃvara*—training in the precepts and training of our six sense faculties—helps bring that into a focus that can be effectively worked with. Our practice of the *brahmavihāras* (divine abidings) makes the mind great enough to do so, and our practice of deep meditative absorption makes the mind fearless and strong and gives the context for the liberating depth of insight that can pass through everything.

Rather than hold untrue ideals, it is important to realize and allow in the truth of things as our primary refuge. This allows the mind to flow while remaining stable. Allow yourself time to pause, to just abide with what is there or not there—in the heart, the mind, the body, the space around, in everyone. We need not be moving directedly all the time.

Sometimes just abiding in awareness with what is, just as it is, is the best thing to be doing. Then when the move comes, and it always does, we move, but we need not push.

Please allow yourself to feel what you feel, and know and honor that with little judgment—in an unbound, unstilted way, allowing the feeling its own time and space, shifting like the coming and lifting of morning fog on the cliffs. It's sweet and beautiful, all just as it is.

We don't know what will happen now . . . do we? Be open to that. Allow the heart to move in good energy, sending *mettā, karuṇā, muditā,* and *upekkhā* (goodwill, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity). These things give great support energetically to us and everyone around us, but we should not try to make anything happen any particular way—our way is openness and freedom in the truth of things.

There is a growing and blossoming happening here in the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha. It is a wonderful time for those who like to be a part of such things. This time has its special uniqueness. There is so much joy in the discovery process of being a beginner; so much gladness in the compassion and understanding, and having what is good to share later on. It is all so worth it on this path.

Check what's going on. Is there Dhamma matching well with this circumstance? Consciously consider, recollect, and bring it up and you'll be switched to a different mode. When we remember such Dhamma, when we turn on our conscious awareness, things shift. They change, especially if we've developed this practice. It happens quickly, so you want to develop it beforehand, like speed dial. The analogy I learned was warrior training—good warriors should know how to use all their weapons and skills before they go into battle. Practice beforehand and have them ready. Then, having survived the battle, bring what was learned back to the training ground. In this way, the training is further refined.

Another image is of the Buddha's words being likened to wildflowers gathered together as a bouquet, bound by string. The amazing assortment of wildflowers is us; the string is the Vinaya. The bouquet is beautiful and rich because of its variety and represents the strengths and memorable qualities of all the great monastic disciples.

You are, in some sense, perfect just as you are. Unique *kilesas* (defilements) transformed by Dhamma become unique *pāramī*—qualities that pass through everything. What you will contribute to the Saṅgha, no one else can and the same is true of others around you. It is an incredible process of discovery.

Please let examples of those who inspire you—the qualities within them, their embodiment, and presence—move deeply into your heart. Let them be your spiritual parents. Let their example create you and take birth and life in you. Their qualities are most important, not the person. If you are inspired by these qualities, you have them latent in yourself. Allow these examples to nurture and guide you.

Compassion and understanding allow us to deeply appreciate the blessing and benefit of others while being true to our own way. This is right in the Saṅgha—like the field of various wildflowers bound by one cord that makes us all part of this enormous ancient and multifaceted intentional community.

I would like to widen and deepen the intention to include personal support for all those involved who are experiencing difficulty, including the monastics and many supportive lay friends. If that were us on the other side, what would we hope for? What would be helpful and deeply beneficial? We might not immediately have answers, but it is good and important kamma to incline our minds in this way.

Sometimes, in a search for answers to difficult questions, we find empty space more fruitful, which leads to exploring unfamiliar heart ground before the unknown beneficence we were hoping to find emerges. Sometimes this takes years of applying our mind, heart, and efforts so intently. It is well-spent time—worthy effort, not unworthy.

I encourage delving deeply in this, not just dipping in and out and then walking away, because we are not yet proficient or not yet able to quickly and easily draw out what we were looking for—patient perseverance applied to emptying, seeing, knowing, and the wish to wisely and compassionately respond.

There is sacrifice that is pure gift—no strings, no need for results to be any particular way, a pure *dāna* (offering). Then there are other types of sacrifice—the kinds in which attachment plays a big role. I have found it good to train myself, repeatedly, from the small things to the large, to do what I am doing freely as an offering, otherwise, it can become a trap, a cage with an unfriendly animal inside that bites.

It is important to sit with things—not to react quickly. Go to your *kuṭi* (hut) or into natural spaces and spend a few hours sitting. Let the process of reactions and responses go through their full spectrum of unfolding. What is left, glowing in the center after all the leaves have opened out, is excellent.

I believe in all of you. This process of pausing, centering, grounding, and then looking deeper can reveal great things. It also leads to a steadiness and if practiced regularly, a sense of deep, ongoing steadiness. This steadiness and clarity are the heart of the path, the antithesis of *dukkha*. Steady with release and consistent moment-by-moment mindfulness—clear, full awareness.

I am finding the patterns of nature to be conducive as metaphors for meaning in life and the unfolding of this path—both the blossoms

and fragrance of sweet springtime, now abundant, and the fires and frosts. Each with its season, its blessing, and its beauty. The fire tempering the blade, the frost giving rest and the time to go deep within, the springtime glory. The shadow providing cool shade, giving shape and definition illuminating the light.

Bhikkhunī Sudinnā Therī

A Sri Lankan by birth, **Ayyā Sudinnā** was ordained as a *sāmaṇerī* (female novice) in 1999 by Bhante Henepola Guṇaratana at the Bhāvanā Society in West Virginia. She received the higher ordination *(upasampadā)* in 2002 in Sri Lanka.

In lay life, Ayyā Sudinnā served as a teacher in government schools and as a lecturer in English at the Maharagama Teachers Training College, and later with the Higher Education Ministry in Sri Lanka. She has an honors degree in English and an MA in Buddhist philosophy, and is the author of three children's storybooks titled *Delightful Tales, Precious Tales I*, and *Precious Tales II*. In 2018 she translated Bhante Guṇaratana's book *Meditation on Perception* into Sinhala which was published in Sri Lanka by the Buddhist Publication Society.

Ayyā Sudinnā resides at the Carolina Buddhist Vihāra in Greenville, South Carolina.

The year of this publication, 2019, is Ven. Sudinnā Therī's twenty-year anniversary of going forth into monastic life (pabbajjā).

Death and Stream-Entry

Bhikkhunī Sudinnā Therī

If birds are trapped in a net,
only a few will ever escape.
In this world of illusion
only a few see their way to liberation.

Dhammapada 174

Friends, I would like to tell you about two things that are important to understand regarding this *gāthā* (verse). One is death and the other is stream-entry. The Buddha said that in this world most people are blindly running up and down on this side of the shore. He compares this *saṃsāra*, this round of birth-death-birth-death to a river. There are two banks: this bank and the bank on the other side. People in this world are running up and down on this side of the bank, but most do not try to cross over to the other side. The Buddha said this Dhamma is a raft. After you go across you don't need the raft anymore. When you have gone beyond saṃsāra, when you have attained arahantship, you don't even need the Dhamma, because you have done what had to be done in this world.

Let us look at this idea of death. Most people fear death. They don't want to think about it. How can we overcome this fear of death? We need not be afraid because it is something that we brought with us when we came into the world. We have gone through this cycle of birth and death innumerable times and have suffered. We have

suffered enough to be weary of life. But we are not weary. Why not? Because we don't remember. We don't remember even what happened yesterday, so how can we remember what happened in past lives?

When we think of rebirth, there are two benefits we can consider. One is that we have faced it many times and therefore, we need not be afraid. The second benefit, the more important one, is that is we will be motivated to find a way out of this cycle. It is not the length of time that we live that matters but the way we live. The quality of our life is what is most important.

Meditation on death can have many benefits. It is not necessary to be morose, frightened, worried, or depressed when you think of death. Instead, we can use our contemplation to enable us to live more wisely than we have lived before. We can be more compassionate and do things for others and in this way, we can compensate for any former selfishness.

Through meditating on death, we can learn to be more tolerant of other people's faults. We can be more patient, kind, and gentle. Through contemplating death, we become less attached to our material possessions because we don't know when we are going to leave them and go. All these worldly things are conditioned, and all conditioned things end when the conditions end. We become less attached and we learn to share our things with others and to enjoy the sharing.

Now when I say this, you might think we should not collect things, we should not be wealthy, but the Buddha never said that we shouldn't be wealthy or we shouldn't earn money. The Buddha said when we are young, we must work, get enough wealth for family, and share with others. But the earning should be righteous, and it should not harm you or others. How we collect wealth should be righteous

so we can share it with others joyfully. That is how we can have spiritual balance in life.

Another important word is *saṃvega*. Saṃvega is what can result when you contemplate death. When you think of death you can feel saṃvega, an energy, a sense of urgency that before we die we do whatever good we can. Having a sense of saṃvega is very, very good in life.

There is another way of looking at death. We experience death from moment to moment. Every moment we are dying: with the intake of the breath, we live, with the out-breath, we die. In, out, in, out—every moment we are living and dying again. If we cannot breathe in, that means death. Total death. But that is not the only way of explaining it. What about your consciousness? It changes so much. In one second there are many thoughts and ideas and in the next second they all go away. It's a case of being born and dying, birth and death in consciousness.

When you think of the body, you realize it is also dying. Every seven years the cells in our body are replaced, so we are a different person every seven years. We can see how often we have changed in a lifetime. To see this change, we have only to look at photos of ourselves as a small baby up to now. So you see, that is birth and death.

Let us look at another important topic: stream-entry. A stream-entrant *(sotāpanna)* is one who has cut off the first three fetters (of the ten). What are the three fetters? Identity view *(sakkāyadiṭṭhi)*, adherence to rules and observances *(sīlabbataparāmasa)*, and doubt *(vicikicchā)*. Those are the three things that a sotāpanna destroys. A sotāpanna will never be reborn in a lower realm. Now isn't that a great thing? "Lower realm" means one of the four *apāyas* according to the Buddha's psychology. One is the hell realm, one is the animal

world, which we can see, another is the *peta* world, the realm of hungry ghosts, and another is the *asura* or the world of demons. A sotāpanna will never be born in these lower worlds. The most important thing is that a sotāpanna is headed for enlightenment.

There are many positive qualities that a sotāpanna has. Unwavering confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha is one. Now we might wonder, "Was the Buddha actually enlightened? Is this Dhamma actually true? Were the arahants at that time really enlightened?" This sort of thinking is a kind of doubting, but once a person becomes a sotāpanna, that person will never have doubts—all doubts will be gone. The five precepts you normally take as laypeople—a sotāpanna will not fall into these five areas of possible misconduct. A sotāpanna will have the four foundations of mindfulness. Such a person will look for *kalyāṇamitta*, people who are more developed or at least equal to them. They will possess the eight factors of the Noble Eightfold Path and will know what's fit for attention and what's not fit for attention, what should be cultivated and what should not be cultivated. Such a person will not get what is unwished for, what is undesired, what is disagreeable—these things will diminish. Such a person will get what is wished for, what is desired, and what is agreeable will increase. We should all try to attain sotāpanna in this life—that should be our aim. It would be good if we became arahants, but to become a sotāpanna is something very great and something we should all aim for.

Bhikkhunī Sudhammā Therī

Ayyā Sudhammā was born in Charlotte, North Carolina, in 1963 and educated at the University of North Carolina and New York University School of Law. She was married and enjoyed a brief career as an attorney in San Francisco, but then encountered the teachings of the Buddha while suffering personal losses that forcefully drove home the truth of the Buddha's teachings on impermanence and suffering.

After years of longing to go forth, she found her opportunity at the Bhāvanā Society in 1999, where she trained for several years with Bhante Guṇaratana. In 2003, Ayyā Sudhammā obtained higher ordination as a bhikkhunī in Sri Lanka. For eight years, she was the resident bhikkhunī at the Carolina Buddhist Vihāra in Greenville, South Carolina. In 2013 she founded the Charlotte Buddhist Vihāra in her hometown of Charlotte, North Carolina, where she continues to dwell and teach.

The year of publication of this bhikkhunī anthology finds Ven. Sudhammā Therī celebrating the 20-year anniversary of her pabbajjā—her "going forth" into the saffron robes as a sāmaṇerī.

Some Last Advice

Bhikkhunī Sudhammā Therī

In a chapter of the *Long Discourses* titled "The Buddha's Last Days" (Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta),[1] we find a fascinating narrative of the Buddha's last actions and conversations. This chapter provides us with colorful stories and a deeply moving account of the human drama surrounding the loss—to impermanence—of our precious teacher. Here, too, we find the Buddha's last advice, essential Dhamma teachings, and a few of his best-loved quotes.

Some of this material may be familiar without one knowing where it can be found among the many books of scripture. Writing in May during Vesak season, traditionally a time to recall the primary events of the Buddha's life, as an act of devotion I'd like to point out many jewels included in this narrative of his passing away. I can only introduce them in brief, not delve into them all, so this is an enhanced list to steer you toward these jewels.

Within this long chapter of "The Buddha's Last Days," we find the following:

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1. "The Buddha's Last Days" (Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta), *Dīgha Nikāya* 16 (*Long Discourses of the Buddha*, available online at *Sutta Central* (suttacentral.net/en/dn16) and at *Access to Insight* (https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.16.1-6.vaji.html).

Practical Advice

- Lists of instructions for how the Saṅgha may behave to ensure their growth and not decline, totaling forty-one points of advice (including the Buddha's advice to neither make up new rules for the Saṅgha nor remove the rules that he had set down);
- A technique of inquiry that the Buddha called "the Mirror of the True Nature of Dhamma" to determine whether one has reached the first stage of enlightenment (by assessing one's own virtue and level of faith in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha);
- The "Four Great References," an instruction on how to discern whether teachings ascribed to the Buddha are valid or sham accounts;
- The Buddha's encouragement for future disciples to undertake pilgrimages to the four holy sites of his life and his reasoning for why we should have monuments *(stupas)* to honor the relics of great people; and
- The Buddha's highly controversial statement that after his passing the Saṅgha may choose whether to abolish rules that are "minor."

Some Engaging Stories from his Last Days

- The Buddha giving a bit of advice that would lead to the overthrow of a strong kingdom;
- A group of princes trying to wrest from a wealthy courtesan the honor of giving a special meal to the aged Buddha;
- Ānanda failing to act when he could have asked the Buddha to live longer, followed by Māra's successful dirty work of inviting the Buddha to pass away and then Ānanda's terrible shock on learning the awful news;
- The Buddha visiting the construction site of a future great city, with a miraculous instant crossing of a nearby river;
- The devout layman Cunda the blacksmith giving—to the reader's horror—the toxic dish that would end the Buddha's life, and the

Buddha's thoughtful message, after becoming deathly ill, sent to comfort Cunda;
- The conversion and going-forth of one last monk as the Buddha approached his end;
- The heart-rending and hair-raising death scene of the Buddha, during which some witnesses showed heightened equanimity but others fell to the ground in an agony of grief;
- A monk rudely declaring gladness at the Buddha's demise, eager to be rid of the Buddha's rules, which alerted the elders to the need to codify the Dhamma and Vinaya lest the teachings be lost (culminating in the First Council); and
- The unfolding of events having to do with the Buddha's dead body, including not only lofty actions of homage by deities and humans offering celestial and human music, dancing, and flowers, and miracles wrought, but also a near-brawl by worldly people over who would get to keep the cremated remains!

Famous Quotes From His Last Days[2]

This first quote foreshadowed the Buddha's imminent determination to pass away:

- Now I am old

I, Ānanda, at present, am old, elderly, of great age, far gone, advanced in years, I am eighty years old. It is like, Ānanda, an old cart, which only keeps going when shored up with bamboo, just so, Ānanda, I think the Realized One's body only keeps going when shored up with bamboo.

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2. All block quotations translated by Ven. Anandajoti, DN 16, public domain material under Creative Commons Zero, accessed from Sutta Central website https://suttacentral.net/en/dn16 on 8/15/2017.

He added that only in deep meditation did his body feel comfortable. He continued with these next memorable words:

- Your Only Refuge

Therefore, Ānanda, live with yourself as an island [elsewhere translated as "be a lamp unto yourselves"],[3] *yourself as a refuge, with no other refuge, with the Teaching as an island [lamp], the Teaching as a refuge, with no other refuge. And how, Ānanda, does a monk live with himself as an island, himself as a refuge, with no other refuge, with the Teaching as an island, the Teaching as a refuge, with no other refuge?*

Here, Ānanda, a monk dwells contemplating the nature of the body in the body [feelings in feelings . . . mind in the mind . . . things (dhammā) in various things], ardent, fully aware, and mindful, after removing avarice and sorrow regarding the world . . .

For whomever, Ānanda, whether at present or after my passing [does so] . . . those monks of mine, Ānanda, will go from darkness to the highest—whoever likes the training. [4]

- The Buddha's Intention All Along

Soon after deciding to let go of his life process, the Buddha made an amazing egalitarian statement of what his intention had been all along. He informed Ānanda that upon gaining enlightenment he had refused Māra's request to quickly pass away, stating:

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3. The word "dīpa" may mean "island" (based on Sanskrit *dvīpa*) or "lamp" (Sanskrit *dīpa*). Maurice Walsh, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha* (Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 1995), n. 395.
4. Anandajoti, first chapter, subheading 16: "The Gracious One's Sickness."

I said this to the Wicked Māra: "I will not attain Final Emancipation, Wicked One, for as long as my monks . . . nuns . . . laymen . . . laywomen are not true disciples, accomplished, disciplined, confident, learned, bearers of the Teaching, practicing in conformity with the Teaching, correct in their practice, living in conformity with the Teaching, and having learned it from their own teacher, will declare, reveal, make known, set forth, open up, analyze, make plain—after giving a good rebuke with reason to the doctrines of others that have arisen—and teach the miraculous Teaching . . .

"I will not attain Final Emancipation, Wicked One, for as long as this spiritual life of mine has not become successful and prosperous, well spread-out, possessed by many, become great, until it is well-explained amongst Divinities and men."[5]

The Buddha explained to Ānanda that these aspirations having come to fruition, he became ready to renounce the life process. In recent years we bhikkhunīs often use this quote to show that the Buddha had always intended to fully ordain women (though the English translation of "nuns" for "bhikkhunīs" doesn't help).

- Your Teacher Once I Am Gone

  Just before his passing, the Buddha gave this important guidance for us all:

  It may be, Ānanda, that some of you may think in this way: 'Past is the Teacher's word, there is now no Teacher for us.' But it should not be seen like that, Ānanda, whatever Teaching and Discipline

5. Ibid.

[Dhamma and Vinaya] has been taught by me or laid down, Ānanda, that is your Teacher after my passing away.[6]

- His Last Words

  Often quoted, yet we may still get goosebumps:

  Then [he] addressed the monks, saying: "Come now, monks, for I tell you all conditioned things are subject to decay, strive on with heedfulness!" These were the last words of the Realized One.[7]

Two Significant Dhamma Teachings

In the chapter on "The Buddha's Last Days" we also find two powerful sermons,[8] one a solid approach to teaching Dhamma that the Buddha highlighted through sheer repetition in his last few months, and the other a key summary of what we, as disciples of the Buddha, should know and practice:

- A Comprehensive Discourse

  As the Buddha made his last visit to various communities he spoke frequently to the monks, thus:

  Such is virtue, such is concentration, such is wisdom, when virtue is well-developed it yields great fruit and brings great advantages in regard to concentration, when concentration is well-developed

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6. Anandajoti, sixth chapter, subheading 40: "The Last Instructions of the Realized One."
7. Ibid.
8. Additional Dhamma teachings recorded in this end-of-life narrative: a teaching on the Four Noble Truths; a teaching on virtue; an explanation to his last new monk on how to view his teachings in comparison to non-Buddhist teachings; and two short versions of satipaṭṭhāna mindfulness.

it yields great fruit and brings great advantages in regard to wisdom, when wisdom is well-developed the mind is completely liberated from the pollutants, that is to say: the pollutant of sensuality, the pollutant of craving for continued existence, the pollutant of ignorance.[9]

During his final visits to at least seven locations, the Buddha taught along these lines, repeatedly choosing as the topic of his final message to each audience the interconnections of morality, concentration, and wisdom.

Those of us who teach Dhamma may well ask ourselves whether we and all of our students have yet gained a comprehensive grasp of the Buddha's fundamental message on morality, concentration, and wisdom. If not, perhaps we should drop some less essential topics, such as popular feel-good teachings and modern theories, to return to these—repeatedly—until we all have a good, firm grasp of what the Buddha deemed important enough to be his last sermon to many disciples.

- Wings to Awakening

To publicly announce his determination to pass away into *parinibbāna* in three months' time, the Buddha assembled all the monks in the vicinity of Vesāli. First, he instructed these monks that for the welfare and benefit of everyone, they should thoroughly learn and practice the following seven sets of teachings:

1. The four ways of attending to mindfulness *(satipaṭṭhāna)*
2. The four right strivings *(padhāna)*
3. The four paths to power *(iddhipāda)*

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9. Ven. Anandajoti's translation, first, second and fourth chapters, subheadings 8–10, 13–15, 27 and 28.

4. The five faculties *(indriya)*
5. The five strengths *(bala)*
6. The seven factors of awakening *(bhojjhaṅga)*
7. The Noble Eightfold Path *(magga)*

He said,

These, monks, are those Teachings that have, with deep knowledge, been taught by me[;] after grasping them well, you should practice, develop, and make a lot of them, so that the Spiritual Life may last long, and may endure for a long time, and that will be for the benefit of many people, for the happiness of many people, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, benefit, and happiness of Divinities and men.[10]

He then made the startling announcement that in three months he would pass away into final emancipation (parinibbāna).

The contents of these seven sets add up to thirty-seven factors that lead toward enlightenment; hence, the list is called the "thirty-seven factors of enlightenment" *(bodhipakkhiyā dhammā)*, also known as the "wings to awakening." Over the years, the Buddha had taught these factors many times, sometimes giving the full list, sometimes explaining each set of factors, and many more times focusing on various individual factors.[11] The pairing of the thirty-seven factors of

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[10.] Ven. Anandajoti's translation, third chapter, subheading 26: "The Thirty-Seven Things on the Side of Awakening."

[11.] Seven sets given as a list: DN 16:3; DN 29:17; SN 22:101(9); AN 7:71 (AN iv 126); AN 8:19.7 (AN iv 203); Vism XXII p. 678. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, trans., *Path of Purification* (Seattle: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991), Ch. XXII, 33. Seven sets' factors explained: MN 77; Vism p. 678–681 (Path Ch. XXII, 33–43).

For a thorough exploration of these seven sets and the interrelationships between their factors, see Ven. Thānissaro Bhikkhu's brilliant *The Wings to Awakening: An Anthology from the Pāli Canon*, published by the Dhamma Dana Publication Fund and freely available on Access to Insight and other sites online.

enlightenment with the announcement of his impending parinibbāna indicates its *key place* among his teachings.

Today in the West, having discovered the effectiveness and beauty of one portion of the Dhamma, such as a type of meditation, some people take hold of that one thing and study and practice only that, to the exclusion of the Buddha's many other presentations of Dhamma. Thus, they fail to enlarge their understanding. I've heard some say of a particular teaching, "This is the only way!" although the teaching to which they adhere comprises only one amongst the Buddha's list of thirty-seven key factors. Some Buddhist communities even discourage their students from studying Dhamma directly from the texts lest they get "confused" by the Buddha's sermons that don't line up with the claims of their lineage. The danger of such a narrow approach should be obvious. We live now in a privileged time in which the early Dhamma teachings are now more widely available than ever, so let us take full advantage of the opportunity to learn the whole range of the Buddha's core teachings.[12]

Let us begin right now by reviewing the seven lists totaling thirty-seven factors of enlightenment. We see some overlaps among the

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12. The availability of the Buddha's early sermons increased in leaps and bounds, starting in the late 1800s when what for millennia had been limited to certain Buddhist enclaves gained a growing international audience through Pāli Text Society publications in Pāli and English. More recently, during the past few decades, new translations sold by Wisdom Publications—and then free publication on the internet of texts in Pāli, soon followed by their translations in English (primarily through John Bullock's Access to Insight)—each brought a whole new level of world access to the Pāli Canon.

The next expanded level of access began in 2013 with an online service called Sutta Central, founded by Bhante Sujāto; it presents the entire Pāli Canon in multiple translations, along with matching portions of other versions of the ancient Indian Canon preserved in various Buddhist schools. Now we can begin to compare early accounts of the Buddha's words across ancient translations and traditions, in some cases even matching paragraph by paragraph for comparison, which promises to greatly widen our understanding of the Buddha's teachings, particularly with the aid of newly emerging text-critical studies of the Canon.

factors on each list; this should not be surprising, for knowing well any one list should give enough direction to seek enlightenment. The Buddha nonetheless gave these multiple approaches for a good reason: to enable people of different proclivities to be able to learn.[13]

The thirty-seven factors listed in their seven sets:

Four foundations *(satipaṭṭhāna)*
(1) mindfulness of body
(2) mindfulness of feelings
(3) mindfulness of mind/*citta*
(4) mindfulness of mental qualities/*dhammā*

Four right efforts *(padhāna)*
Efforts to:
(5) prevent unarisen unwholesome mental states
(6) overcome arisen unwholesome mental states
(7) develop unarisen wholesome mental states
(8) sustain and further develop these wholesome states

Four roads to power *(iddhipāda)*
Effort of will and concentration of:
(9) intention/*chanda*
(10) energy/*viriya*
(11) consciousness/*citta*
(12) investigation/*vimaṃsa*

Five faculties *(indriya)*
(13) faith/*saddhā*
(14) energy/*viriya*
(15) mindfulness/*sati*

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13. Ven. Thānissaro Bhikkhu, *The Wings to Awakening: An Anthology from the Pāli Canon* (Massachusetts: Dhamma Dana Publication Fund 1991), 18–19.

(16) concentration/*samādhi*
(17) wisdom/*paññā*

Five strengths *(bala)*
Same list as the above faculties (faith, energy, etc.) but on a higher level
(18–22)

Seven factors of enlightenment *(bhojjhaṅga)*
(23) mindfulness/*sati*
(24) investigation/*dhamma-vicaya*
(25) energy/*viriya*
(26) joy/*pīti*
(27) tranquility/*passadhi*
(28) concentration/*samādhi*
(29) equanimity/*upekkhā*

Eightfold Path *(magga)*
Right or skillful:
(30) understanding
(31) intention
(32) speech
(33) action
(34) livelihood
(35) effort
(36) mindfulness
(37) concentration

You may ask yourself: *Can I recite them all? Do I know how to make each factor effective in my life?*[14]

[14.] For details on how to practice each of the factors, see "The Greater Discourse to Sakuludāyin" MN 77, in *Majjhima Nikāya (Middle Length Discourses)*. For more on the Eightfold Path, I recommend Ven. Henepola Guṇaratana's *Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness* (Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 2001).

If yes, then *have I made efforts yet to bring them to fulfillment?* While several factors appear in more than one of the seven sets, the only factor mentioned in nearly all of them is energetic effort; we cannot afford to be lazy!

"For the welfare of many" the Buddha instructed ordained disciples to learn, practice, and master these key teachings, so let's ask ourselves further: *Am I able yet to pass along these seven sets of teachings as needed for the upliftment and progress of my students?* All phenomena being impermanent, including even our unprecedented modern access to the teachings, let us do so without delay.

I hope that my sharing of these jewels from the account of the last days of the Buddha has kindled your interest. If any of these jewels specially sparkle for you, look them up to read more; the record of the Buddha's last days is freely available online.

Bhikkhunī Guṇasārī Therī

Ayyā Guṇasārī was born in Myanmar in 1932. She trained to become a physician and then immigrated to the United States in 1961 to work in medicine with her husband. After raising five children, she started practicing meditation in the 1970s under the tutorship of the late Taungpulu Sayadaw, the late Sayadaw U Sīlānanda and the late Sayadaw U Paṇḍita. For nearly thirty years, through many retreats with these teachers, she has developed the practice of the four foundations of mindfulness and vipassanā meditation as taught by them.

In 2002, by then a grandmother at seventy, she entered into monastic life as a sāmaṇerī at Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihāra in Los Angeles and was ordained by Venerable Bhante Paññaloka Mahāthera and Venerable Bhante Dr. Walpola Piyananda, Chief Saṅgha Nāyaka Thero of the Sri Lankan Saṅgha in North America.

In 2003, Venerable Guṇasārī and Venerable Saccavādī became the first two Burmese women in modern times to receive full ordination as bhikkhunīs in Sri Lanka in accordance with the Theravāda tradition, via dual ordination by Venerable Dhammaloka Nāyaka Thero of the Amarapura sect in Sri Lanka.

In 2008, Ayyā Guṇasārī was invited to become abbess of Mahāpajāpatī Women's Monastery in California, where she resides.

Determined to Do It

Bhikkhunī Guṇasārī Therī

My Background

I was born in Burma in 1932 during the Great Depression. My family was very kind to me because I was the firstborn. I got my early education, but it was interrupted by the war with Japan. My parents were worried about the bombing in Rangoon, so we moved to a faraway village where my uncle was a monk. My grandfather was so generous that he would feed fifty families during this time of scarcity, and so we had little food for ourselves.

When the war ended around 1945, I was able to continue my education. Because of the years I missed school, I had a double promotion three times so I could be with the other students my age. I was good at math and able to catch up, but I was poor at history and other subjects. At the time of matriculation, I took mathematics and physics. I decided to become a doctor because my grandfather was an Ayurvedic physician and my uncles were all doctors. My mother and aunts did not agree because they thought it was not a suitable profession for a woman. They thought I would have to behave in an unladylike fashion. I became a doctor nonetheless.

At medical school I met my future husband and eventually got married. I had two children while I was in my final years in medical school in Burma. My husband wanted to move to the

United States. I stayed back with my two children for the first year, but then followed my husband to the United States. At that time, I could not bring my two young children, who were one and two years old, with me. It was a very upsetting situation for me, but my mother thought it would interfere with my studies if I brought them. After four or five years, we tried to bring the children over, but the Burmese government would not allow it. They feared brain drain and thought Burmese professionals should return to their own country. Each time we applied to bring the children over, we were refused.

Finally, after my father passed away, my daughters, aged fourteen and fifteen, came to the United States. I thought that since at last the family was together it would be perfect, but it didn't turn out that way. My older daughter was bitter about being left behind for all those years. She couldn't understand why I left her at such a young age, even though I explained it to her. It was a difficult time for us. This is when I began to question, "What is life? What use is money? What is happiness?" We had five children whom we loved, but life became chaotic. Every day I was crying when I went to work. It was because of this unhappiness with my daughter's situation that I had doubts about what leads to happiness and stability in life.

This eventually led me to meditation. A few years later, Mahāsi Sayadaw came to the desert in California. It was his first visit to the United States and I didn't even know who he was. A friend told me he was coming, so I traveled to the desert with my children. That's when I got my first taste of the desert—thorns and all. When I was introduced to Mahāsi Sayadaw, he just looked at me very seriously and didn't say a word. I was scared. Later I would meet him, along with Sayadaw U Sīlānanda. When I heard Mahāsi Sayadaw talk about *satipaṭṭhāna* practice, that's when I decided to meditate.

After Mahāsi Sayadaw left, I started meditating with Sayadaw U Sīlānanda, who stayed in California. For the first few years, I was not so good with meditation. During the walking time, I liked to sleep—I was a bit lazy.

When I was young, I knew there were *thilashins*, eight- and ten-precept nuns. As much as they were quiet and meditative and doing what they needed to do, they didn't get the respect they deserved. If a woman wanted to become a thilashin, people thought it was because she had no financial support, or because she was old, or because her husband had died—that sort of thing. Young girls rarely became thilashins unless they were orphans or from financially deprived families. I only remember one thilashin in our clan, a distant relative whom we supported. At that time, thilashins weren't highly regarded, so becoming a thilashin never occurred to me. So even though I wanted to be a serious practitioner after meeting Sayadaw U Sīlānanda, becoming a thilashin was never in my mind.

By 1989, I was very serious about meditation, going on longer retreats totaling three months each year. I would make time for my meditation even while I was still working. I read Bhikkhu Bodhi's work on the Samaññaphala Sutta and the Brahmajāla Sutta. My mind changed totally. I was sure there had to be something besides thilashins. I knew that during the Buddha's time there were bhikkhunīs, but I had never heard of bhikkhunīs while I was in Burma. I was determined that I would ordain somehow, although I didn't know how.

One day I went to the Bodhi Tree Bookstore in Los Angeles and saw Venerable Karma Lekshe Tsomo's book on bhikkhunīs. On the cover was Guruma Dhammawati Mahātherī from Nepal. I recognized Daw Dhammawati because she was well-known and loved by the Burmese people. She ran away from Nepal at age

fourteen, following an old monk into Burma. At first, she didn't know Burmese, but she learned when she became a nun and eventually earned her Dhammacariyā degree. When I saw that picture, my mind was shaken up. Although she was still wearing the thilashin robes, Daw Dhammawati had become a bhikkhunī. I also saw in that book there was a bhikkhunī association started by Venerable Karma Lekshe Tsomo, Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, and Ayyā Khemā. That made me determined to find out more.

For the next thirteen years, I plunged into my research. Without knowing how to operate a computer, it was hard on me, but I bought the books and read all the articles I could find. The reason it took thirteen years was my husband became sick and couldn't work, so I had to work to put the last three of our children through college.

While working and meditating, I researched this topic. I recalled speaking with Sayadaw U Sīlānanda about what I had discovered. He told me the lineage of bhikkhunīs had been cut off and the Burmese monks believed that it couldn't be reconnected. I said I would continue to do the research nonetheless. That's when I saw stories of Ashin Ādiccavaṁsa and of Mingun Jetavan Sayadaw. Jetavan Sayadaw was the teacher of Mahāsi Sayadaw, but after he wrote *Milindapañhā Aṭṭhakathā*, he was criticized by the monks for wanting to help the bhikkhunīs. In 1934, Ashin Ādiccavaṁsa's disciple, U Thittila, became the first Burmese monk to come to America and England. Even though Ashin Ādiccavaṁsa was famous, he was forced to disrobe because of what he wrote about bhikkhunīs.

I showed my research to Sayadaw U Sīlānanda. He said he knew about these older sayadaws who supported the bhikkhunīs, but even so he couldn't help me or he would suffer the same fate as them. He said that it was not the right time to go ahead on

this matter. He did not say I should ordain or that I shouldn't ordain; rather, he left the decision up to me. He only asked me one question: "What would you do if you didn't have someone to give you these precepts?" I answered that I would do as the lay disciples and go in front of the Buddha statue and take the precepts myself. Knowing he could not help me anymore (he had suffered a minor stroke), he picked up the phone and called Bhante Piyananda, asking him to help me to become a sāmaṇerī. In this way, he helped me while remaining in the background.

After I decided to go ahead with the sāmaṇerī ordination, many monks who knew me came to try and dissuade me from doing so. They told me I would starve, there wasn't enough support, and there would be no place for me to stay. They felt it was not even possible to be a thilashin in the West, let alone a bhikkhunī. Instead, they recommended that I wear the white clothes and determine for myself how I would live and practice. I decided to ordain nonetheless, even if I would starve. I was really determined that just like in the Buddha's time, women should have the opportunity to live as bhikkhunīs.

Finally, the monks left me alone. In 2002, before I ordained as a sāmaṇerī, I was still practicing at the Tathāgatha Meditation Center in San Jose when Sayadaw U Sīlānanda suggested I spend four or five months in Burma continuously. I had known Sayadaw U Paṇḍita since 1984, when he started teaching in the United States, so I applied to stay at his place in Yangon. It went smoothly at first because I was a layperson. Then I became a sāmaṇerī with Bhante Piyananda. I had to write back to Sayadaw U Paṇḍita and let him know about the change. He did not tell me not to come, so I went there in my rust-colored robes. Only after I got there and met with Sayadaw in person did he say, "Oh, the monks will be shocked. Please, for my sake, will you listen to me?" He requested that I take off the robes I was wearing and replace them

with the robes of a thilashin. I was heartbroken, very upset, but I had no choice. I had applied to be part of this retreat for two and a half months. I have never been back to Burma since.

The mind was changed after becoming a sāmaṇerī. Ever since the day my head was shaved, I have thought, *This is it. I will take no other position in life. This is what I want to do.* With each stroke as the hair went down, I felt a coolness in my heart. I knew I was in the right place. Even more than when I became a bhikkhunī, becoming a sāmaṇerī was very striking for me. I was really happy as a sāmaṇerī and was so eager to learn about monastic life, but my preceptor, Bhante T. Dhammaloka, head of the Amarapura sect in Sri Lanka, along with Bhante Piyananda, decided that due to my long-time experience as a meditator, I should take my bhikkhunī ordination before two years elapsed. So on February 28, 2003, I became a bhikkhunī in Sri Lanka.

My Time as a Bhikkhunī

My first year as a bhikkhunī in Sri Lanka, I spent learning Pāli at Kelaniya postgraduate studies and with Dr. Lily de Silva at her home. In 2004, I planned to go to Birmingham, UK, to study Abhidhamma under Sayadaw Rewata Dhamma. Unfortunately, right after I bought the ticket, the Sayadaw passed away. Since I was already prepared to go, I went to Birmingham, but I wasn't allowed to stay or study there because I was a bhikkhunī. The board members at his organization decided it was improper to accept a bhikkhunī at the monastery.

As I was stranded in the UK with no place to go, a friend, Dr. Leo Kyawthinn, searched for a monastery where I could spend the Rains Retreat. Luckily, I was allowed to stay at Ajahn Khemadhammo's forest monastery in Warwick, and my time there went well.

During the period of 2004 to 2007, some kind Burmese sayadaws quietly taught me Pāli and Vinaya and my friend Ayyā Uttamā and I attended the University of the West to study Pāli under the late Dr. Ananda Guruge. Despite this helpful instruction, those years were unstable and hectic. Without a permanent monastery to live in, I moved frequently. I moved from Riverside to Monterey Park, and then to Joshua Tree. Finally, I settled at Mahāpajāpatī Monastery in 2008 after it was established by Therese Duchesne, and I have been the abbess there since October 2008.

Even with a stable location, my life was not stable. Setting up a new monastery is challenging. I looked for suitable bhikkhunīs to come live and work with me, but as there were few bhikkhunīs in the United States, they were hard to find. So besides looking for women who were already ordained, I tried to support others in their wish to train in monastic life at Mahāpajāpatī Monastery. However, as is to be expected when people are exploring a whole new way of life, *anāgārikās* came and went. In addition, those who became sāmaṇerī did not always stay either. One bhikkhunī whom I ordained and who lived at the monastery with me for several years died suddenly of cancer. The Buddha admonished monastics to live together "like milk and water," which blend seamlessly when mixed. This is not always easy. However, I now have another bhikkhunī, two sāmaṇerī, and an anāgārikā at the monastery, and we are developing our community. As it is the eighth year of growing Buddha's daughters at Mahāpajāpatī Monastery, hopefully these precious seeds will sprout and mature soon, through effort, courage, confidence, and loving-kindness.

Besides working to develop the community at Mahāpajāpatī Monastery, beginning in 2008 I started to support the ordination of other bhikkhunīs. I arranged for one bhikkhunī ordination to take place in South Carolina in 2008. Then in 2010, I helped arrange for the ordination of five bhikkhunīs and was one of the chanting

bhikkhunīs who questioned and supported the candidates during the ceremony. In 2012, I did the same thing for four bhikkhunīs. Finally, in 2016, as I had the twelve vassas required to act as a preceptor, I was the preceptor for two bhikkhunīs who were ordained at Bhante Piyananda's temple, Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihāra. It has been my greatest joy to help other women become bhikkhunīs—something that I myself struggled so hard to do.

My Relationship with the Bhikkhus Outside of Burma

I knew many bhikkhus in the Los Angeles area for thirty years before I ordained. As a layperson, we were like brothers and sisters. But when I ordained, it became very awkward. As much as they liked me, they didn't know how to behave or communicate with me now that I was a bhikkhunī. There were four or five bhikkhus who tried to teach me Pāli and the rules of monastic conduct. All I had known before was meditation, so I appreciated that. As they pointed out, experience in monastic life is quite different than experience as a lone meditator.

I loved studying Pāli. On the whole, the monks were very kind to me, but it took many years for them to be relaxed with having me around. Now I can go to Paṭṭhāna chanting with no problem. It took many years to be accepted, as it did with Sayadaw U Paṇḍita. It took nine years for him to even recognize me as a bhikkhunī.

The History of Bhikkhunīs

I am interested in the history of bhikkhunīs, particularly the latest records of bhikkhunīs in various countries. There are many records of bhikkhunīs on the Indian subcontinent and in "greater India" up to the fifteenth century. In Burma, it was originally thought that bhikkhunīs disappeared in the thirteenth century, but recent research by Peter Skilling shows there were

bhikkhunīs into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. I feel it is very important to trace the archaeological findings, such as the inscriptions at Pagan discovered by Professor Than Tun and Dr. Luce to understand the historical presence and movement of the bhikkhunīs.

Venerable Bhikkhu Anālayo asked me to translate three booklets of his on the legality of bhikkhunī ordination into Burmese. Thus, in addition to doing my own research, I completed the last of those translations in early 2016. It was a great gift to be able to contribute to the understanding of these issues.

Advice for Women Who Are Considering Taking Ordination

First, they must be honest with themselves. If it is an attempt to escape difficulties in relationships—husband, boyfriend, parents—it will not work. They must have a genuine interest in Buddhism. That's why when women come to me, I try to help them gain a general knowledge of the teachings. There are many things we do not know, but we should be willing to learn. It's so important to know at a deep level if this is really what they want to do. If they just get into the glory of the robe and like it when people bow down to them, that is not coming from the right place.

At first, my idea was to become a recluse because I had become so disenchanted with life, but being a bhikkhunī is not only about meditating. When we become part of the Saṅgha, it differs from being a solitary yogi. For example, as bhikkhunīs, we must communicate and reciprocate *saṅghakamma* with our brother bhikkhus and our sister bhikkhunīs at other monasteries. Accordingly, we attend Kaṭhina, Vesak ceremonies, Paṭṭhāna, and Paritta chanting ceremonies, and Buddhist monastic gatherings and some Buddhist social programs, such as Bhikkhu Bodhi's Buddhist Global Relief. To fulfill our duties toward laypeople,

we attend funeral services, visit sick patients at hospitals, and provide inspirational Dhamma talks and chanting. I do not want aspirants to have the same misconceptions as I did. I encourage them to visit many monasteries and learn from their experiences. Every place has its strong and weak points.

An aspirant must ask herself why she wants to become a bhikkhunī. She should search inside herself to understand her motivations. I have seen monastics who have dedicated themselves to one monastery and then when something happens that causes them to feel they can't stay there, they have nowhere to go. By making a commitment too soon, they may find out that it isn't what they wanted and then be left without support. This is why I try to make sure my aspirants take their time to consider carefully before they commit. We must be realistic about things. Nowadays there are many good lay teachers. Many people are suited for lay life whereas others are suited for monastic life. We must know for ourselves what we are best suited for. This is why it is important to take sufficient time to try things out, first as an anāgārikā, then as a sāmaṇerī. It is better to take the time to find out during the earlier stages than to feel stuck in something later.

In the beginning stages, it is important to stay in one place because that is where the groundwork is developed. Community life is difficult; it requires a lot of patience. I have found meditation and seclusion much easier. It was my first choice, but somehow I found myself going down this road instead. My suggestion to younger people is to see whether they can fit into community life by practicing with patience.

Coming into monastic life as an older person is not easy either. The energy is low and many habits are hard to change. I wish I had started when I was younger. But it was my kamma to finish what I needed to do in my family life. Looking back, I could see

that lay life was not for me. Although I like freedom and solitude, I also like the restraints of being part of a community. It inspires me when we all get along as a saṅgha, show concern for each other, and go through challenges together. Also, I enjoy giving to others in the Saṅgha, including those outside my immediate community. Although we may have personality differences, we belong to each other. We are sisters; we are one. The whole thing is Saṅgha. It is not complete on our own.

Adapted from an interview with Ayyā Guṇasārī conducted by Ayyā Dhammadhīrā in May 2014.

Bhikkhunī Satimā Therī

Ayyā Satimā was born and raised in Sri Lanka and immigrated to the United States in 1973 as a Montessori teacher. After deciding to lead a spiritual life, she was ordained as a nun in the Zen tradition in May 2000. She returned to Sri Lanka in 2004 to enter monastic life as a novice in the Theravāda tradition. Two years later, she received full ordination (upasampadā) as a bhikkhunī at the Golden Temple in Dambulla, Sri Lanka.

After training for seven years as a bhikkhunī at the Minnesota Buddhist Vihāra, she moved to Evergreen, Colorado. At the Evergreen Metta Vihāra Hall she serves a very small community and leads a solitary life listening to Dhamma talks and meditating most of the day.

Reflection on Repulsiveness

Bhikkhunī Satimā Therī

Puna ca paraṃ, bhikkhave, bhikkhu imameva kāyaṃ uddhaṃ pādatalā adho kesamatthakā tacapariyantaṃ pūraṃ nānappakārassa asucino paccavekkhati.

O monks! . . . [A] monk reflects upon the body, from the soles of their feet up, from their crown of his head down, enclosed in skin, as being full of a variety of impurities.

The Buddha
Dīgha Nikāya 22[1]

One of my daily meditation subjects is from the *patikkūla manasikāra* (reflections on repulsiveness), specifically, the reflection commonly called "the thirty-two parts of the body." I did this meditation for many years without actually seeing the inner parts of a real human body.

In 2014, when visiting Sri Lanka, I was fortunate to see the inside of a dead body. I went to the hospital morgue in Galle to witness an autopsy. I was given permission because I was a monastic coming to view a body purely to help my meditation practice.

[1.] Pali text from Mahāsaṅgīti Tipiṭaka Buddhavasse 2500, *Dīgha Nikāya* 22: Mahāsatipaṭṭhānasutta, 1.4 Kāyānupassanāpaṭikūlamanasikārapabba. English adapted from translation by Ñāṇaponika Thera.

For most worldly people, a dead body brings fear. It is repulsive, disgusting, and fearsome, and they want nothing to do with it. Death happens to each and every one, so it could be me or anyone close to me; this is what life is all about! Thinking in this way, there was no fear or any feeling of repulsion toward the dead body.

When the body was brought into the room where the autopsy was to be held, all that came to my mind was, "A dead body!" There was no concept of male or female; it was just a body. Right away I started reflecting repeatedly on the outward parts of the body: *kesā* (head hair), *lomā* (body hair), *nakha* (nails), *danta* (teeth), *taco* (skin). The body was cut open and I reflected on the parts as they appeared. I was so interested and focused that no fear arose in me. I felt grateful for having the great opportunity to see the parts and contemplate them.

Now to go into the procedure that was performed: First the skin was cut open and pulled back. Then they opened the rib cage. As the rib cage was opened a lot of blood poured out. The doctor explained that the blood was from the lung. The man had lung cancer, and his damaged lung could not hold the blood. One assistant made an opening at the throat and pulled out the tongue. The tongue, the food pipe, the windpipe, and the whole mass of the internal organs were stripped out of the body and placed on the table. My attention was not on what the doctor and his team were doing. My whole attention was on the seeing and knowing and reflecting on each organ I saw. All I saw was the impermanent and insubstantial nature of all this. While all this was going on, another assistant removed the scalp like taking off a cap; he sawed the skull, pried it open, and scooped out the brain.

I was so focused and deep in meditation that I saw the whole thing with equanimity. I had neither repulsion toward these loathsome

parts of the body nor any attachment. I was so detached I kept saying: "This body is not me, not mine, not myself; it is *anicca* (impermanent), *dukkha* (suffering), *anattā* (non-self)."

After reflecting on the thirty-two parts of the body externally (as in the dead body) and reflecting internally (on my own body), I reflected upon a different theme. Now I kept saying to myself, "This is what will happen to me pretty soon and to all beings. Each and every one who is born will some day end up in death, just like the person on the table. No one can escape death. Whether it is my body or another person's body, it is just an impersonal body; all that is found there is impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self. Nothing there could be described as me or mine."

At that moment, there seemed to be no attachment, no ill will, and no delusion in me. My mind had become so focused that my whole body was permeated with joy and happiness *(pīti sukha)*. Right there I had one of my best experiences of meditation *(samādhi)*. A realization came that truly, there is nothing. As it says in the *Visuddhimagga (Path of Purification)*, "just empty phenomena rolling on."

I kept on contemplating, considering: First, there had been a human, someone's husband, a father, and so on. Then a dead body. Now a carcass stripped of all the internal organs—just skin, flesh, and bones. This is life! This is what it is for me, and this is what it is for my entire group of loved ones and for all beings. What is there to get attached to? For what would one get angry?

So there I was practicing body contemplation externally and internally. I was able to remain detached without clinging to anything in the world. Hours later, when I rejoined my family patiently waiting outside the morgue, they exclaimed with surprise that I had become radiant.

Atthi kāyo'ti vā panassa sati paccupaṭṭhitā hoti,
yāvadeva ñāṇamattāya paṭissati mattāya anissito ca viharati,
Na ca kiñci loke upādiyati.

Or their mindfulness that there is a body is maintained to the extent of knowledge and remembrance. And they remain independent, unsustained by (not clinging to) anything in the world.

The Buddha
Dīgha Nikāya 22[2]

May all beings be well, happy, and peaceful.

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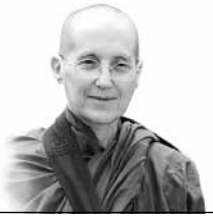
2. Pali text ibid. English adapted from translation by Thānissaro Bhikkhu.



Bhikkhunī Medhānandī Therī

Ayyā Medhānandī, a native of Montreal, is the founder of Satī Sārāṇīya Hermitage, a Theravāda Buddhist training monastery for bhikkhunīs in Perth, Ontario, Canada.

After years of meditation study in India and malnutrition relief work for the United Nations and other aid programs, she took the ten-precept nun's ordination with Sayadaw U Paṇḍita in 1988. In search of training in the West, she joined the nuns' community at Amarāvatī Monastery, UK, and lived there for ten years before moving to New Zealand, and later to Penang. She has taught retreats in Australia, New Zealand, Asia, and the West.

In 2007, she was ordained as a bhikkhunī in Taiwan and returned to Canada the following year to establish Sati Sārāṇīya Hermitage. She is the guiding teacher of the nuns' community and leads retreats and meditation courses, including programs for hospice volunteers and staff in the Ottawa area. Her Dhamma reflections book, *Gone Forth, Going Beyond*, was published in 2007.

A Handful of Poems

Bhikkhunī Medhānandī Therī

Empty Shells

Leaving one life is beginning another
they go together like days and nights
like the roots of a tree and its fruits
like empty shells
in the steel blue sands of twilight
when the near-full moon casts an eye
and a vagrant tide washes the soles
of my feet.

Leave softly, but leave—
then will you be complete
as you touch and receive
the rising moments
in their unabashed splendor
and allow all fear in your heart
to dissolve forever.

Are we not then like these
tudong shells
that gather on the beaches
buffeted on the waves
polished and refined in the depths?

Wandering the vast seas
we arrive, yes
we arrive in one majestic
breath on the shores
of freedom
to cease, at last to rest
smiling jewels
discrete—
we reflect
the unnameable Silence.

The Hermitage, Paekakariki, New Zealand, 2003

I Live as a Beggar

I live as a beggar
in the beauty of virtue
a clear mind
not withering
with fear or hate,
destroying dread
and delusion,
I guard the jewels
of my heart.
Among my teachers—
pain and poverty
sorrow and impatience
and life's sweetness
poured through the notes
of each breath,

alone with the hills
and wild flowers
I walk the razor's edge
beyond death.

The Hermitage, Paekakariki, New Zealand, 2004

My Old Sandals

My old sandals heavy with brine
play tag with the waves
that steal home at twilight,
my robe a sail in the vernal winds,
I veer between tangled weeds and woods
and gleaming stone
gathered at the edge of Truth.

Where will I go now the sea is dark,
night is everywhere and the beach—
a plane of shadows,
my thoughts as profuse
as these battered shells
and ancient refuse
that cling to the shore
waiting for high tide?
Where will I rest in all this movement—
traveling time
like the gulls and terns
that scout the coastal hills
and retreat in the first breath of evening?

I am praising, praising the seamless sky,
that Emptiness unabashed,
a still exuberant sun
bowing to the world
while crustaceans die in their berths
and stallion clouds
blush with gratitude.

What is this work we do,
blessing every ache and sting
darkness and light
death and the ending of day?

Night holds the cosmic sceptre
galaxies lean close
and the seas chant with me
this litany of love.

The Hermitage, Paekakariki, New Zealand, 2004

Cicada

Sunlight on the stream
an old cicada struggles
wings cracked—
his heart pounding in mine.

Bodhiñāṇārāma Monastery, New Zealand, 2002

Tell Me Again

Don't the seasons of life
enrich us?
now a storm
now a truce
now a blessed peace
tuning us
to the hymn of silence.

Tell me again
of timelessness
of growing old
and keeping still
at the edge of the lake
on this peerless, silver night.

We beat our wings
to the far horizon,
our moments of courage
surpass all despair—
soaked in the joy
this knowing brings.

Ottawa Valley, Ontario, Canada 2008

These poems were written at the original Sati Sārāṇīya Hermitage when it was still in Paekakariki, New Zealand from 2002–2006, and at its reincarnation in the Ottawa Valley, Ontario, Canada, when I returned to Canada in 2008. The New Zealand poems were published about ten years ago in a free Saṅgha book of monastic poetry: Tomorrow's Moon*, Sucitto Bhikkhu, editor (Northumberland, UK: Aruna Publications, 2005).*

Bhikkhunī Vāyāmā Therī

Ayyā Vāyāmā was the founding abbot of Dhammasāra Nuns Monastery. Located in Western Australia, Dhammasāra is the first of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere, a place where women can train as nuns, live according to the Vinaya, and remain largely self-governing.

From a young age, Ayyā Vāyāmā felt moved to ease the suffering of others. After university, she became a social worker in Australia, and later volunteered in Calcutta among the poor and sick, but felt unsatisfied, seeing that this was not the way to end all suffering.

While in Sri Lanka in 1985, she ordained as a ten-precept nun at Parappuduwa Nuns' Island with Ayyā Khemā as her teacher. She spent ten years practicing in Sri Lanka, and then one year at Amarāvatī Monastery in England. In 1997, Ayyā Vāyāmā returned to Western Australia to inaugurate a nuns' monastery.

In 2009, in Perth, Australia, conditions finally came together to allow Ayyā Vāyāmā to receive higher ordination and become a full member of the Saṇgha. In June 2010, as a result of failing health, she took early retirement. She and Ayyā Serī, her caregiver, established Patācārā Bhikkhunī Hermitage, where they live quietly and continue their practice.

The year of this publication, 2019, marks the ten-year anniversary of the first Theravāda bhikkhunī ordinations in Australia. Ven. Vāyāmā Therī was the first of those bhikkhunīs.

Happiness

Bhikkhunī Vāyāmā Therī

Something we'd all like to have is happiness. The Buddha said all beings are seeking happiness. Sometimes we think Buddhism is a lot about suffering, not happiness. This is because the central teaching is around the Four Noble Truths, the first of which is that suffering is an inherent part of life. But the Buddha was pointing out what causes unhappiness so we can create happiness for ourselves and others. The Buddha's teaching is basically about how to be happy.

I'd like to talk about the correlations between the Buddhist approach to happiness and some of the recent research findings of modern psychology and sociology. The Buddha teaches us how to create the conditions for happiness in our lives and these teachings resonate with the discoveries made through examining the way the brain works, and through examining the conditions shown to produce happiness. Western psychology only in recent times has started to pay attention to what makes people happy, rather than what makes people miserable. Past research and energy have gone into exploring depression and anxiety—trying to understand what produces those states of mind because they create such misery in people's lives.

Research methods have been developed to investigate the changes taking place in modern society. As we become more affluent with less hardship, statistics reveal that the numbers of people reporting they are depressed have increased. The levels of happiness or unhappiness

people are reporting don't seem to match the improvements in living standards, so psychology is now taking a different approach. They're trying to understand what actually produces happiness. When we thought happiness came from having comfort and being prosperous that was where a lot of energy in society went, but the research results don't show that material prosperity is crucial to happiness. Certainly, there is a standard in terms of having a place to live, having food on the table, clothes to wear, having medicine when one is sick—everyone needs to be relatively at ease. Even in the monastic life, the Buddha recognized if you're going to develop the spiritual path, you need material support. The four requisites: food, clothing, shelter, and medicine are things that everyone needs to feel somewhat at ease, somewhat happy.

But beyond those basics, what research has found is that levels of prosperity are no sure guide to levels of happiness. The research points out some interesting aspects of what creates happiness in the mind and these correlate with the approach of the Buddha. First, I suppose we should define what happiness is. It's a positive emotional state, a state of mind we would like to keep, not one we want to get rid of. We know we're happy when we like the emotional state we're experiencing and we wish it to continue. Within this definition of happiness there are many ways of elaborating. For example, a feeling of well-being, a feeling of satisfaction with one's life, a feeling that one's life is worthwhile, feeling satisfied with one's situation—these are all ways of describing happiness.

There are three aspects of happiness the psychologists have identified beyond satisfaction with food, shelter, clothing, and medicine—far beyond satisfaction with the basic necessities of life. The first of these aspects has to do with being able to produce pleasant experiences in one's life. That is, to have enough of the things we would say in Buddhism are pleasures through the senses: nice food or at least enough food—these are all relative terms—

nice fragrances, nice sounds, nice sights, comfortable feelings in the body, and thoughts that cause happiness. This first aspect of happiness has to do with levels of comfort and the ability to produce as many pleasant experiences as possible in one's life.

If we look around, we see, even in Australian society where people are relatively well-off, there's still a range in the abilities of people to produce pleasant experiences. There is a difference in what they can buy, how often they can enjoy the things they like, and so on. There will be differences in the amount of pleasure they can give themselves, but that alone won't mean the person with more money who can buy more things will be happier.

What psychologists have recognized is there is a quirky aspect in the human mind—instead of judging what we have as being enough for comfort and pleasure, there's something they've defined and called "reference anxiety." This means we don't judge how happy we are by what we've got and whether it's enough to meet our needs. We judge what we have according to what the person next door has, or whoever else it might be that we compare ourselves with. Even if we have more than we need, if we haven't got as much as those other people, then we won't be happy with what we've got. This is only one aspect of what they call reference anxiety.

The other thing they've realized is that we compare what we have now with what we had in the past. So, if we have the same as what we had in the past, it doesn't feel so good because it's not a step up from what we used to have. For example, if we used to live in a one-bedroom flat with many other people, and one day we acquired a two-bedroom cottage with an indoor bathroom that only our family used, then we would think that two-bedroom cottage with the indoor bathroom that only our family used was just wonderful, just great! How satisfied we'd feel. But if we grew up in a two-bedroom cottage with an indoor bathroom that only our family used, it wouldn't be

as satisfying for us to live in such a place now; it wouldn't be as exciting. What we'd be looking for is the four-bedroom house with the two indoor bathrooms only our family could use. This is how the mind works. It looks to the past and that affects our level of satisfaction with what we have right now.

The other quirky thing the mind does is it not only compares with other people and the past, it also compares with what it assumes we will get in the future. It does this to decide whether or not what we've got now is satisfying. When I'm talking about the mind deciding, this isn't intellectually comparing notes. This is all at an unconscious level—this seeking the elusive happiness and satisfaction we think can be found through things we enjoy. In looking to the future, if people think, "This is as good as it's going to get," there is no prospect for improvement, no way that the four-bedroom house will get a jacuzzi or a sauna or whatever we think we must finish it off, then again, we will not be as delighted with it. The prospect of further improvement, the idea that we will be able to add on, or go up, or get more—that also adds to our happiness and our satisfaction.

So this reference anxiety, which means moving off from what we have right now into the past, into the future, and comparing what we have with what other people have—these are all factors in whether or not we are happy right now. This is significant for our practice. One thing you will have noticed in the meditation is although we're trying to stay in the present moment, trying to stay with the body as it is—it's very difficult to do so because the mind runs off into the past and into the future. It's only when we can allow the mind to settle and be still in the present moment that inner peace arises. And when the inner peace arises, it's nice to be in the present moment. But when the mind is agitated, when it's busy, or when it's sleepy, and can't stay with the present moment, then it doesn't feel so pleasant. It feels like there is nothing here good enough to keep us focused in the present moment, so the mind seeks something better,

the missing thing that is not here. This lack of contentment feeds off itself. When the mind keeps roaming, it can never settle and the peace can never arise.

In the meditation practice, one of the basic skills we learn is to focus in the present moment, to let go of the past and future, and to focus continually and often enough so inner peace has the space to arise. To do that, we must be content with the present moment. We must know this moment is enough, this breath is enough, this body is enough. When we pay attention long enough, we become content and when that contentment grows, it allows the mind to settle and peacefulness to arise.

The Buddha encourages us to investigate this again and again to see if it is true or not. To stay in the present moment is to focus, to be content, to let go of the past, and the future. This practice mirrors what we do in ordinary life. We are constantly looking for what is missing, for what we don't have, for what we will get next and we assume that the newly acquired thing will bring us the elusive happiness. The mind quickly gets fed up, isn't interested, isn't delighted, seeks something else, seeks something more, so one of our daily practices is to stay focused where we are, with whatever we're doing—to develop contentment with what we have, instead of focusing on what we don't have.

One way we develop this contentment in the present moment is gratitude. Developing gratitude is one of the most powerful, positive states of mind we can generate. The Buddha called gratitude one of the highest blessings in life, and interestingly enough, modern psychologists in their studies have found that people who develop a gratitude practice score higher levels of well-being than those who don't. They not only have a greater sense of well-being, they look on their life as a gift. They take better care of themselves because they treat life as something precious. It has also been shown that

people who actively cultivate gratitude have a higher level of energy. In studies of people with chronic illnesses, when they have been given a gratitude practice to develop, changes in their level of pain and tiredness are quite dramatic.

These gratitude practices they have been given are simple practices we talk about as Buddhists. One method is to take time at the end of every day to look back and recollect three things we can be grateful for. We might be grateful that we got all green lights on the way to work, or we might be grateful that the weather was how we wanted it to be; we might be grateful that our body is working today. Maybe parts of our body aren't working that well but we can focus on those parts working well and appreciate them.

Another way to develop this gratitude practice is to look back, not just at the day we had, but to look back over our whole life—to start deliberately bringing to mind those people who have helped us. Better than just bringing those people to mind, what gives an even more powerful and lasting effect is the practice of telling the people who have helped you that they have helped you. Taking the trouble to write a letter, taking the trouble to make a phone call, taking the trouble to go and see the person. If we understand the way the mind works, the way the Buddha explained it, we can understand why taking these actions would have an even more powerful effect than just bringing someone to mind. It takes many more mind moments, a lot more effort and energy to write that letter or to go and see the person. As much time as we put into these actions, that much more we will get out of them.

Cultivating gratitude is a powerful practice for helping us to be happy and content with what we have. When we practice meditation and want to go further, we must strengthen the contentment we feel in the present moment. If we want to stay with the meditation object and move beyond the thinking mind, move beyond the scrambled

mind to find peace, then we must relax into the moment as it is and be content. The lack of contentment prevents us from going further in the meditation practice. So not only is contentment essential for life, it's essential for our meditation practice. If we can cultivate it in daily life, it will allow the mind to go to stillness in the meditation.

The second aspect psychologists have identified as a powerful factor in contributing to a sense of well-being is what they've called the "level of engagement" people have with their life—how much actual involvement, how much time and energy we put into those areas of our life we say are important to us. If I asked you, "What's important to you in your life?" you might say, "Well my family is important to me," or "My job is important to me," or "My health is important to me" or "My spiritual practices are important to me." And then I would ask you, "Well, how much time and energy do you give to developing and sustaining the relationships within your family? How much time and energy do you give to developing your spiritual practices? How much time and energy do you give to your job?" The measurement is how much time and energy do you give to the things you say are important to you.

What psychologists have recognized through their investigations is that when we say something is important to us, and yet we spend little time and energy on it, that low level of engagement means less happiness. Greater happiness, greater satisfaction, comes when we put our heart into the things we say are important to us. We might say we're very committed to Buddhist practice. First, I would ask, "Well, what do you do in your practice? How much of it do you do? How often? How regularly? What sort of priority do you give to it?" You might say, "The Buddhist community is important to me, not just where I live in particular, but the people who come together and practice, the people who uphold the sort of lifestyle I want to lead." I might ask, "What do you do to encourage that sort of lifestyle? What do you give of yourself to support that community?" This is

how we gauge levels of engagement in our life. If we're not getting as much satisfaction out of those things as we think we should, maybe we need to ask ourselves, "Am I giving enough of myself?"

The next aspect of happiness the psychologists have identified is what they call the "meaningfulness of one's life," whether one's life seems to have a purpose, whether it matters we're here or not. The way they get people to reflect on that is to observe whether they can contribute their skills, talents, time, and energy to something they consider worthwhile, something which isn't for their own direct personal well-being—giving time and energy to something like the Buddhist Society, doing something that allows the place to continue. The level of meaningfulness in our lives is measured, not by what we will gain personally, but how connected we feel to the thing we are supporting.

We had a good example of levels of engagement and meaningfulness recently, when the volunteer bushfire fighters were battling the fires around Perth. We see it time and again. They give their time and energy. They often lose pay. They take time off work. They put themselves at risk. They put their life on the line for people they don't even know and if you ask them how they feel after they've done that work, they'd say, "I feel great. I feel exhausted. I might even feel sick as a result of it, but I still feel great because I'm doing something that is worthwhile." In those moments, there is tremendous satisfaction.

Recently in the Buddhist Society, we had a weekend of fundraising for the people affected by tsunamis. That was another good example of people being engaged with something, giving their time and energy expecting nothing back. People spent many hours preparing the food and other items offered for sale. Some people had prepared days and days beforehand. Some have helped to put up tents, others helped to clean up the mess—if you asked, those people would have

said, “I feel great! It was worth it. It was something I’d gladly do again if the opportunity arises.” These people have a high level of engagement, not only in the Buddhist Society, but in the human community. The money they were raising was for countries they may not even have any connection with—no one they know and yet they were glad to do it.

To do that kind of work and to put yourself out like that makes life feel worthwhile. It matters we do these things, not because we’re getting something out of it personally, but because it contributes to the greater good. Studies have shown when people have these three aspects in their life: the pleasure of nice things or at least enough comfort for their needs to be fulfilled, when they have this feeling of being engaged in their life at a deep level, and a feeling their life has meaning because of what they can contribute to the greater good, then these people report the highest levels of satisfaction and personal fulfillment with their life. They are the people who are truly happy.

What modern psychologists have recognized as producing happiness mirrors the conditions and the practices that the Buddha advocated for his followers to undertake, not only for the well-being of others but because they produce true inner happiness and well-being for ourselves. So next time you feel drawn to go out and get something expecting some “thing” will give you the happiness that’s eluded you until now, stop and look. First, question that drive—question craving to reach out for what’s not in this moment right now. Before you follow that impulse, look at what you have already in your life.

Develop a feeling of gratitude. Take time to consider whether if whatever you are about to run after will really bring into your life anything you don’t already have. When we can be content with what we have and don’t want for anything else, then that is true wealth, that is true happiness. To reach that point, we must be willing to

keep on investigating and questioning our assumptions, and relating whatever we experience in our life to the teachings.

May the teachings you have heard this evening help you to investigate your own life. May they help you bring the conditions of happiness into your life and may they help us all to attain Nibbāna.

Adapted from a talk given in 2005 at the Dhammāloka Buddhist Centre in Western Australia and published as the book Taking Refuge *by Patācārā Bhikkhunī Hermitage in 2012 to mark the sixtieth birthday of Ayyā Vāyāmā.*

Bhikkhunī Nirodhā Therī

Ayyā Nirodhā was born in Austria in 1945 and arrived in Australia in 1965. She was married but later divorced. Her first meditation retreat was at Wat Buddha Dhamma in 1979 with Ayyā Khemā, Phra Khantipālo, and Munindra-ji leading the retreat.

There followed many further retreats in Australia, the United States, and Burma with Ayyā Khemā, Joseph Goldstein, Sharon Salzberg, Sayadaw U Paṇḍita, Ajahn Brahmavaṁso, and Venerable Dhammajīva, amongst others.

Beginning in January 2001, Ayyā Nirodhā stayed at the newly established Dhammasāra Nuns' Monastery in Gidgegannup near Perth, as a layperson. She later took on the monastic training, first as an anāgārikā, and then in 2003 she received pabbajjā and undertook the ten precepts with Ajahn Vāyāmā and Ajahn Brahm.

In October 2009, she received upasampadā from the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha with Ayyā Tathālokā as preceptor and with subsequent confirmation by the Bhikkhu Saṅgha. Both events were held at Bodhinyana Forest Monastery in Serpentine near Perth, Western Australia.

Ayyā Nirodhā was co-abbess at Dhammasāra Nuns' Monastery for some time before being asked in 2014 to assist at Santi Forest Monastery in Bundanoon in Australia's Southern Highlands in New South Wales, where she now resides as senior bhikkhunī.

Ordaining and Renunciation

Bhikkhunī Nirodhā Therī

My Background

I was born in Austria in 1945 and arrived in Australia at age twenty, newly married and then 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 in the late 1970s, 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 strong, childhood Christian roots, but remained open. One day in 1979, on a short visit to Sydney, my friend invited me to meet her Buddhist teacher, Anāgārika Munindra-ji, at an open-house gathering. My other plans for the day got canceled, 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 and co-led with Venerable Ayyā Khemā and Venerable Khantipālo. 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, the United States, Burma, Thailand, and back in Australia.

Ordination

Ordination was not just one experience, but three. First was the anāgārikā 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 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 had 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 ordinations were profound experiences for me, but the deepest one occurred in 2009, at my higher ordination ceremony as

a bhikkhunī. The male and female Mahā Saṅgha 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 Nibbāna, please raise me up out of compassion*—that is, *may they raise me into Saṅgha status*. And they did, in Pāli, reciting the same phrases that the Buddha used. An indescribably unique experience happened during my ordination—of linking up, as though being received into the pure Saṅgha realm, with all Saṅgha blessings. From that day on, I have gratefully enjoyed the complete lifestyle that the Buddha compassionately gave his ordained disciples that is the greatest support for the mind's development.

Two Levels of Renunciation

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

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 inside or outside—or simply everything experienced—have three things in common: they're unsatisfactory, unstable, and cannot be owned. The algebra of

life experiences brings one to a simple equation: saṃsāra is movement; stillness is Nibbāna.

Life in a Monastery

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 workload, for example, may be shared among few residents or many, with or without helping hands from volunteers. The community's highest priority may be meditation, teaching the Dhamma, offering ceremonies, or guiding those who are newly ordained—or building infrastructure may be the priority at times. At Dhammasāra, we focus on developing the community, particularly guiding newly ordained members, while also teaching the Dhamma. Also, a high priority is meditation and retreat time for our community members, therefore, we allow time for that. We also must focus on developing infrastructure to give our quickly growing community a place to reside.

Adapted from an interview conducted by the Buddhist Fellowship for the Buddhist Fellowship Newsletter *and the Winter 2012 issue of* Present *online magazine*.

Bhikkhunī Hāsapaññā Therī

Ayyā Hāsapaññā was born in Ipoh, Malaysia. During her days as a layperson, she and her family supported Ajahn Sujāto when he was practicing in Ipoh. The main influence in Venerable Hāsapaññā's spiritual development is the monastic lifestyle of the Forest tradition. When she had developed enough courage and inspiration to become a nun, Ajahn Sujāto suggested that she join Dhammasāra Nuns' Monastery.

She joined Dhammasāra in 2002, beginning her monastic training as an anāgārikā and later ordaining as a ten-precept nun with Ajahn Vāyāmā as her teacher. She subsequently ordained as a bhikkhunī in 2009 with Ayyā Tathālokā as her preceptor via the ancient canonical Pāli-text *Bhikkhunī Upasampadā* ceremony at Bodhinyana Monastery, Western Australia.

Venerable Hāsapaññā is the abbess of Dhammasāra Nuns' Monastery and assistant spiritual director of the Buddhist Society of Western Australia. She is heavily involved in teaching and training bhikkhunīs, sāmaṇerīs, anāgārikās, and laypeople.

The year of this publication, 2019, marks the ten-year anniversary of the historical first bhikkhunī ordination for nuns in the Theravāda Forest tradition in Australia, in which Ven. Hāsapaññā Therī participated.

Do Not Judge Yourself

Bhikkhunī Hāsapaññā Therī

It's important we understand the Buddha's teachings, that we keep reflecting and developing the perception of non-self. When you see non-self, you see impermanence. Things come and go, whether you like it or not. When we see impermanence, we become more appreciative of this moment and what we have. When we know that things are not going to last, we make the most of things while we can. When pleasant feelings arise, we enjoy that moment. We don't try to interfere; we don't try to hold on to that feeling and make it stay longer. When we have unpleasant feelings, we accept them and think, "Fine, they too will pass." This is how we see impermanence. When we see it is suffering, then we understand suffering. We know it is just part of life. No matter what we do, it will not be perfect—this is part of life. The more we can understand suffering, the more we can see where the suffering is coming from. It's not what we are experiencing that is the problem; it's how we relate to the experience that is important.

Practicing and reflecting in this way helps us develop a perception of non-self. When we become aware of non-self, we don't try to own things. When we have loving-kindness, we're at ease and at peace with who we are. This loving-kindness even toward our own defilements is fine. Sometimes we are not accepting, we are constantly fighting and it causes us more suffering.

This is a gradual training. All we need to do is to keep practicing, and slowly we wear out the negative energy. For example, when we experience anger, we know it will not go away immediately, but if we do not react, reinforce it, or push it away, then next time when a similar situation arises, it will be less intense. The defilement is still there, but it has become less powerful.

If we continue to practice, the defilements become weaker and eventually subside; they will be eliminated and disappear. It's a gradual training. That's why it's important we don't judge ourselves—if we don't judge ourselves, we will have confidence in our abilities. It's not only monks and nuns who can do it. You can see from the Buddha's teaching that even people whose defilements appear to be very gross became enlightened! So never judge yourself—you never know.

I offer this for your reflection, and may this teaching be of benefit to all of you.

Questions and Answers

How do I deal with a person who is ignorant, negative, and creating bad kamma?

The only thing we can change is ourselves. Sometimes we can't avoid being with people who are negative or ignorant. The only way we can deal with people who are ignorant, negative, and creating bad kamma is to have compassion. If someone is negative, it means they have lots of suffering. If someone has negative emotions, it's very draining—they feel tired and it's unpleasant. If you can see that person is suffering, you try not to change the person; you just have compassion toward them.

If I have tried my best in practicing the path, but am still not free from a negative state of mind at the end of this life, will I still get a good rebirth?

Rather than worrying about what might happen, it's better if we make the most of things now. It's better if we bring our mind back to this moment. We take one thing at a time and we don't project into the future, wasting our time and energy by worrying. Live in the moment with present-moment awareness. Never underestimate the power of *now*. With one moment of positivity, you create the next positive moment. With the next positive moment, you create the next, and the next, and the next. Now is important. Live in the moment.

Could you explain how to believe in yourself, especially when you have been laid off from work several times? How to overcome the anger toward the person who fired you?

The first thing we must believe in is ourselves, and the first thing we need to trust in is ourselves. It's difficult. You must take up the whole path of practice. The first thing is morality. Morality is the foundation of a peaceful mind. Without morality, it's difficult. If we purify our bodily action and speech, we can have a peaceful mind and when we have a peaceful mind, we develop wisdom and the whole path of practice.

Regarding anger: you can do loving-kindness meditation to help overcome anger. You still must keep the precepts, to have the morality to support your meditation.

Lots of people think they just need to sit on the cushion and repeat, "May I be well, may I be happy." They try to use loving-kindness to get rid of the anger. It doesn't work that way. When you keep the precepts and live a virtuous life, you will find that

the five precepts are all rooted in the first precept: non-harming, non-violence, not harming ourselves and others. When we keep that precept well, we are naturally kind, we naturally have loving-kindness and compassion. When we have that, it helps to weaken our anger.

Practicing loving-kindness toward ourselves is one way to overcome anger. You can also send loving-kindness toward the person who fired you. It's easy for us to complain about the other person, but the other person also has his own suffering. Training the mind will not happen overnight, so you must keep practicing. A body builder cannot say, "I'll go to the gym for one day." The muscles will never build up that way. The mental muscle is the same. We must keep practicing. Change will not happen overnight; it will take time.

Bhikkhunī Serī Therī

Ayyā Serī met her teacher, Ayyā Vāyāmā, during a pilgrimage to India in 2001. The following year she entered monastic life as an anāgārikā at Dhammasāra Nuns Monastery with Ayyā Vāyāmā as her teacher. Before ordaining, she was a pharmacist and naturopath in Perth, Western Australia.

Ayyā Serī went forth (pabbajjā) and ordained as a ten-precept nun on July 4, 2004, with Ajahn Brahmavaṁso as her going-forth teacher and Ajahn Vāyāmā as her teacher.

On October 22, 2009, she ordained as a bhikkhunī at Bodhinyana Monastery, Western Australia with Ayyā Tathālokā as her preceptor.

In 2010, Ayyā Serī left Dhammasāra Nuns Monastery to look after Ayyā Vāyāmā, who had retired as abbot of Dhammasāra Monastery when she became ill. In 2011, Ayyā Serī, together with Ayyā Vāyāmā, founded Patācārā Bhikkhunī Hermitage in Jane Brook, Western Australia, where they continue to live and practice.

The publication of this bhikkhunī anthology falls on the ten-year anniversary of Ven. Serī Therī's bhikkhunī ordination, the first in Australia for nuns in the Theravāda Forest tradition.

Spiritual Warriors

Bhikkhunī Serī Therī

When we hear the word "warriors," we think of brave combatants or distinguished soldiers in an armed force. Spiritual warriors, however, are not fighting on the killing fields to harm; instead, they are trained to battle on the spiritual path, practicing for freedom. This concept resonates with me—I associate them with qualities such as courage, determination, integrity, renunciation, loving-kindness, compassion, and peace. As a Buddhist bhikkhunī, I consider the Buddha the ideal distinguished spiritual warrior. He was clear and resolute in his quest for liberation and he found refuge in renunciation, determined to practice for freedom.

The Buddha taught and trained his disciples. How do we train and practice as spiritual warriors now? As Buddhists, this way of training is the Noble Eightfold Path. To follow in the footsteps of the Buddha, we commit ourselves to this training and practice of *sīla* (morality), *samādhi* (meditation), and *paññā* (wisdom). We must be committed and put in the work. Training as spiritual warriors doesn't mean a spectacular display of fireworks or thunder and cheers. It's more like strands of liberation we weave into the fabric of day-to-day living, wholeheartedly, patiently, with love and care. It's a patient practice, like collecting water into the bucket of liberation, drop-by-drop and moment-by-moment.

When we come to a Buddhist center, we're looking for something that can lead us to peace, to freedom, to liberation. As we arrived

and entered this hall, we bowed down to the Buddha—at that point we stepped onto the path. Tonight, just the fact that we are all here, seizing this opportunity to meditate and listen to Dhamma—by these actions we are planting the seeds—taking a step to be spiritual warriors.

We must use every opportunity to be awake, to look at resistance and openness in our heart. Bowing seems to be a small gesture, but when bowing we are fully aware and mindful of the movements of our body. Bowing trains our humility; it shows our respect and gratitude to the Buddha. We bow three times: first to the Buddha, then to the Dhamma, the teaching of the Buddha, and then to the Saṅgha, the community of those enlightened by practicing the path. We can use any small action and gesture to practice and learn about ourselves, our minds, and our hearts.

As spiritual warriors, we must be aware and honest with our feelings, actions, and reactions in life—to be fully present with whatever is in front of us rather than running away from life. We can learn and practice with whatever situation we are in for greater understanding of ourselves, for peace and ease, for liberation.

One powerful moment I experienced recently was at Bendat Cancer Centre in Subiaco. I was standing in the hall waiting for someone, when out of the corner of my eye I saw a woman walking past with an IV drip. She was weak and frail, and I caught myself instinctively turning my head away because I could not bear to look at her pain and suffering. I recognized this fear of suffering in me—the fear it could be me. My reaction was shocking to me. As I became aware of my own fear, I made an effort, a gigantic effort, to turn around and look one more time. This time, as I stood there watching this woman—this fellow being in saṃsāra—my heart melted and softened. I sent good wishes and loving-kindness to her: “May you be free from suffering; may you be at peace and at ease.”

It was a powerful moment as I was shocked to see the fear of suffering in my heart and surprised to see that I had turned away to avoid looking at her pain. I was grateful for the training and practice that I had undertaken. It gave me the awareness, the willingness, the courage, and the compassion to turn toward the suffering. It allowed me at that moment to open my heart to the suffering of the person in front of me, and then to open to my own suffering.

That experience reminded me of the Buddha's three considerations: the threefold pride as mentioned in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya (Numerical Discourses)*: pride in youthfulness, pride in health, and pride in being alive.[1] Most of us only want to see beauty, love, health, happiness, and success. We do not want to see or to know old age, sickness, and death. The pain and suffering are always "them" but not "us," not "me." Old age, sickness, and death are always "out there," not "here." The Dhamma, the teaching of the Buddha, gives spiritual warriors the tools and the strength to awaken to life as it is. The practice gives us the skill to be at peace and at ease—to love and be compassionate to ourselves and beings around us. We are training and practicing for our happiness and well-being here and now in our daily lives, and eventually, this will lead us to freedom. We can all walk on this spiritual warrior path together, help each other, and encourage and inspire each other along the way.

I will share some poems from the *Therīgāthā (Poems of Early Buddhist Nuns)* contained in the Pāli Canon. They were written by women who were spiritual warriors during the time of the Buddha. In India 2,500 years ago, the society was strongly class and caste orientated with fixed ideas and expectations of female roles. Women

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[1] "Threefold Pride" AN 3:27 and 3:38, in Ñāṇaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1999), 53. See also "Delicate" (Threefold Pride), AN 39:9, in Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *Aṅguttara Nikāya: The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2012).

were expected to be daughters, wives, mothers, and grandmothers, or even servants, slaves, and prostitutes. These spiritual warriors had the courage, determination, and confidence to break through the social constraints and limitations to seek spiritual liberation. Many were not only seekers; they achieved their goal, they attained Nibbāna. The Buddha, in his radical gesture of compassion and wisdom, offered these women recognition equivalent to the male spiritual warriors: full admission to the Saṅgha as bhikkhunīs.

One of my favorite verses was written by *arahantī* Cittā Bhikkhunī, who came from a well-to-do family. Not until old age did she gain enlightenment. She describes this experience on top of Vulture's Peak:

Though I am thin, sick,
and lean on a stick,
I have climbed up Vulture Peak.

Robe thrown down,
bowl turned over,
leaned on a rock,
then great darkness opened.

Cittā Bhikkhunī[2]
Therīgāthā

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[2] Susan Murcott, *The First Buddhist Women: Translations and Commentary on the Therigatha*, (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1991), 117.

Vulture's Peak was the Buddha's favorite retreat in Rajgir and the place where he gave many of his discourses. It's a steep and hard climb. If you close your eyes you can almost see aged Cittā Bhikkhunī climbing up to the peak, full of faith and determination to practice. She would have been up there many times before, but this time her breakthrough came with a simple and insignificant incident—just leaning on a rock: "then great darkness opened," and she attained liberation, Nibbāna. The breakthrough, the transcendental moment on the spiritual path is often the culmination of many small and unspectacular efforts. It requires commitment, patience, and persistence.

I will close this Dhamma sharing with a poem by arahantī Sundarī Bhikkhunī from the *Therīgāthā*. This is the last verse in which she is paying respects to the Buddha after attaining liberation by following his teachings and instructions. It's a significant poem because in it the Buddha recognizes and confirms her achievement:

I am your disciple Sundarī
and I have come from Kasi to pay homage.
Buddha, teacher,
I am your daughter,
your true child,
born of your mouth.
My mind is free of clinging.
My task is done.

[The Buddha replied:]
Then welcome, welcome to you,
great woman.
The tamed come this way
to pay homage to their teacher's feet.
Free of desire and its chains,
your mind is free of clinging.
Your task is done.

Sundarī Bhikkhunī [3]
Therīgāthā

I share this teaching with you, and may the spiritual warrior path bring us happiness and peace. May sharing this teaching help us all on the path of practice for liberation and freedom.

I would like to dedicate the merit tonight to a distinguished female spiritual warrior of our time, my teacher, Ayyā Vāyāmā Bhikkhunī, on her sixtieth birthday, for her well-being and peace. May she attain her goal, liberation and freedom, Nibbāna, in this very life!

Adapted from a talk at Dhammāloka Center of the Buddhist Society of Western Australia on October 19, 2013.

[3] Susan Murcott, *The First Buddhist Women: Translations and Commentary on the Therigatha*, (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1991), 189.

Ammā Thānasantī

Ammā Thānasantī was born in California and first encountered the Dhamma in 1979. Since then, she has been committed to awakening. On a trip to Asia, she met the highly accomplished meditation masters Ajahn Chah and Dipa Ma. In 1989 she went to England, ordained as a nun in the Ajahn Chah Thai Forest tradition, and led Vinaya discussions for the community. Ammā Thānasantī has been teaching intensive meditation retreats since 1996.

In 2009, she left her monastic community in England and returned to the United States to pursue her vision of eventually developing a bhikkhunī training monastery integrating the ancient teachings of the Forest tradition into the modern world. She founded Awakening Truth, a tax-deductible religious charity dedicated to this vision.

In 2010, after being a nun for nineteen years, she received bhikkhunī ordination in the first dual-platform Theravāda ordination in North America with Ayyā Tathālokā as her preceptor.

In 2017, she relinquished bhikkhunī training and returned to lay life with the aim of continuing to teach meditation with Awakening Truth, combining the power of classical Buddhist teachings with a focus on well-being and maturation. She is adept at meeting people where they are, supporting them to find their own full life path and discover the blessings possible in transformation.

Discoveries in Meditation

Ammā Thānasantī

For many of us it's a life-changing discovery to realize that it's possible to bring attention to our various sensations, thoughts, feelings, and all the associations they trigger without having to identify with any of them. If, for example, in dealing with illness, rather than thinking, "I'm sick" or "Something is wrong with me," I instead see there are sensations being experienced and health issues arising, the shift is liberating. The feelings can be there and I can be at peace with them. This is not simply a conceptual change, but a difference in the way of relating to what is arising.

Another discovery is the shift from the sense of "me" who is doing, knowing, and evaluating, to just resting in awareness—an embracing awareness that allows, knows, and receives all that arises. When attention is so inclined, awareness becomes a resting place and a refuge. Instead of trying to locate a "self" with the ordinary reference points of time, place, details, and story, attention leans into awareness. This shift is another step toward knowing that who we are cannot be defined by the contents of what we experience.

When awareness becomes a resting place, this movement can trigger a hunger for the unconditioned and a desire to lose oneself there. The assumption that the unconditioned is separate from the conditioned—from our bodies, thoughts, and feelings—can catalyze withdrawing from the world. Thinking the more I withdraw, the more access I gain to pure awareness, I become stuck in a manifestation

of duality and experience suffering. The way out of this suffering is to recognize that the experience of pure awareness can meet the world as it is; it doesn't need to be kept separate and closeted. It's the discovery that right where thoughts of identification occur is where they can be known in awareness. And where they are known is where they end.

Another discovery in meditation is the way unconditioned love can bring about healing and wholeness—resistance melts away. This love is able to engage the world in all of its complexity, contradictions, and messiness; it doesn't reserve itself for situations that are safe or simple. I don't generate this love, but it penetrates everything in such a way that problems cease to be problems—not because feelings and problems disappear, but because they are held in a vast, embracing field. When that love is the basis for engaging with what is arising, I experience being part of a web of life where love is the fabric that connects.

Bhikkhunī Adhimuttī

Ayyā Adhimuttī, born in New Zealand and known as the first "Kiwi bhikkhunī," ordained in Thailand as a mae chee in 2005 at Wat Ram Poeng with Ajahn Suphan. She subsequently went forth as a sāmaṇerī at Santi Forest Monastery in 2008 with Ayyā Tathālokā as preceptor.

At Santi Forest she actively participated in Bhante Sujāto's groundbreaking bhikkhunī ordination research team as a co-organizer of the First International Seminar on Bhikkhunī Ordination, and worked on the *Bhikkhunī Paṭimokkha First Edition* and *Second Edition*.

In 2010, Ayyā Adhī was invited to join in the founding and first community vassa of the Theravāda Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in the West at Dhammadhāriṇī's Araññā Bodhi Awakening Forest Hermitage on the Sonoma Coast of northern California. She ordained as a bhikkhunī during the first vassa at Araññā Bodhi in 2010 with the hermitage's founding abbess, Ayyā Tathālokā, as preceptor.

Returning to Australia after time back in Asia, in late 2013 Ayyā Adhī supported and participated in the transition of Santi Forest Monastery to being a bhikkhunīs' monastery. She also regularly supported and participated in the Sakyadhītā International Conference on Buddhist Women, helped edit the Sakyadhītā publications, and co-ordinated a Sinhalese Sakyadhītā Anthology

on Buddhist women. She was also one of the founders of Sakyadhītā's *Awakening Buddhist Women* blog.

Understanding the pressing need for deeper Bhikkhunī Vinaya studies, in 2012 Ayyā Adhī co-organized the first intensive session of the Bhikkhunī Vibhaṅga Project in New Zealand. That same year, she and supportive friends began development of the New Zealand Bhikkhunī Saṅgha Trust, which was registered as a charitable trust in New Zealand in 2016. The Trust aims to support bhikkhunīs' meditation retreats, deep Dhamma and Vinaya study and research, and bhikkhunī teachers' presence in New Zealand. The Trust has a long-term goal of supporting bhikkhunīs' ongoing residential practice and teaching in New Zealand. Ayyā Adhī is based between New Zealand, Asia, and North America, where she is active in further developing her meditation practice and Dhamma and Vinaya studies.

My Going Forth

Bhikkhunī Adhimuttī

On March 9, 2008, I went forth from home to homelessness with my then visiting bhikkhunī teacher, Ayyā Tathālokā, as upajjhāyā. Under more "normal" circumstances, after sāmaṇerī ordination, I would then have taken dependence on Ayyā Tathālokā and the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha for my training, but as a reflection of the times (and in reflection of Santi Forest's then-abbot Bhante Sujāto's great generosity and compassion), I then went across to the Bhikkhu Saṅgha and took dependence on him.

Since I first ordained as a mae chee in Thailand (2005), I've learned through (sometimes bitter) experience the importance of space and support—physical, psychological, intellectual, and spiritual—for the holy life to be well lived. I hoped this sāmaṇerī ordination would mark the beginning of a new era within our Forest traditions and after this, as a woman, one would be able to go forth within a context that assumes the natural progression of sāmaṇerī status to full ordination as a bhikkhunī.

After experiencing other forms of ordination, there is a sense of rightness and flow to this progression. It feels like bones long misaligned are now in their natural place. I appreciate the courage and integrity of the many women before me who carved out a coherent monastic life with ten-precept ordination. I am grateful and inspired by the work they have done, the ground they have prepared, and the way they have grown in often difficult and unsupportive

conditions. For myself, however, ten-precept ordination has a feeling of incompleteness.

Until recently, bhikkhunī ordination was a "non-issue" within the Thai Forest traditions. There was the idea that the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha died out a thousand years ago and cannot be revived. Therefore, women should be content with other forms of ordination—mae chee or ten-precept nuns—full ordination is not necessary for them. It was within a wider monastic context shaped by these ideas that I first came to Santi.

At Santi, even back then, things were a little different. Both male and female monastics were living there, and with great joy I sometimes had the opportunity to serve both bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs. Issues such as women's place and situation in Buddhism and bhikkhunī ordination were actively engaged in, discussed, and debated. Outside of this small monastery, however, these issues were largely ignored. The loyalty to an all-male Saṅgha within the mainstream backed by tradition had a resilience and strength that was almost impossible to stand up to.

To create space for bhikkhunī ordination to take root and flourish, there had to be a countercurrent within the river of our tradition. A special combination of skills and factors has been necessary to bring this about. It is essential to have people who have undergone training within the tradition, who understand it intimately, and who have great appreciation and faith for the beauty and gifts it has to offer. We need people with enough clarity to see the weaknesses of the tradition, and enough compassion to be moved by the suffering caused by the blind points of traditional structures. These people need the strength, wisdom, and conviction to heal the blind spots. For example, when seeing the suffering and injustice caused by traditional structures (especially those denying full ordination and participation for women in monastic life) it was necessary for us to

look deeply into the texts and see if, indeed, the Buddha's original intentions and teachings support the assumptions underlying the traditional structures. Furthermore, in doing this sort of work, challenging ideas long held as sacred, one inevitably faces strong opposition. It has taken enormous strength and stamina to stand against the main currents of the river and to investigate.

Over the last few years, meditators and scholars like Bhante Sujāto, Ayyā Tathālokā and Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi have had the dedication, clarity, and strength to undertake this sort of investigation. By looking deeply into the traditions, examining how they have grown and the assumptions that underlie them, they have been able to expose these assumptions and enable us to see our traditions in a new light. This has allowed us to separate the original intentions of the Buddha from cultural accretions. By doing so, these monastics have been able to create new currents within the vast river of our tradition, and to allow the causes and conditions to flow that support bhikkhunī ordination.

This work had been going along steadily and quietly for a long time—largely disregarded and ignored, and having no real impact on the main flow of events. In July 2007, however, there was the international conference on bhikkhunī ordination in Hamburg. Theravāda monastics Ayyā Tathālokā, Bhante Sujāto, and Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi spoke clearly and intelligently about many assumptions that prevent the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha from taking root and flourishing. After these ideas were voiced in an international forum, the necessity for bhikkhunī ordination could no longer be swept aside by mainstream assumptions and began to be openly recognized and engaged with.

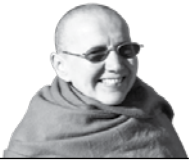
In November 2007, Bhante Sujāto had the inspiration to invite bhikkhunīs, nuns with various forms of ordination, and women to Santi to discuss issues surrounding bhikkhunī ordination. This idea

was enthusiastically taken up by the community. At Santi, although we had the vision of a flourishing Bhikkhunī Saṅgha, as young nuns and nuns-to-be, we felt alone and unsupported within a wider context which had until recently denied the existence and necessity of a Bhikkhunī Saṅgha. We were not stepping into a context and structure already formed and guaranteed support and respect as the monks do. As young nuns, we were still feeling very tender and in need of guidance. We felt as if we were stepping into nothing, and that we had to build the bridge as we walked on it.

It was appropriate that Santi should provide the space for the first such gathering/conference within the Forest traditions. The land that our monastery is built on was generously provided by Venerable Nirodhā, the first nun to ordain on Australian soil. Bhante Sujāto was the abbot, a monk whose conviction about the necessity of a Bhikkhunī Saṅgha stems from his compassion in seeing the suffering caused when the desire to go forth and live the monastic life in its full form is denied.

His deep contemplation and intimate knowledge of the early Buddhist texts provide a clear vision of the necessity of the Fourfold Saṅgha. Our wonderful monk brothers, Bhante Jaganātha, Bhante Mettābha, and Bhante Tapassi supported us and were with us every step of the way. Also, we had the support of many laypeople, who saw that the time for flourishing of the Fourfold Saṅgha had come and who supported us with their enthusiasm and energy.

Adapted from an article published on the Alliance for Bhikkhunīs *website, March 2008.*



Bhikkhunī Suvijjānā

Ayyā Suvijjānā was born in 1952 in Concord, California. In 1976, she began Buddhist practice in the Zen tradition. She married in Santa Cruz, raised a son, and had a career as a nurse. Around 1998 she was introduced to Vipassanā at Insight Santa Cruz. Shortly after her introduction to Vipassanā, she visited Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery and soon became a lay student of Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Pasanno. There she became inspired to live a monastic life herself and left her career as a nurse to pursue ordination in the Theravāda tradition.

In 2005, she met Ayyā Tathālokā, who encouraged her to go ahead with her plan to explore the possibility of ordination at Amarāvatī Monastery in England. After spending five months at Amarāvatī, she returned to California to train with Ayyā Tathāokā at Dhammadhāriṇī and has been a student of Ayyā Tathālokā ever since.

Ayyā Suvijjānā entered monastic life as an anāgārikā in 2006, and became the first woman to go forth as a sāmaṇerī with a bhikkhunī teacher in the Americas in 2008. She received full ordination as a bhikkhunī in August 2010 at Arañña Bodhi Awakening Forest Hermitage (Aranya Bodhi), and has played an important supportive role in establishing both Arañña Bodhi and Dhammadhāriṇī's Sonoma Mountain Bhikkhunī Ārāma (Dhammadharini Monastery).

Liberation of Mind through Loving-kindness

Bhikkhunī Suvijjānā

Mettā (loving-kindness) is frequently taught at meetings of meditation groups. It is practiced by members of Insight meditation groups and is well-known as a practice in Theravāda Buddhism. Most people know it as a method to overcome anger and hatred, and it's practiced as a way to become a more loving and accepting person. But how far can it take us in our practice? What does it mean to us? What is the impact of the mettā practice?

Few people realize that the Buddha taught loving-kindness as a vehicle for the liberation of mind. In the suttas, particularly in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* and the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, the Buddha teaches the concept of liberation by loving-kindness and measureless liberation of mind. This liberation is true for all four *brahmavihāras* (divine abidings) but the focus here will be on mettā.

What did the Buddha and others in the Pāli Canon mean by liberation of mind and heart by mettā? The term *mettā ceto vimutti* can be translated as "deliverance of mind by loving-kindness." What are we being liberated from and how does this happen?

With the practice and cultivation of *mettā bhāvanā* (development of loving-kindness), on the more immediate or mundane level the suttas speak of freedom from hatred and ill will. Learning mettā bhāvanā and the cultivation of mettā is cited as a means of overcoming ill will. In a translation of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the following saying is attributed to the Buddha:

> *I do not see even one other thing on account of which unarisen ill will does not arise and arisen ill will is abandoned, so much as the liberation of mind by loving-kindness. For one who attends carefully to liberation of mind by loving-kindness, unarisen ill will does not arise and arisen ill will is abandoned.*
>
> *Aṅguttara Nikāya* 1:7

The mettā practice may be used as a means to not only rid oneself of hatred and anger, but to also prevent their arising. This truly is a freedom of the mind and heart. When developing mettā and continuously cultivating it, hatred will not arise. If we are constantly inclining our mind toward thoughts of goodwill, kindness, and forgiveness, these qualities will be our response to challenging situations. In one translation of the Karaṇīyamettā Sutta, the instruction is: "Whether standing, walking, seated, or lying down, whenever awake, one should develop this mindfulness [of loving-kindness]." This constant cultivation of wholesome mental states prevents the arising of unwholesome mental states. We are forming wholesome mental habits—it is possible to change our mental habit patterns, and this leads to happiness for others and for ourselves.

> If it were not possible to develop the wholesome, I would not say: "develop the wholesome!" But because it is possible to develop the wholesome, I say: "develop the wholesome." If this developing of the wholesome led to harm and suffering, I would not tell you to develop it. But because the developing of the wholesome leads to welfare and happiness I say: "develop the wholesome."
>
> *Aṅguttara Nikāya* 2:19

Hatred and ill will are obstructions to happiness and progress

on the path. The Buddha named ill will and irritation as one of the primary hindrances to meditation. We all know how bad we feel when our minds are obsessed with anger or irritation. The Buddha described in a simile that having anger and ill will is like being sick in bed, and being free from anger and ill will is being well again.

In the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, hatred is described as a "maker of measurement." We measure others in terms of our likes and dislikes and whether we perceive them as a danger. We measure people when we meet them—is this person friend or foe? We measure the sense world in terms of our preferences. "I hate Brussels sprouts!" or "I love sunsets!" are expressions of measurement. The "love" that arises with this measuring is not true love. With true mettā bhāvanā, we go beyond this measuring.

Measureless liberation of mind by loving-kindness goes beyond making measurement. It's cultivating unconditional loving-kindness for other beings:

> The Buddha's Words on Loving-Kindness
>
> Whatever living beings there may be,
> whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,
> the great or the mighty, medium, short, or small,
> the seen and the unseen,
> those living near and far away,
> those born and to be born,
> may all beings be at ease.
>
> *Karaṇīyamettā Sutta*

This immeasurable or measureless quality may persist only as long as the deep state of mettā bhāvanā lasts during meditation.

At that time, we are temporarily free from hatred and the love we feel is unconditional and boundless. After emerging from this state, we still must be watchful for unwholesome states arising. With this practice, over time the arising of anger and hatred will diminish.

Another aspect of the immeasurable quality is that when mettā is well developed, it has a radiant and expansive quality. Our hearts fill with the feeling of mettā and overflow. We are instructed to radiate kindness over the entire world. It is described as outward and unbounded by the Buddha in the Karaṇīyamettā Sutta.

After we have become well established in mettā bhāvanā, we can start using it as a springboard for other practices. It can be used as a concentration practice that can lead to *jhāna* (meditative absorptions), but these practices are still not complete without developing insight. We may confuse expanded and blissful states of mind with awakening. We must be firmly grounded in the Dhamma with wisdom about the danger of greed, hatred, and delusion. If we are treading in the exalted states without this grounding, we may misstep and fall into a crevice that will land us into the hell realms of anger and rage—supported by delusion and greed for the divine. If we do not see that these pleasant states are conditioned and therefore impermanent and that clinging to them leads to suffering, it is still possible to fall into lower realms.

Mettā bhāvanā is also taught as a basis for developing penetrating and liberating insight. Combined with other practices that lead to insight, mettā bhāvanā can be instrumental in bringing about complete and final liberation of mind.

The Buddha teaches a relationship between cultivation of loving-kindness (and the rest of the brahmavihāras) and developing the jhānas and the four satipaṭṭhānas (foundations of mindfulness) in the

Aṅguttara Nikāya. The Buddha describes this "Dhamma in brief" to a certain bhikkhu who had requested a teaching for training while dwelling alone "withdrawn, heedful, ardent, and resolute." The training given to the certain bhikkhu by the Blessed One in this sutta is summarized here. He was instructed to:

(1) Make his mind firm and internally well settled, free from unwholesome states of mind.

(2) Develop and cultivate the liberation of the mind by loving-kindness, make it a vehicle and basis, carry it out, and consolidate it.

When *mettā ceto vimutti* or liberation of mind by loving-kindness is developed, then this concentration should be developed:

(1) With thought and examination, it should be developed
(2) Without thought but with examination, it should be developed
(3) With rapture
(4) Without rapture, accompanied by comfort
(5) Accompanied by equanimity

The Buddha is describing the jhāna factors in a fivefold sequence starting with the concentration developed with thought and examination through to concentration accompanied by equanimity. Each of the remaining brahmavihāras (compassion, altruistic joy, and equanimity) are developed in turn, leading to the jhāna factors. After the four brahmavihāras are developed this way along with the attainment of the jhānas, the Buddha gives instruction for the fulfillment of the four satipaṭṭhānas:

> Contemplating the body in the body, ardent, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed longing and

> dejection in regard to the world . . . feelings in feelings . . . mind in mind . . . phenomena in phenomena, ardent, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed longing and dejection in regard to the world.
>
> Four Foundations of Mindfulness
> *Aṅguttara Nikāya* 8:63

Bhante Henepola Guṇaratana teaches mettā bhāvanā as a springboard for jhāna, alternating between breath meditation and mettā bhāvanā to develop deep concentration.

Liberation of mind through loving-kindness is cited in *Majjhima Nikāya* 52 and *Aṅguttara Nikāya* 11:16 as one of the eleven doors to the deathless. These eleven doors are the four rūpa jhānas, the four immeasurables, and the three lower formless attainments (the arūpa jhānas). Each one may be used as a basis to develop insight. Ānanda describes this process to the lay disciple Dasama: "First, a bhikkhu dwells pervading the ten directions with loving-kindness. He develops it, establishes it, he examines it in terms of being a volitional formation, impermanent, and subject to cessation."

Through examining the suttas, the teachings of the Buddha, and through our own experience with mettā practice, we will find that mettā bhāvanā is more than a meditation to provide a peaceful abiding for oneself. It is much more than a practice to overcome anger. It is a way of life, a way to develop wholesome attitudes from the moment we wake until the moment we fall asleep. It supports wholesome actions of body, speech, and mind and in turn, these wholesome behaviors support its development. Along with these benefits and beyond, mettā bhāvanā is one of the doors to the deathless. It is a practice that leads to the higher attainments of the jhānas; it supports the fulfillment of insight and leads to final liberation, a truly measureless liberation of mind.

Bhikkhunī Phalañāṇī

Ayyā Phalañāṇī was born in 1959 in Germany. She encountered and practiced Zen Buddhism in Düsseldorf, leading to her first meditation retreat in Japan at the age of twenty with Shodo Harada Roshi. There, she formally took refuge, practiced meditation on a regular basis, and made a career as an actress and comedian.

In 2003, Ayyā Phalañāṇī left the stage to seek a more meaningful life. In 2007, she went to Thailand to attend a Vipassanā retreat, and there entered monastic life as an eight-precept nun. Later she trained at Wat Ram Poeng (Tapotārām) with Ajahn Suphan as her teacher. Assured of return to Wat Ram Poeng to continue meditation as a bhikkhunī, Phalañāṇī left Thailand to receive full ordination with Ayyā Tathālokā at Araññā Bodhi in 2010. After basic training and independence, Ayyā Phalañāṇī travelled to forest monasteries in Sri Lanka and Australia before returning to Thailand.

In Thailand, she went into retreat at Wat Pah Mieang Khun Pang, a small monastery in the mountains of Amper Phrao, Chiang Mai. She lived and practiced in this secluded environment there for five years guided by her teachers Ajahn Suphan and Ajahn Tong Sirīmaṅgalo.

In April 2018, Ayya Phalañāṇī accepted an invitation to assume the position of abbess of Aneñja Vihāra, a training monastery for bhikkhunīs back in her home country of Germany.

Living as a Bhikkhunī in Thailand

Bhikkhunī Phalañāṇī

How It All Began

The year of this writing I passed my fifth vassa as a bhikkhunī, the seventh year in robes—although the original plan was to be a nun for only a year.

I have been a Buddhist for nearly forty years, at first not belonging to any particular sect or tradition. When I was about twenty, I read some suttas from the Tipiṭaka and some Mahāyāna sutras and practiced Zen meditation, all this because it was available and not because I had any particular preference for one lineage or teaching over another.

At the age of forty-eight I felt the urge to deepen my practice because I had experiences in meditation I could not explain and sought a place where I could do a retreat. The first place I contacted was the monastery in Japan where I did my first retreat at twenty-two. I also did some research on the internet about places in Thailand, because I had a dream one night in which I was walking in a forested area, full of light and warmth. I looked at an illustrated atlas and found it must be in northern Thailand. I applied to several places and got a quick response from a small, new forest meditation center in the north of Thailand, a place for the practice of Mahāsi Sayadaw's meditation technique. A week later I was on my way, with white clothes for the monastery and a bikini for the beach. The plan was

two weeks of meditation and six weeks of chilling out on the beach. I had time and funds for two months.

It turned out otherwise. I forgot about the beach, and one day heard myself telling the teacher: "You know, Ajahn, I could live like this." I was asked to ordain as a nun and heard myself saying, "Okay." It took months to arrange everything in Spain, where I had my home, and then go back to Thailand to ordain. There was little time to inquire about what it would be like to be a nun in Thailand, so I assumed that I would become like a monk, a female monk. I had seen mae chees (Thai, white-robed eight-precept nuns) but only a few and thought they were postulants or laywomen. I had been meditating for about twelve hours per day so there was little time to look around and see how the nuns were living.

When I came back to ordain I discovered little by little I would not be like a female monk at all. I found that I would become an eight-precept nun. In terms of duties in the monastery, I would be considered a laywoman, while in terms of behavior, I would be expected to behave like the holy mother. I was on the verge of canceling my ordination, but I really had the urgency to be a female monk, so I went ahead despite my misgivings.

My first preceptor was the Canadian monk Phra Yuttadhammo, who understood my sense of urgency to undertake the renunciant life and allowed me to wear brown robes instead of white. He also gave me the Vinaya to read and reminded me whenever I was not acting accordingly, to say to myself: "Behave like a monk!" or something to that effect. We practiced some of the *dhutaṅga* observances and observed strict Vinaya. After six months of being trained as a monastic by Phra Yuttadhammo, his visa expired and he had to leave for America. I suddenly found myself alone with an old monk in this small, rural monastery. The old monk's health was not good and he was happy that someone would help him sweep the temple

grounds, so I stayed and practiced on my own for six months, but I knew I needed a teacher to progress. I had heard about the revival of the Theravāda Bhikkhunī Order and realized that living alone in a Thai forest, I could not become one myself. I therefore left for Wat Ram Poeng, a large meditation center in Chiang Mai. The abbot, Ajahn Suphan, was full of mettā (loving-kindness) and karuṇā (compassion) and he accepted me into his community.

Coming from the forest where I had lived alone, it was quite a shock to find myself in a large urban meditation center, but having a lot of faith in my new teacher, I just repeated to myself the Buddha's words to Venerable Aṅgulimāla when he was suffering: "Bear up with it, bear up with it."

My time was spent on meditation and I would leave my room only for the daily interview, the meals at the dining hall, and once every three months for a trip to the immigration office. All foreigners must report their presence in the country every three months, which gave me a brief break of three or four days, after which I would start a new retreat.

Eight-Precept Nuns

Despite being in my room all day and hardly ever talking, I became aware of the difference between the nuns and the monks. Wat Ram Poeng is a good place for nuns—everyone works two weeks and has two weeks off for meditation, unless one decides to work full-time. That is so for the monks and the nuns. In general, the mae chees are treated well and with respect, and Ajahn Suphan encourages them to practice meditation or to study Dhamma. In many other places mae chees are merely menial servants for the monks. They cook, clean, pay rent for the kuṭis in which they live, and sponsor the monks with the little money they receive. Mae chees are always dependent on monks. They can offer to monks and take a leading

role for the laywomen, but in many monasteries even the laymen go before the nuns, sit in front of nuns, and receive the food before them. Mae chees are not regarded as part of the Saṅgha, which in terms of Vinaya is correct, but they are not told or taught to have their own saṅgha.

After some time of strict retreat, I acquired a mobile phone with internet access and got in contact with Ayyā Tathālokā in America. I had read the Bhikkhunī Pātimokkha and had questions about it, so we communicated and she cleared up my questions. My urgency to become a female monk grew, and during meditation interviews I would speak with Ajahn Suphan about it, sometimes crying. I knew that Ajahn would have long since given me bhikkhunī ordination if only it had been possible.

Land of Infinite Possibilities

I received an invitation to come to America and stay with the community at Araññā Bodhi Hermitage near Jenner, California—not an invitation to ordain, but at least get to know each other and see what would happen. Ajahn Suphan dismissed me, granting me leave to come back to resume meditation at Wat Ram Poeng even if I returned as a bhikkhunī.

Since I had been living like a novice monk and sāmaṇerī observing ten precepts, I was considered to have already fulfilled the preliminary sāmaṇerī training. I had been continuously observing the eight and then the ten precepts, wearing the dark brown robe and had been trained like a monk, because I had this strong aspiration to live as a bhikkhunī.

Shortly after I arrived at the bhikkhunīs' hermitage, Araññā Bodhi, I was offered and formally undertook the sāmaṇerī pabbajjā and took dependency on my bhikkhunī preceptor, Ayyā Tathālokā, to whom

I will ever be grateful. I had the joy to finally wear the patchwork saffron robe. I memorized and rehearsed the bhikkhunī ordination formulas, but even until shortly before the full ordination I was not sure whether it would really happen for me. I was weak from having had several bacterial, amoebic, and intestinal parasite infections, which had been cured but left me malnourished. Sometimes I felt too weak to do the daily chores or to walk up and down the hill, but the prospect of becoming a bhikkhunī enabled me to keep going. When finally I was told that I would be ordained, the prospect of becoming a bhikkhunī made me the happiest nun in the world. After the ordination, one of my fellow bhikkhunīs asked what it meant to me and I said, "It is just the next logical step. It feels right."

Land of Smiles

When I returned to Wat Ram Poeng in Thailand, I was allowed to go in the piṇḍapāta line after the bhikkhus but before the sāmaṇeras (male novices), with sufficient room before and behind me. At first the bhikkhunīs would sit in front of the mae chees, but on the floor facing the monks or on chairs in the back. After a while, we were invited to sit at the same level as the monks on the podium, on the opposite side of the Buddha statue. After a brief hesitation, the mae chees fully accepted my new status, as they understood I was a friend and was always helpful to them whenever possible.

Often women who stayed at the monastery to practice meditation would knock on my door and offer food. Sometimes they would weep with joy to see a woman in the ochre robes. Then there were others who would stare at me as if they had seen a unicorn. Sometimes people—both lay and monastic—would tell me it is impossible to revive the Bhikkhunī Order, although most times people would just rejoice. Some monks were so happy that the fourfold assembly was now complete again, that I was brave enough to "live the impossible," and that I made it possible for bhikkhus to

practice their own Pātimokkha in full now. On only two occasions did I encounter monks who were angry at my being a bhikkhunī. Never am I regarded as just something normal—it is always controversial, though my impression is that most people I've met are pro-bhikkhunī.

At the time of this writing I was living in Baan Khun Pang, a tiny mountain village in the north of Chiang Mai Province and many miles off the beaten track. It was peaceful there, beautiful, and poor—or better said, simple—and one can live and practice the Buddha's teachings. But even there it was controversial as to whether I was really a bhikkhunī or not. Those who thought that I was were in the majority and they invited me to stay there a long time by offering to build a kuṭi for me. Twice it happened that monks came to stay in the mountain hermitage for short periods, and while there tried to convince the villagers that bhikkhunīs no longer exist and all that. I became afraid that the villagers would demand I leave, but then to my great surprise, they instead ordered the monks to go somewhere else. It seems that they were as tired of the controversy as I was.

It is still a struggle, and there is a long way to go before bhikkhunīs will be as common as bhikkhus. But there is hope.

Since writing, Ayyā Phalañāṇī received wide acceptance from local Thai people and was asked to support the management of the monastery at Wat Pah Mieang Khun Pang. Not long after, she received invitation to return to Germany and assume the position of abbess at Aneñja Vihāra. She is presently training aspirants for bhikkhunī ordination. This effort brings her hopes for growth in the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha closer to fruition.

Bhikkhunī Ānandabodhī

Ayyā Ānandabodhī first encountered the Buddha's teachings in her early teens, igniting a deep interest in the Buddha's path of awakening. From 1992 she lived and trained as a nun in the Thai Forest tradition of Ajahn Chah and Ajahn Sumedho at Amarāvatī and Cittaviveka (Chithurst Buddhist Monastery) in England. She moved to the United States in 2009 to help establish Āloka Vihāra, a training monastery for women, with the intention to create supportive conditions for the monastic Saṅgha to grow.

She values the qualities of simplicity, renunciation, and respect for the natural world. Her practice and teaching are guided by the early Buddhist scriptures and nature's pure and immediate Dhamma. In 2011, she received full bhikkhunī ordination, joining the growing number of women reclaiming this path given by the Buddha.

The year of this publication, 2019, finds Ayyā Ānandabodhī's growing monastic community at Āloka Vihāra Forest Monastery in the northern California Sierra foothills of Placerville celebrating their ten-year anniversary.

Process of Awakening

Bhikkhunī Ānandabodhī

The great compassionate gift of the Buddha was to open a way to liberate us from this realm of saṃsāra, this constant movement toward pleasure and away from pain. Through his teaching, the Buddha is trying to help us understand more clearly the mistake we are making in seeing what is in constant flux as permanent or self, and seeking lasting satisfaction in that which is always changing. He pointed out the truth of the way things are so we can be free from this compulsion of moving away from the present to some idea of a future happiness greater than what we can experience here and now. He is pointing us back to Dhamma—it's apparent here and now. Always there is the Dhamma—right here—and that teaching reveals itself in the constantly changing nature of things.

When we look carefully, we can see this directly—it's like watching a movie. We become interested in the characters and our emotions are swayed by the love story or drama, but if we stop and look, we see that the whole story is made up of lots of little pixels and there is no real substance to it. Our lives are like that. What we take to be "me and mine" is like that. It's these ever-changing elements.

One way of looking at this sense of "being me" is to see it like a river. We name rivers. We say, "This is the Hudson River," but what is the Hudson River? Can we pin it down actually? If we see it one week and then go back a week later, because the water is constantly flowing, is it the same river? Do the banks make the river or is it just

the water? Does it include the riverbed? Where does the river begin and end? We can't find a point where the river starts and stops. There is a time when the river is sweet water, then it's brackish water, and then it becomes part of the ocean, and can no longer be designated as "river." It's a process.

Our lives are like this too. Consider birth: first there's the egg and sperm, then fertilization of the egg. Next comes the forming of cells growing into a fetus in the mother's womb, then being born and going through the process of growth, if the conditions are right. Then the process of growing and changing that never stops. On it goes: this ever-changing process. The breath is part of that. It's also constantly changing. The food we put in our bodies is different every day. Part of that food becomes what we call "me" and part of it becomes what we don't want to think about. This is going on all the time, constantly. Then at one point, there will be a final exhalation for this lifetime—we call that dying—but the process goes on. In a natural state, the body would return to the earth and start to break down, and creatures would move in and help with the breaking down of the body's form. The life process is continuing in a way that we would not necessarily think of as "me," but it's still going on. The body becomes part of the earth again, nourishment for trees, flowers, and grass, and on it goes. This is what we call "me and mine."

By grasping this idea of "me and mine," we make life much more difficult for ourselves than it needs to be. On an ultimate level, there is just a process going on of feelings, thoughts, perceptions, sensory experiences through the six sense doors, and the body—the body as a process. And then there's the attachment to that as "me and mine." The practice is about learning to find the right relationship to this process. If we go to the ultimate level, say there is no self, everything is impermanent, and attach to those ideas, then we can become aloof and disconnected—I've seen

this in monasteries. It's often a phase people go through. No self, everything's impermanent, nothing matters—until something happens that brings us back down to earth, and we recognize there are a few more layers to work through.

Understanding impermanence is not meant to lead to a feeling of indifference or aloofness, but to an understanding of the way things are. When we tune into this moment and recognize there's never going to be another moment like this, then it's the most precious thing. We feel bright, sharp, and alert. This is it. This is life, now. Wow! It's not a mental concept we place on top of experience. It's about sharpening attention and seeing the changing nature of things.

Understanding the impermanent nature of all things and seeing our own clinging and craving, we can't help but feel compassionate, because life is messy and complicated and there is kamma arising. We think we know where we're going or what we're going to do, and then we lose our job, fall in love, or experience an earthquake. Then suddenly everything changes, and that nice, neat trajectory we thought we were on just isn't going to work anymore.

In the practice, we're developing the capacity to be with things just as they are. Sometimes that means recognizing we are firmly attached and not able to let go. When there is attachment to a person, idea, or outcome—just to know that. When we read the books, the path looks very clear, a map of different stages of insight, and yet in life, in my experience, even as a nun, the challenges come from all sides. We have to learn to follow our own wisdom and intuition. We'd all like to have some devoted guru lead us by the hand, step by step: "Show me how to become enlightened! Lead me by the hand and show me what to do when things get difficult." The Buddha is pointing the way and saying, "You can get on with it. Nobody is going to do it for you. Even if they wanted to, they can't."

We have to apply wisdom and compassion in our practice and not get caught up in a cold concept of the Dhamma or get stuck in the sense of self, because that will arise again and again. Just keep bringing up the reminder that this sense of "me" is a process. We can name ourselves—I do. This Ānandabodhī is a process—Ānandabodhī-ing—that's what is going on. If I have an idea of myself as a somebody, then I've got an idea of what I should be and how I should manifest in the world, how I should overcome all the things that aren't great in the world or in myself, and that's a stuck position. If I can just allow this process and not try to be somebody with a particular outcome, then it can just be what it is. There will be times when it's inspiring, fun, wonderful, or insightful, and there will be times when it will be contracted, confused, maybe depressed—just know and allow the natural unfolding. If I'm blindly going through it, then I'm most likely repeating the same old habits, but if I bring attention to what's going on, then I start to understand a bit more clearly. I get those insights of, "Ah! This is arising because of that. This is caused by that!" In this way, I can unravel this conglomerate of self and guide the thoughts, speech, and behavior in a more skillful direction.

One of the important things to look at is identity view, the first of the three fetters to stream-entry (the other two fetters are the belief that if we do things in a particular way, such as following specific techniques or rituals, it will liberate us, and doubt in the Buddha, the teachings, and those who have stages of awakening on the path). If these fetters are broken through, there is clear insight into emptiness or a brief experiencing of the enlightened mind. That gives a deep confidence, leaving no more doubt. Even though there might be a lot more work to do—it's not that we are free of greed, hatred, or delusion yet—but we have seen through this conditioned realm enough to know what is real.

The most difficult fetter to overcome is the attachment to and identification with these processes—believing that the body,

feelings, thoughts, and perceptions are who and what we are or believing in our sense experience: "I must be here because I'm looking out and I can see you, and I can hear my voice, I can feel my body," and so on. People say, "Well, if I'm not the body, feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and I'm not sense consciousness, then what am I? Where am I?" That's a good question to ask. It's scary because if we can't believe in any of those things as who and what we are, then we can feel lost because we only know how to attach or how to be somebody.

To let go and just allow the process to unfold doesn't mean we lose our character. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has a warm and wonderful personality, and others with high levels of realization can have strong characters. It's not that we become bland; it's simply that we allow this kammic process to go on without adding to it, without attaching, and we also recognize when we're not able to do that. There's the intellectual understanding of the teaching and the (often humbling) reality of where we are on the path—we can allow that to be completely present. This doesn't mean we can't cultivate what is good. We need to cultivate generosity, loving-kindness, and compassion—this is very, very important. We cultivate wholesome qualities but not to become a perfect person. We're doing it as a support and as a gift to ourselves and to others. We make friends with what we've got and use it in a skillful way in the world.

On this path of practice, we have to be willing to turn and look honestly at what is going on inside. As with depression: we are not born sad or depressed, but due to conditions in life, we start shutting down. This is conditioned, so by being present and curious, we can start to gradually transform. This is a practice that leads to freedom and joy, though it may not always feel like it. Learning to be with feelings, we gradually work through more and more layers of conditioning. It's about knowing what is going on, becoming

intimate with our process, and not fighting it. Even things we believe are deeply part of who or what we are can be transformed through our presence, compassion, kindness, wisdom, and patience.

Bhikkhunī Santacittā

Ayyā Santacittā was born in Austria and did her graduate studies in Cultural Anthropology, focusing on dance, theatre and ritual. She also worked in avant-garde dance theatre as a performer and costume designer. In 1988 she met Ajahn Buddhadāsa in southern Thailand, who sparked her interest in Buddhist monastic life. She has trained as a nun in both the East and West since 1993, primarily in the lineage of Ajahn Chah, and has practiced meditation for over 30 years. Since 2002, she has also received teachings in the lineage of Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche.

Santacittā Bhikkhunī co-founded Āloka Vihāra Forest Monastery in 2009 and received bhikkhunī ordination in 2011. She is particularly interested in creating sanctuary close to nature and bringing wisdom traditions to the environmental movement.

In 2019, the monastic community Ayyā Santacittā co-founded a decade ago is well established and her Dhamma and meditation teaching are much appreciated in both America and Europe.

The Heart Wish

Bhikkhunī Santacittā

All experiences have liberation as their essence. When we turn toward our experience and stay steady with it, the path to liberation from suffering and ignorance opens up. That's a Dhamma gate, and any experience can become a Dhamma gate for us, if we really pay attention. When we step through such a Dhamma gate, when we step from the surface into the depths, things start to reveal their true nature. Some people step through that gate and walk the path, while others turn away and distract themselves with the million things on offer in the world. So who steps through and who does not step through? What is the deciding factor?

Having a clear motivation is the secret. In the Pāli Canon, a teaching called the four *iddhipāda*, the four bases of spiritual power or spiritual success, speaks about harnessing our life energy in the service of our motivation or aspiration, in the service of what matters most to us. These four iddhipāda are applicable not only to our spiritual path but to any undertaking in life. A project, for example, goes through these same phases. I'd like to present this teaching in relationship to my own path, and I hope it will be helpful for your path.

My deepest motivation—which I didn't even know I had—became conscious quite unexpectedly. While studying cultural anthropology in my twenties, I ventured to Asia and found myself

on a train in Burma in the heat of May 1988. Looking out of the window while in a station, I saw some monks about to board the train. A large group of people were bowing to the monks on the dirty platform. These people's devotion struck me deeply; it was awesome to watch. I kept observing the monks, who had taken seats in the same carriage as me. Most people were going crazy because of the heat, but the monks were sitting there very calmly, not doing anything much, just sitting and sitting and sitting for eight or ten hours. My admiration for their equanimity increased by the hour, because it was really hard to endure the heat. Somehow, they were able to cope with those difficult conditions much better than anyone else in the carriage, including myself. I didn't know what it was, but the quiet strength they had resonated deeply in my heart and began percolating. That experience etched itself into my mind.

This was an example of the first iddhipāda, *chanda*, which is a passionate interest, an enthusiasm, a desire to manifest something of value, the archetype of the lover, a heart wish. That's what arose in me when I saw all those people bowing to the monks, and then the monks sitting in the heat on the train in a way that was awesome to me, because I could have never done it myself. This experience awakened in me a vision of a different way of living. I too wanted to be like that. Even though I didn't know how, it was clear it was possible, because those monks were doing it. A strong desire arose in me to find out the secret those monks had. That's chanda.

Over the next year of my travels, I kept remembering the quiet strength of those monks, wondering when the right moment would come—when I would have an opportunity to find out more about their "secret." Less than a year after recognizing my heart wish, I ended up in the monastery of Ajahn Buddhadāsa, a Forest master in the south of Thailand. As soon as I met him, I recognized that

very same quality I had seen in the monks the year before in Burma. I felt a strong attraction toward spending time in his presence, wanting to understand what he so obviously already understood. I did some retreats for Westerners at his monastery. Even though I didn't know much English or Thai then, it didn't matter; Ajahn Buddhadāsa transmitted his understanding simply by his presence. I understood directly, without words, on the level of the heart. In Thailand, they have a special word for that kind of understanding: *thorachit*, meaning something like "heart connection."

Especially in the beginning, these experiences felt quite strange, elating, and rather disconcerting at the same time, because my old way of life, my old way of seeing things, was starting to break down. I was torn between wanting to be more like Ajahn Buddhadāsa, wanting to know more, versus returning to my familiar life. To make a long story short, there were a few years of struggle, back and forth. This was the time when the next iddhipāda, *viriya*, became activated. Viriya is a courageous effort or energy, represented by the warrior archetype. It doesn't matter how many obstacles are in your way, you know what you want and you just go for it. During the struggle to leave my old life behind—a time of internal and external turmoil—I needed a one-pointed mind and a strong application of energy.

This energy kept me from being deterred and allowed me to manifest what I needed. I moved to live at Wat Suan Mokkh, the monastery of Ajahn Buddhadāsa, and by staying engaged in my struggle, it eventually became clear: I didn't want to live on the fringe of an Asian monastery; I needed to be in a spiritual community with other Westerners.

The next iddhipāda arose, *citta*. "Citta" means "heart" or "mind." Really, it's both—heart-mind. *Citta-iddhipāda* is the phase of integrating all the efforts made before. In 1992, I moved to Amarāvatī

Monastery in England, where there was a nuns' community, the Sīladhārā Order, and the American monk and teacher Ajahn Sumedho—Buddhist monasticism adapted for Westerners. It had taken me more than four years to get there since seeing the monks on the train in Burma.

This phase was not so much a time of passion but more of devotion. First there was a strong vision or desire *(chanda)*, then a struggle against lots of obstacles to manifest that vision *(viriya)*, and now things were starting to gel and cool down. When I came to Amarāvatī in England—which had a whole setup for nuns, Western teachers, a wonderful library, and people I could easily discuss the Dhamma with—I felt a sense of relief. I was able to settle down and open myself more to the practice because there were no longer constant, huge obstacles. Now there was a certain amount of order in my life and the possibility to nurture my aspiration gently, to integrate it, and to align my life around it more organically. I finally ordained as a novice in the Sīladhārā Saṅgha in 1993. In terms of archetype, the citta phase can be compared to a king or queen creating order, no longer a warrior fighting. In an environment of relative peace, there is less agitation and one can go deeper into one's aspiration. For me, this phase lasted for quite a long time, over ten years.

Then the next phase arose, *vīmaṃsā-iddhipāda*. "Vīmaṃsā" means "investigation." Around 2006, I began to feel that my living situation was no longer in alignment with my original aspiration and I needed to be honest with myself to acknowledge what was going on. Vīmaṃsā is a time of fine-tuning, troubleshooting, adjustment, and reorientation, the magus or magician archetype. In the monastery where I'd lived for so long, where I'd learned so much and made so many good friends, I started to recognize strong limitations around what was offered to female monastics, who were not supported to take the full bhikkhunī ordination.

Initially, when I was still in a junior position, I didn't feel these limitations, but the longer I was in robes, the narrower my world became.

A new vision started to arise as a result of that reorientation: "I need to get out of here!" This brought me back to chanda-iddhipāda again. When I had seen the monks on the train platform in Burma, I had a sudden recognition of a different way of life, a life in full alignment with my deepest values. Now this was happening again. I didn't yet know where or how, but I knew something more must be possible for female monastics. Again, I was willing to hold that new vision in my heart. When the opportunity arises, I thought, I will jump for it just like I did before.

Soon, a new opportunity came in the form of a novice nun visiting Amarāvatī from California, encouraging us to accept an invitation from the Saranaloka Foundation to travel to the West Coast. A few of us decided to go and after that initial visit, we were invited to return and start a nuns' training monastery in the United States. The warrior phase, *viriya-iddhipāda*, began for our little group as we faced the struggles around leaving Amarāvatī and moving to San Francisco. But we managed. After some time in America together with Ayyā Ānandabodhī, it became clear to us what would be sustainable and create order, the citta-iddhipāda phase. We recognized that people wanted women to have the same opportunities as men, which meant full ordination as bhikkhunīs. The two of us adjusted to this new input, and working with vīmaṃsā-iddhipāda, left the Sīladhārā Order of our old lineage and became bhikkhunīs in 2011.

These four iddhipāda describe an ongoing process of developing and deepening one's path. "Chanda-iddhipāda" is the enthusiasm that arises when we trust our heart wish as our guide. It's a faith in Dhamma that goes beyond belief and beyond doubt. If we have

a fixed plan and believe we have to hold on to it, that doesn't work. If we are constantly in doubt about whether what we are doing is the right thing, that doesn't work either. To sum it up, awakening to one's potential without a clear motivation—this is not possible. It's vital to get in touch with our heart wish. What do we really want to do with our life?

Choosing to live our heart wish gives us the energy—viriya-iddhipāda or courageous effort—to turn toward experience and learn from it. It supports our capacity to be with ambiguity and uncertainty, to be strong enough to know what to do, one step at a time. We don't have to be able to see the whole path, because that's not possible anyway. We can bear with the dissonance that arises, remembering that it doesn't matter that much what happens in life, but rather, how we meet it. We stay steady and don't collapse when there are challenges and obstacles.

Next, we begin to arrange our life around our heart wish—the citta-iddhipāda phase—creating order and integrating chanda and viriya. A new way of living one's life starts to become established.

And finally, we investigate—vīmaṃsā-iddhipāda—whether we are still in tune with our heart wish. That investigation repeats itself again and again, taking one ever deeper into manifesting one's potential, internally and externally. And if the situation is not good enough anymore, if our lives are not in alignment with our heart wish, then a new vision has to—and will—arise.

Our aspiration to practice can only flourish fully if we stay in tune with our heart wish. For me, my heart wish became more conscious when I saw those monks on the train in Burma and through meeting Ajahn Buddhadāsa in Thailand. It was the unshakeability of the heart they embodied that resonated so deeply with my own capacity to develop that same quality. Because only that which is fully aligned

with our heart wish, our central motivation, is strong enough to pull us through a Dhamma gate, to open up the path.

There is no shortage of Dhamma gates in our lives; we just need to remember that all dhammas, all experiences, have liberation as their essence and then respond from that knowing, supported by our heart wish.

Bhikkhunī Dhammadhīrā

Ayyā Dhammadhīrā grew up in southern California. After receiving her BA in social sciences and MA in education, she worked as a school teacher for ten years. Upon learning more about Buddhism and experiencing significant life changes, in 2001 she entered monastic life in England. For eleven years she trained at Amarāvatī and Chithurst Monasteries. In 2012, she returned to America and took bhikkhunī ordination at Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihāra in Los Angeles. Since then, she has practiced at various monasteries in the western United States. She lives in Colorado and is part of a newly emerging community called Web of Connection.

The Challenge of Change

Bhikkhunī Dhammadhīrā

When I first entered the monastery, I had an intuitive sense of what I would be facing in my life as a nun. I remember drawing a picture of two feet standing on a patch of earth as it crumbled in front of me. The caption below the drawing read, "Let this ground fall away from beneath my feet, for all ways of imagination are incomplete." I had no idea at the time how this was going to play out in my life but over the years, this truth would re-emerge in unmistakable ways. Each time I thought I had arrived at something solid and dependable, the ground would shift and become unstable. The problem wasn't that conditions weren't reliable, but that I had expected them to be.

The Buddha teaches that uncertainty is one of the three fundamental marks of existence. It is the key to understanding the other two marks—unsatisfactoriness and non-self, because it is impossible to find lasting satisfaction in what is constantly changing, and we can't claim what is out of our control as being our own. Psychologists tell us that the number one cause of stress in the lives of individuals is the uncontrollable change we experience. Losing a job or a relationship, aging, sickness, and death are but a few challenges we will face in our lives. If our health improves or we find a better job, we consider these changes to be favorable. Hence, uncertainty is not the problem. Rather, it is that we prefer certain outcomes over others.

There are many ways we try to protect ourselves from life's unpredictability, but most give only a temporary or false sense of security. Instead of dealing with the underlying fear and anxiety we harbor in our body and mind, we often cover them over with activities, busying and distracting ourselves from the inconvenient and uncomfortable aspects of existence. We manage situations we find difficult by coming up with plans and strategies aimed at ensuring that the future is more secure or just relying on habit and routine to give us a sense of control and order in our lives. We try to armor ourselves against what we perceive to be threatening in our environment, be it physical intrusions or the complexities of interpersonal relationships. Being unsure of what's coming around the corner, we build up our defenses, construct policies, check our ammunition, and get the backups in place. This seems logical, but it puts us on hyperalert. In trying to safeguard against our vulnerability, we are actually adding stress to our lives.

While acknowledging our various coping strategies, it is important that we don't judge them. To some degree, we need external situations to provide us with a sense of security. As long as our world doesn't change significantly, we know our place in it. We have a sense of belonging and meaning, affirming who we are. Research has shown that a safe environment is essential for the healthy development of children and that lacking this support affects us into our adult lives. It is difficult, if not impossible, to meditate on higher truths if our physical or emotional well-being feels threatened. Even as mature adults, there are times in our lives when we get re-traumatized by events. Something happens that pierces right into the tender spot we thought we had protected.

The process of meditation itself can allow old emotional disturbances to surface once again. Here it is important not to ignore what is happening or to interpret it in elevated terms that bypass our felt experience. Instead, we need to allow the feelings

to surface, to be known and held in awareness. With gentleness and kindness, we can embrace unwanted emotions rather than demanding that we pull ourselves together to meet expectations of what a spiritual practitioner "should" be experiencing. Contrary to what we are conditioned to believe, there's no need to improve on anything, including ourselves.

Being present with whatever arises in our minds and hearts can be very uncomfortable. There can be a sense of helplessness or despair when we don't have control over what we are experiencing. Having no guarantee we will be able to cope with what comes next can feel more threatening than if a tiger were standing in front of us. Understandably, our reaction would be to distance ourselves from this perceived threat by running in the opposite direction, distracting ourselves, fighting what we take to be the enemy, or numbing out. Unfortunately, these strategies don't solve any of our problems.

We can employ mindfulness of the breath and body to bring attention to the present moment. When watching our breath, we do it without trying to change the length or depth of our inhalations and exhalations. We just allow the breath to be as it is. Likewise, when we encounter unpleasant feelings, we can apply the same approach. By allowing what is arising to be held within a space of awareness, we are not caught in the scenarios that the mind conjures up. When we breathe into any physical or emotional knot, we will find it is not only bearable but transient, and thus not who we really are. In just this much, we have found a refuge wherein we can stay with the changing nature of physical and mental phenomena.

It is common to come to a point in our lives where we feel we are at a crossroads. For some reason, we are unable to continue in the same direction. Unfortunately, the way forward is not always

obvious. Confusion, desire, and aversion can color our perception, making it impossible to rely on our own thought processes. We may see several options in front of us while not knowing which of them is the right one. Fear of making the wrong choice can be highly stressful if we think in terms of duality and absolutes. We can feel stuck or trapped by our circumstances, but at the same time unable to move out of them. Many factors contribute to our ambiguity, such as the expectations of others, what is seen as culturally acceptable, or our sense of duty and obligation. We can reason for days, months, or even years and still not arrive at an answer that satisfies all these competing demands. Ultimately, making skillful decisions requires that we let go of the perfect outcome and be willing to face whatever may come from our best intentions. Through struggling with this process repeatedly, I'm gradually coming to trust that no matter what I choose, I will have the opportunity to learn the lessons that will free the heart.

As we let go of clinging to what is familiar, it is natural to experience vulnerability. Rather than immediately scrambling to gain some ground of certainty, can we courageously be with what is exposed and unresolved? To the rational mind, welcoming unwanted emotions such as fear seems contrary to our well-being. Here, it is important to discern whether the unpleasant feeling is due to a real or imagined threat. In other words, do the present conditions allow us to engage in the process of waking up to the way things are or is our well-being compromised beyond our capacity to cope skillfully? A heroic stance is not always the most skillful response. Our intuitive sense is more trustworthy than relying on the ideals handed down to us. Wise friends may offer support and provide helpful advice, but ultimately we must come back to the integrity within our own heart.

Finally having made a choice, we may battle with doubt or regret, wondering whether it was the right thing to have done. If our

context changes significantly, there can be a sense of dislocation, providing no place for "me" to exist in its familiar way. The forms we take, the roles we play, and the relationships we have with others are all ways we define ourselves as a person. When these change, we can feel adrift on a sea without an anchor or safe harbor in sight. Some would view this as an existential crisis to be corrected, but seen in the light of Dhamma, it is precisely at this point we are at the threshold of a deeper understanding. Instead of creating a new identity by clinging to different forms, roles, and relationships, we could feel what it is like to rest in the gap where things are unformed. If we are able to patiently be with our experience, we will discover a stability and strength beyond the limitations of who we once perceived ourselves to be. In doing so, an unbounded space opens to reveal the underlying wholeness of life. Just this is the ever-present ground beneath our feet.

Bhikkhunī Dīpā
1955 – 2014

After several years of practicing in Springfield, Missouri and spending a year as a novice at the Bhāvanā Society, **Ayyā Dīpā** moved to California in search of a place where she could continue her monastic life. She met Ayyā Guṇasārī in the desert and took pabbajjā on December 13, 2009. She later took bhikkhunī ordination at Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihāra in Los Angeles on October 22, 2012.

Ayyā Dīpā lived in the quiet desert environment at Mahāpajāpatī Women's Monastery near Yucca Valley, California. In her final months, after receiving her medical diagnosis, her calm acceptance of pain and impending death was inspiring.

Going Nature's Way

Bhikkhunī Dīpā

There were many difficult experiences early in my life. There was enough suffering to cause me to search for happiness. My search, like the search of so many others, led to all the wrong places. Having exhausted the wrong places and having found they only increased the suffering, I began to be open to a way out. This opening to a way out allowed me to see there were other alternatives to the way I had been living.

November 17, 1984, is my sobriety birthday. I trace all the good that has since come to me to that critical turning point. Beginning on that day, I could practice the five precepts of a lay Buddhist. Later, around 1990, a Buddhist group was formed in Springfield, Missouri, where I lived. This was another turning point, as it was there I was shown a copy of *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*. When I read the lines, "Thus have I heard. Once the Lord was staying at Rājagaha, at the Squirrel's Feeding Place in the Bamboo Grove," I discovered what I found lacking in Zen Buddhism, namely, the history, the story of the Buddha's life and teaching. The earthiness of the name, "Squirrel's Feeding Place," spoke to me in a way that stories of *Mu* and the sound of one hand clapping never could. From that point on, I became an avid reader of the discourses of the Buddha.

The things I perceive as challenging can sometimes motivate me. It has mostly to do with my perception of whether what I am

facing is something I can rely on the Dhamma to help me with. Death is center stage in the Buddha Dhamma, so there is much to be learned from the process.

Having recently learned I have fourth-stage lung cancer that has spread to the spine, adrenal glands, and possibly the liver, I am giving thought to what is happening now and what is important to give attention to. I spend a lot of time just being aware of the body and how it feels. Sometimes when it really feels bad, I focus on a part of the body that isn't in pain. For example, when my back is in pain, I switch my attention to my hand, which isn't in pain. It does work. However, it is a lot more challenging to focus on the body when it is in pain, because often there is aversion to how it feels. Sometimes, I just want to sleep to get away from the pain. When I first started meditating, I would sit right through the pain even to the point of fainting. I'm not going to put myself through that again because I know it is not helpful for me. Now mindfulness comes naturally to me, almost automatically. I can be sitting here and just be mindful of the feet on the ground or my hand on the table. When I get tired of sitting, I may do walking meditation.

I don't know what will come in the future. I have been told I may have six to eight months left to live. I am just trying to take care of small tasks related to winding up this life. I don't have much energy as a result of the cancer, so I rest more and that seems good to me. I don't feel driven at this point. I will deal with whatever life and death offers as it comes. It has been much easier to let go, now that I know I don't have much longer to live. I feel like I have permission now to relax. I'm glad I'm not focusing on the mundane things I used to focus on, such as the duties involved in running the monastery. After having spent so much time feeling I had to be responsible, I now have a chance to rest and take it easy. Getting sick is bittersweet because people are so kind when you're

sick. I feel grateful this has happened, really, because it allows me to appreciate how nice people are and it makes it easier for me to be nice back. It kind of snowballs. Being in a Buddhist environment certainly helps. So many people have called or written to tell me they are chanting for me. People don't express themselves as much if you're not sick. Possibly for the first time in my whole life, my brother and my two sisters actually expressed on the phone that they love me. I came from a really rough background and spent so much of my life fighting everybody and everything. When we're little, we can more easily say, "I love you, Mommy," but then over the years it changes.

I'm very grateful to have this opportunity to interact in a soft and gentle way. I also feel gratitude for living in this monastery. We're living in a quiet and undisturbed way and people are bringing us food. We haven't had to go without. It's a fortunate thing to be in a situation where people genuinely care.

I've been living at Mahāpajāpatī Monastery for nearly five years and have gotten to know Ayyā Guṇasārī pretty well. She is a dear friend. I feel as close to her as if she were my mother and have no fear of her. Even when we do things the other doesn't like, we both know we care about each other and that's the main thing that matters. I can do things that show familiarity and require mutual trust. It's been a gradual process because I didn't have a tendency to trust people easily. My tendency in the past was to not get close to anybody, to be aloof and cut off. I found it very difficult to understand how people could get close to each other. When I came to this monastery, it was different because there were just the two of us for much of the time. It allowed a closeness unlike any I had previously known. In the past, I lived alone and was content to have superficial relationships, like just waving at the UPS man. Going from being such a hermit to being around people has been a huge learning curve for me. At times, I found

encounters with others to be excruciatingly painful, and this is partly why I avoided them.

One of the things I've noticed lately is that it's been easier to direct my mind to stay positive. I've been trying to consciously pay attention to skillful ways of thinking. Our mind-state is always important, but even more so as we come close to dying. When Bhante Guṇaratana called me in the hospital, one thing he said was, "Keep your mind peaceful and calm. Don't let it get agitated." So I'm trying to give attention to that.

Also, I can give attention to the good things I have done. Reflecting on our virtue is one of the contemplations the Buddha recommended to bring up joy and happiness. Even though I'm not perfect, my virtue is much better than what it was when I was a teenager. I'm keeping the precepts and not doing anything immoral. I do feel good about where I've come to and being able to ordain as a bhikkhunī. It's not an ego thing but a recognition of progress.

Experiencing the results of walking this path is what sustains me. Knowing that I suffer much less now than I did thirty, twenty, or even ten years ago gives me confidence. I started from an un-integrated way of being. In the past, I would go along with whatever other people valued because I wanted to be liked. This began to change when I got sober at age thirty. I adopted the principles of willingness, honesty, and open-mindedness hoping sobriety would lead to my happiness. It was a practical thing. As an alcoholic, I had gone down a dark road of losing self-respect because of the things I would do when I was drinking. Getting sober and going to meetings was the beginning of a process whereby I could become an integrated person, somebody I could feel better about. I had already discovered the Buddha's teachings, but I needed to get sober so I could gradually care

enough about myself to make choices that would result in my own happiness.

Old habits don't magically go away, though. They are ingrained to react and do what is familiar. Seeing things with distorted perception can give rise to jealousy, fear, or feeling unliked. Becoming a bhikkhunī and keeping all the rules was a way for me to maintain a life of integrity.

Sometimes, too much emphasis on being impeccable arose out of fear of losing my integrity. Integrity means a lot to me because I used to not have it. At one point, I was caring more about what others thought. Later, I swung to the other extreme to where I didn't care much what others thought. Now I can be aware of the Dhamma and keep coming back to what feels true and right instead of the old stories or what I imagine people are thinking about me.

The opportunity to be with nature brings me much joy. On most mornings, my walk through the sandy wash led me to a place where I would sit in meditation. To begin with, I would sit with my eyes closed for as long as it felt helpful. After a while, I would open my eyes and look around, appreciating the environment and the stillness. I like looking at the blue sky, the mountains, the plants and lizards, seeing a hummingbird sitting still on a Joshua tree, or hearing the sound of a raven's wings as it soared over my head.

When I'm gone, there will still be rabbits in the desert. Everything doesn't have to be colored by the heaviness of death. Our culture tells us that death is bad, something to keep away from, but it's still here even if we don't want to see it. When I see the animals, I reflect that they won't be affected by my passing. They'll just continue doing their thing. Looking at nature helps to put things in perspective. Instead of "my" life being everything, I can see

there is a larger scene that doesn't center on me. Life keeps happening: there is birth, aging, sickness, and death, and the way beyond it all.

Adapted from an interview with Ayyā Dīpā conducted by Ayyā Dhammadhīrā on June 19, 2014. Ayyā Dīpā passed away July 18, 2014.

Bhikkhunī Santussikā

Ayyā Santussikā grew up in Indiana, raised two children, and was a software designer and engineer before ordaining as a bhikkhunī in the Theravāda tradition. She began meditation practice in the 1970s, but didn't meet up with the Dhamma until 1998, when her son moved to Thailand to become a monk in the Ajahn Chah lineage of the Thai Forest tradition. Through many visits to see her son in the monasteries in Thailand, she was able to learn from master teachers, and her faith and understanding of the Dhamma developed.

She entered monastic life as an anāgārikā in 2005 and trained at the original Dhammadhāriṇī Vihāra in Fremont, California, Cittaviveka (Chithurst Buddhist Monastery) and Amarāvatī in the UK, and Āloka Vihāra in San Francisco. In 2012, Ayyā Santussikā co-founded Karunā Buddhist Vihāra in Mountain View, California, where she lives with bhikkhunī Ayyā Cittānandā. She teaches Dhamma as it applies to life experience and for several years served on the board of Buddhist Global Relief.

The Good Life

Bhikkhunī Santussikā

She came to California when she was twenty-two, newly married, without much English, leaving her family behind in Vietnam. She worked hard, finished beauty school, and started her own business. Over the years she gave birth to two daughters and brought her mother to live with them. Every day she would go to work and take care of the needs of her husband, daughters, and mother. Every night, no matter how late it was, she would chant, bow, and pray.

Her love and devotion for the Buddha held the central theme of her life. The Dhamma provided the operating principles for all her interactions. She never asked her employees, whom she called "my friends," to clean the bathroom. That was her job. When the customers came in who gave big tips, she gave those to "her friends." When the difficult ones came in, she served them herself. If a customer was unsatisfied, after having done all that could be done, she would say, "You don't have to pay." Her rule was to leave every interaction in a good way. After all, you never know if this is the last time you will see this person.

Being kind, honest, and fair were much more important than making money. She always said, "I don't care about the money; that isn't important." But money came anyway, and she used it to look after her family, her friends, and to give to the poor people back home and to the temple. When the husband of one of her friends fell ill, making it impossible for her friend to come to

work, she paid her as if she were there. Her friend said, “But I didn’t work those days.” She told her, “That doesn’t matter. I will pay you anyway.”

Sometimes they would ask her, “How can you be so patient when people are so mean?” She would tell them about the Buddha and Kuan Yin Bodhisattva. She clearly knew who was kind and who wasn’t, who was generous and who was stingy, but that did not change how she behaved. She would say, “That is not my problem.”

Being in her presence was like breathing fresh air. She knew how to live the good life. Of all the things human beings strive for, what really leads to true happiness? We can work hard all our lives, grounded in the work ethics, thinking we are doing the right things, and end up wondering what it was all for.

I have a friend who is ninety-six years old. Married for sixty-eight years, his wife has recently been moved to a facility for people with Alzheimer’s disease. He misses her terribly. The apartment and the bed seem so large and empty. Even though it was becoming so difficult to live with her, it still seems better than living without her. He asks me, “So this is how it ends?”

Would an adequate answer to his question be the achievement model, a life of working toward results: diplomas, accolades, awards, promotions, trophies, the accomplishments they represent, and finally, a grand eulogy? Or would an answer to his question be the amusement park model, continually moving from one fun or exciting experience to the next, until the body can’t do it anymore and then what’s left—memories and photographs?

It’s not that any of these things are bad, but something more is needed. The truly good life is founded on moral precepts. Again

and again, people come to the temple with confusion and stress and sometimes tragedies born of heedlessness. Taking up the precepts brings stability, a way forward in healing, and newfound happiness.

It is inspiring to know that the Dhamma brings such positive results and also offers so much more. When we make realization and application of the Dhamma the core objective of our lives, we develop the ability to remain stable and deeply happy through all the gain and loss, pleasure and pain, and praise and blame that life brings. Our peace and stability develop naturally through using the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path as our map and manual for the good life.

You might have thought I'd say that the bhikkhunī life is the good life. It certainly can be, but ordaining is not a guarantee. It really depends on what we do with body, speech, and mind. If, as a bhikkhunī, I work so much that my time on the cushion is spent mulling over to-do lists and conversations, then I need to focus more time and energy on Dhamma. This is what the bhikkhunī life can be and should be and is, if we make the right effort.

This is just as true for lay life. What are your first thoughts when you wake up in the morning? What topics play and replay as you drive, rest, or meditate? What can we do to place the Dhamma on the center stage of our lives, so that it is the Dhamma that arises spontaneously in every situation, even in our dreams?

Here are the Buddha's suggestions from Sutta 95 (Cankī Sutta) of the *Middle Length Discourses*: Find a good teacher and investigate her with regard to whether she would ever, because of greed, hatred, or delusion, say "I know" when she doesn't know, or "I see" when she doesn't see, or might urge others to act in a way that would lead to their harm and suffering for a long time.

After thoroughly investigating and finding that she has no bodily or verbal behavior coming from greed, hatred, or delusion and that she teaches the true Dhamma, put faith in her. Filled with faith, visit her and pay respects to her. Listen attentively to her. Hear the Dhamma. Having heard the Dhamma, keep it in mind and examine the meaning of those teachings. When examining the meaning, you can come to agreement with those teachings. Being in agreement, zeal will spring up. Use that zeal as the fuel to apply your will and scrutinize. Exert yourself. Exerting yourself, you can both realize the ultimate meaning of the truth with the body and see it by penetrating it with discernment. Finally, you can attain the truth through cultivation, development, and pursuit of those very same qualities.

It is a life's work . . . or the work of many lifetimes. The good news is that the Buddha's teachings really are beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle, and beautiful in the end. So, our efforts pay off right from the beginning and the good life blossoms. In the end, we have more than a good pension or a grand eulogy, even more than treasured memories and photographs, and much more than the hard reality of loss and separation. We have the peaceful confidence that no matter what happens, no matter where this karmic stream that we have thought to be ourselves may go, there is nothing to fear, for we are living the good life.

Bhikkhunī Jāyatī

Ayyā Jāyatī was born in England in 1974.

Her first encounter with the Buddha's teachings was at the age of twelve while attending a retreat with the Trīratna Buddhist Community (formerly known as Friends of the Western Buddhist Order). Feeling a deep sense of resonance with the teachings on mettā, she made a commitment to cultivating this in her life. Continuing to attend retreats and developing a meditation practice increasingly became the most important reference points in her life.

This eventually led to her decision to ordain as a novice nun at Amarāvatī Monastery in 2007, to fully devote her energy to the practice.

After spending three and a half years in training at Amarāvatī and Cittaviveka (Chithurst Buddhist Monastery), she joined Ayyā Ānandabodhī and Ayyā Santacittā in the work of developing a Theravāda Buddhist monastic community for women. Having respectfully taken leave of the Sīladhārā Saṅgha, she moved to the United States in June 2012. In 2014, she was given bhikkhunī ordination at Āloka Vihāra with Ayyā Tathālokā as preceptor.

With five years as a bhikkhunī, 2019 finds Ayyā Jāyatī continuing her practice in her home country of England after winter pilgrimage with her bhikkhunī preceptor to sites of historical importance to bhikkhunīs in India and Nepal.

Reflections on Bhikkunī Ordination

Bhikkhunī Jāyatī

From a personal perspective, bhikkhunī ordination was something that in my earlier monastic years I had not even considered a possibility. The monasteries in England provided very good training in many ways, and there was a strong community of committed nuns and monks living a life of renunciation. I felt grateful to have found a place with teachings and a style of practice that provided me with the support I needed to live in a way so contrary to the culture of my birth. I felt so clearly that the conventional route to "success" wasn't the way to lasting peace or happiness. At that time, I have to admit being unable to really take in the disparity between the genders. It did indeed seem to me like things were "good enough" (an oft-used phrase in Amarāvatī for the practice of contentment) for the purposes of cultivating the path of Dhamma.

At the outset, monastic life was a tough journey for me, in those first couple of years especially. We often speak about how kamma ripens for people when they come to the monastery, and that was certainly true in my case. I trust that what I learned through my journey will be a resource that I hope will enable me to be of greater benefit to others who are suffering.

I feel blessed by the wonderful *kalyāṇamittas* (Dhamma friends) who were around to guide me and to offer a shoulder of support on the difficult days. I must make a special mention of Sister Sumedhā, without whom I don't think I would be here today—thank you, dear

sister, for your boundless patience and truly noble friendship. Also, Sister Thitamedhā, whose kindness and tender care were a blessing. There are so many others I could name here, but these two stand out, both for what they did for me and the deep impact it had on my sense of things when they, along with many other sisters, decided that the only way to maintain their deepest sense of integrity was to take leave of the nuns' community. Some chose to return to lay life, and others decided to continue to practice alone elsewhere with the support of kind lay friends.

It was during my third year as an anāgārikā (eight-precept novice) that there was an insistence for the nuns to agree to a mandate (the Five Points) that would cement their position as subordinate to the Bhikkhu Saṅgha and deny even the possibility of considering full bhikkhunī ordination. As much has been said on this matter already, it is not my intention to go over it all again; I merely wish to offer a personal reflection on why I chose to make the step to join the sisters in the US. The way forward at that time seemed so unclear; I had no doubt about the clarity of my intention to continue life as a nun, but now had some serious concerns about making that commitment in a place where so many of those I had been so inspired by were stepping out in protest at what was happening in the UK monasteries. It was hard to find perspective and I felt that some time away was greatly needed.

Around this time the possibility arose of visiting Āloka Vihāra in San Francisco. Nothing could have prepared me for the transformative effect of that visit. Seeing the nuns leading the community and offering teachings, and the amazing group of supporters being drawn to the vihāra awakened something in me. I realized that to return to Amarāvatī was now no longer something I could do with a full heart. It was with a clarity I had not felt for some time that I requested admission to join the sisters in the United States and was accepted.

Even with the many challenges of the work it takes on both the inner and outer level to establish a monastery, I still feel it's a precious offering in this world. As I was once advised: "You don't have to decide, the Dhamma will decide where you need to be." It's an ongoing lesson in trusting the process and living in accordance with what is being offered—this is so central to the renunciant life.

It has been a big adventure in many ways. It was not easy to leave my family in the UK, but I intuitively felt it would be a good exploration to step away from so many of my well-known "comfort zones" and feel the edge this could bring to my practice. I took novice ordination as a sāmaṇerī in 2012 and then made the request to take full ordination as a bhikkhunī after the required two years of novice training. It felt like a natural continuation of a path I had been walking for several years. Even before coming to live in a monastery, spiritual life was something I felt deeply called to. The Buddhist teachings have been a support throughout most of my life, since first attending a Buddhist retreat at the age of twelve.

The meaning of taking full ordination is something I'm still discovering and learning anew each day. I am not so surprised at the bond of connection I now feel with the present-day Bhikkhunī Saṅgha. I had not, however, expected it would bring such a clear feeling of connection with the ancient lineage of women who have also taken this step. I reflect upon the journey of Mahāpajāpatī and her unwavering determination to be granted the chance to live as one who has completely dedicated her life to follow the path of the awakened ones. It is inspiring for me to feel the sacred sense of responsibility that comes with keeping the way open for those who will come after me. I feel very blessed by those women who persevered with the nun's life, even in the face of so much adversity, both in the present day and historically.

My ordination on November 1, 2014, was truly a joyful day for our Saṅgha, with representatives from ten monasteries in attendance. I bow deeply to all those who were able to be there—thank you for your dedication and wisdom. My heart felt full of gratitude for all the love and blessings given in such abundance. It is something I know will energize my practice now and in the years ahead. I wish to also offer deep bows to the Sīladhārā Saṅgha in England, who hold an important role in establishing the nuns' Saṅgha in the West. I will always feel grateful for their generosity in helping me find my way in those first few years, and for giving me their heartfelt blessing when I took leave of the community in 2011.

As a final word, I pay homage to my bhikkhunī mentor, Ayyā Ānandabodhī. Her patient guidance, kindness, and faith have given me the strength to survive some of the most difficult internal struggles. Ayyā Ānandabodhī and Ayyā Santacitta's work to build and sustain a training monastery for women in the United States is something I have long felt inspired by. None of us could have imagined all that it would entail. It is an unfathomable undertaking and one we are still learning so much about daily. I know this is a rare opportunity and one I am grateful for. I experienced daily life as being both humbling and ennobling. Humbling, because I am so frequently seeing in the daily life of the community all the places within where I still have so much work to do. Ennobling because I am also learning that with practice, I have the choice to respond with compassion and a kind heart.

May all beings be safe and free from every kind of suffering.

Contact Information

Aloka Vihara Forest Monastery
Bhikkhuni Anandabodhi, Bhikkhuni Santacitta
2409 Tolowa Trail
Placerville, California 95667
USA
Phone: +1 (530) 647-8262
saranaloka.org

Anenja Vihara
Bhikkhuni Phalanyani
Morgen 6
D - 87549 Rettenberg
Germany
Phone: +49 (0) 8327 / 93 08 91
anenja-vihara.org

Aranya Bodhi Awakening Forest Hermitage
(Arañña Bodhi)
Bhikkhuni Tathaloka Mahatheri and Bhikkhuni Suvijjana
P.O. Box 16
Jenner, California 95450
USA
Message phone: +1 (707) 583-9522 or +1 (707) 583-9523
aranyabodhi.org

Awakening Truth
Amma Thanasanti
322 Ramona Avenue
Piedmont, California 94611
USA
Phone: +1 (719) 387-0700
awakeningtruth.org

Carolina Buddhist Vihara
Bhikkhuni Sudinna Theri
113 Woodridge Circle
Greenville, South Carolina 29607
USA
Phone: +1 (864) 329-9961
carolinabuddhist.net

Charlotte Buddhist Vihara
Bhikkhuni Sudhamma Theri
3423 Stonehaven Drive
Charlotte, North Carolina 28215
USA
charlottebuddhistvihara.org

Dhammadharini Monastery
(Dhammadhāriṇī Sonomagiri Bhikkhunī Ārāma)
Bhikkhuni Tathaloka Mahatheri and Bhikkhuni Suvijjana
6791 Sturtevant Drive
Penngrove, California 94951
USA
Phone: +1 (707) 583-9522 or +1 (707) 583-9523
dhammadharini.net

Dhammasara Nuns' Monastery
Bhikkhuni Hasapanna Theri
203 Reen Road
Gidgegannup WA 6083
Australia
Phone: (61-8) 9574 6583
bswa.org/location/dhammasara-monastery

Evergreen Metta Vihara Hall
Bhikkhuni Satima Theri
27193 Mesa Drive
Evergreen, Colorado 80439
USA

Karuna Buddhist Vihara
Bhikkhuni Santussika
260 W Dana St
Mountain View, California 94041
USA
Phone: +1 (650) 556-6427
karunabv.org

Mahapajapati Monastery
Bhikkhuni Gunasari Theri
Physical address:
3368 Chapparosa Road
Pioneertown, California 92268
USA

Mailing address:
P.O. Box 587
Pioneertown, California 92268
USA
Phone: +1 (760) 369-0460
mahapajapati.com

New Zealand Bhikkhuni Sangha Trust
Bhikkhuni Adhimutti
nz.bhikkhunitrust@gmail.com
bhikkhuni-sangha.org.nz

Patacara Bhikkhuni Hermitage
Bhikkhuni Vayama Theri and Bhikkhuni Seri Theri
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A Happy Married Life

A Buddhist Perspective

Ven. K Sri Dhammanada

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I Wonder Why

Ven. Thubten Chodron

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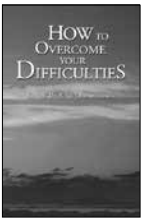


How to Overcome Your Difficulties

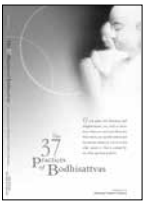
Ven. Dr. K. Sri. Dhammananda

Are you worried? Are you miserable? If so, you are invited to read this booklet to develop a better understanding of your problems. It is dedicated to you and to those who worry.

Seven Tips for a Happy Life

Ven. Thubten Chodron

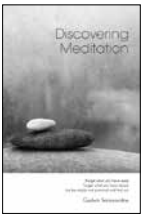
Venerable Thubten Chodron, founder and abbess of Sravasti Abbey (Washington State, USA) shared seven tips on how to lead a happy life with Buddhist youth in Singapore. Drawing on her personal experience, Ven Chodron offered several strategies that Buddhist youth can keep in mind to strengthen their practice and lead truly happy lives.



The 37 Practices of Bodhisattvas

Ven. Thubten Chodron

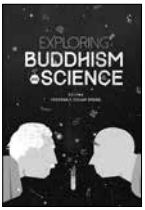
A Buddha is someone who has completely eliminated all defilements from the mind and developed all good qualities limitlessly. Buddhas are sources of all well-being and happiness because they teach us the Dharma and by practising that, we will eliminate all misery and create the causes for all happiness and peace. To accomplish the final goal of the teachings, we have to know what to practise, and thus this book will explain the practice of bodhisattvas. By doing these bodhisattva practices, we will become bodhisattvas, advance on the bodhisattva path, and eventually become fully enlightened Buddhas.



Discovering Meditation

Ven. Godwin Samararatne

"Forget what you have read and heard. Just be simple, practical and find out. This can be so fascinating; if you can have the openness to learn, you can discover so much. This is meditation. Not taking anything for granted. How grateful we should be that we have this experience. I call it the laboratory of mind and body. So please, generate a fascination for this, develop a curiosity for this. Find this the most meaningful thing one can do in this life, because it is learning all the time about thoughts, about emotions, about perceptions, about so many things in this world of ours." — *Godwin Samararatne*



Exploring Buddhism and Science

This book, consisting of 21 essays, explores the encounters of Buddhism and science from the Scientific Revolution to the "Mindful Revolution."

The Man Who Became an Ox & Other Stories

The Man Who Become An Ox & Other Stories is a collection of fascinating, highly readable stories gathered from classical Buddhist texts and teachings of renowned teachers. It shares the Buddha's teachings of cause and effect, gratitude, love and compassion, honesty, generosity, virtue and wisdom. Highly recommended for readers seeking to elevate their mind!

Orthodox Chinese Buddhism

Chan Master Sheng Yen

Do Buddhists believe in the existence of the soul?
Do Buddhists believe in the efficacy of the prayer?
Is Buddhism against birth control?
Can Buddhists engage in military or political activities?
Is Buddhism pessimistic about the future of humanity?

In *Orthodox Chinese Buddhism*, the late Chan Master Sheng Yen addressed these and many other spiritual and worldly problems in a simple question-and-answer format. He clarified common areas of confusion about Buddhist beliefs and practices, and gave practical advice on leading a life that is "full of wisdom, kindness, radiance, comfort, freshness, and coolness." In addition to a translation of the original text, this edition provides new annotations, appendixes, and a glossary designed to give the reader a fuller understanding of Buddhism as practised in the contemporary Chinese world.

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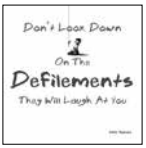

Don't Look Down on the Defilements They will Laugh at You

Ashin Tejaniya

One thing you need to remember and understand is that you cannot leave the mind alone. It needs to be watched consistently. If you do not look after your garden it will overgrow with weeds. If you do not watch your mind, defilements will grow and multiply. The mind does not belong to you but you are responsible for it.

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Awareness Alone Is Not Enough

Ashin Tejaniya

How much do you know about your awareness?
What benefits do you get from being aware? You need to discover this for yourself. You need to continuously learn from your experience. If you cultivate this kind of ongoing interest in your practice you will understand more and more.
Awareness alone is not enough! You also need to know the quality of that awareness and you need to see whether or not there is wisdom. Once you have seen the difference in mental quality between not being aware and being fully aware with wisdom, you will never stop practising.

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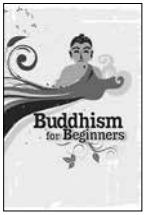

Buddhism for Beginners

Buddhism for Beginners is a book that was used in Singapore schools in the mid 1980s and early 1990s and taught as a curriculum. It covers the basics of Buddhism like the Life & Teaching of the Buddha, Buddhism in Practice, and the Historical Development and spread of Buddhism.

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