

# AMERICAN BUDDHIST WOMEN

*Encouraging Inclusion Across American Buddhisms*

The USA National Branch of Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women

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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT of Sakyadhita USA

Who is the Buddhist woman in America? Where is she? What is she doing? What concerns is she facing? What part do Buddhist ideas play in her life? What does her practice look like? Does she meditate? Take classes? Participate in a sitting group? Is she part of a dharma/dhamma/zen community? Is she a so-called “nightstand Buddhist” who studies and practices on her own? Although we may know other Buddhist women practitioners within our own circle of acquaintances, we otherwise seem to be invisible to each other.



Charlotte Collins  
SUSA President

Through this eZine, we hope to become more visible to each other as women who participate in a Buddhist practice. We want to invite you as an American Buddhist woman to share with other American Buddhist women something about yourself, your life, your practice, how you came to practice, what it means to you—no matter what form your practice takes. This is an open invitation to write a short article about yourself as a woman living in the U.S.A., one who self-identifies as a practitioner of Buddhist ideas. You might have received Refuge or not. You might call yourself a “Buddhist” or not. You might attend a meditation group or study and meditate on your own. You might be part of a dharma/dhamma or zen community or attend occasional retreats. If you teach, what and where do you teach? Whatever your life looks like, whatever form your practice takes, please share some of those details in a short article to be published in this eZine and shared with SUSA’s members across the U.S.A. If you are a man, you are also welcome to share your story, and please include how you support American Buddhist women. If you have questions or would like to send us your story, email us at: [susa@sakyadhitausa.org](mailto:susa@sakyadhitausa.org)



## SAKYADHITA SISTERS - USA Our Lives, Our Stories, Our Practice



Diana Ingalls-Farrell, Treasurer, SUSA

### Diana Ingalls-Farrell and the Practice of Direct Giving

I am Diana Ingalls-Farrell and I live in Olympia, WA. I have been a Buddhist practitioner for almost 25 years in the Sakya tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. My root Lama is Jigdal Dagchen Rinpoche of the Sakya Monastery in Seattle, WA. I am currently the treasurer on the board of directors of SUSA. I was born with an interest in cultures and have been very honored to make some wonderful connections with many cultures around the world. Now I am a retired instructor of many grade levels and ESL.

In May of 2013, I was invited to go to Vietnam with some Vietnamese- American friends of mine who wanted to visit their family and make donations of food and money to people in need, usually the elderly or orphans. I have known that they do this every time they visit their family and this time I was invited to participate in the distribution of food. My friends always make donations at several places on each trip home. The recipients are usually in rural areas and are very poor. This time we would make donations to the elderly who live in a remote village. They gathered at their local Buddhist temple to wait for us to come. The temple itself has

an interesting history. It was washed away in a flood and had to wait 15 years to be rebuilt by local donations. However, the monks did not stay to care for the temple or its Sangha. The temple is now run by 5 nuns. The head nun is very capable and strong. This was a very moving experience for me and I hope to continue the practice of direct giving.



Saij Miller-Wildsmith and her younger son

**Saij Miller-Wildsmith  
Buddha Dharma University  
and the Five Mountain Zen Order Seminary**

Dear Sakyadhita Sisters:

I am a 49-year-old woman with two beautiful boys and a wonderful partner. I have always wanted to be a monastic and have been “seeking” since I graduated high school as a young Catholic girl from a small town in Nebraska. My seeking has taken many forms—herbalism, Reiki, Kung-fu and yoga to name a few. I was looking for something I could identify with...I was looking for “home.”

Seventeen years ago I found my home in Buddhism. I studied, I practiced, I took Refuge and I continued to learn. The nagging wish to become ordained grew stronger, but with life’s responsibilities I grew less and less hopeful of this dream coming true. I began researching the possibilities of online schools, which led me to Buddha Dharma University and the Five Mountain Zen Order Seminary, the “monastery without walls.” Finally I found a place to be a formal student of the Dharma while continuing to take care of my responsibilities at home.

Venerable Dr. Karuna Dharma is one of the founding teachers of BDU and a founder of Sakyadhita, “Daughters of the Buddha,” (International Association of Buddhist Women). She is an amazing woman; her strength and

compassion are profound. Many years ago I purchased the book *Sakyadhita Daughters of the Buddha*, and after reading it, I placed it on my book-filled shelf and there it stayed, forgotten, until just a few weeks ago. The same day I found this wonderful organization, Sakyadhita, I stumbled upon my book! My Guiding Teacher, who is in the lineage of Korean Zen Master Seung Sahn, tells me that I need to have correct direction, and that keeping “Don’t-know mind” moment to moment will enable me to skillfully walk my Dharma path. You are right, Great Teacher!

My hope in writing this is to let other women on the path know: never to give up your dream. The Internet has given us all the opportunity, no matter where we are, to become a student of the Dharma. I am honored that today I am a student in seminary and a grateful sister member of Sakyadhita USA.

For more information about BDU and Five Mountain Zen Order please visit their websites: [www.buddhadharmauniversity.org](http://www.buddhadharmauniversity.org) and [www.fmzo.org](http://www.fmzo.org). Be sure to check out Venerable Dr. Karuna Dharma’s bio page on BDU’s faculty/previous leaders page!



Susmita Barua (center) with Samaneris from India, Samavati (left) and Visuddhi (right) at the 11th Sakyadhita Conference in Vietnam, 2009-2010

**Susmita Barua  
Alliance for Bhikkhunis**

My dear Sakyadhita friends and Sakyadhita USA sisters, I am writing to you to introduce my non-profit organization The Alliance for Bhikkhunis (AfB). AfB was founded in 2007 by Susan Pembroke, out of her personal sense of responsibility to do something about gender inequity in Dhamma and her deep gratitude for her teacher Bhikkhuni Ayya Khema, a founder of Sakyadhita International in 1987. AfB was founded with the mission to nurture and protect the development of the International Bhikkhuni Sangha

through moral and financial support, educational outreach and by promoting a gender-balanced approach to Theravada monasticism.

Although I grew up in Calcutta, India in a Bengali Buddhist family, my first contact with Theravada Bhikkhunis took place only when I ventured out from Kentucky to Vietnam to present a workshop at the 11th Sakyadhita (my first) Conference. During a lunch at the 12th Sakyadhita Conference in Bangkok, Susan Pembroke and I had a hearty talk sharing our mutual appreciation for each other's work. I cannot describe the joy, metta, and spiritual strength I felt, by just being in the presence of an open, diverse, warm and welcoming global sisterhood of fellow practitioners from many Buddhist cultures and traditions around the world.

The Alliance for Bhikkhunis (AfB) educates lay practitioners about the essential role bhikkhunis play in protecting and spreading the Dhamma. Further, the organization raises funds to support bhikkhunis as they assume leadership roles and develop skills that enable them both practically and spiritually to be of service to their communities. Finally, AfB upholds the indispensable role that female monastics play in preserving the Dhamma and the holy life described by the Buddha.

The Alliance for Bhikkhunis has recently updated its website at: [www.bhikkhuni.net](http://www.bhikkhuni.net) and contains a rich source of information about the developing Bhikkhuni Sangha. The website describes projects which need funding, offers rare articles about historical and modern day bhikkhunis, educational videos and PowerPoint presentations and much more. Much volunteer work and labors of love have gone into our new site and Facebook page. Please share them with your friends. Also, find a bhikkhuni from our Directory and invite her to your home, family celebrations, or sangha events.

In September, the Alliance for Bhikkhunis sponsored the 3rd Annual International Bhikkhuni Day (IBD), held on the weekend in September closest to the full moon. This year's celebration was dedicated to the Seven Enlightened Sisters, a story of spiritual friendship and companionship that lays the foundations for today's Bhikkhuni Sangha. Individuals and sanghas from all over the world participated in a day of celebration, education, meditation, and dana-offerings.

The reemergence of the Theravada Bhikkhuni Sangha is a historically significant event, making the Alliance for Bhikkhunis' work vital and meaningful. I encourage you to sign on as an ambassador for bhikkhunis this year. Sending much love, gratitude and well being to all of you.

**Elise A. DeVido**

**Olean Meditation Center, Olean, NY**



Elise DeVido, VP, SUSA

I lived in Taiwan for many years where temples and dharma groups abounded, and when I moved to rural Western New York in 2009, I wondered how I would ever find a meditation group? By good fortune, I met Professor Richard P. Reilly who guides the Southern Tier Sangha, comprised of practitioners from many traditions. We met weekly in a rented

middle-school classroom for meditation and dharma study. After four years of planning, the Olean Meditation Center (OMC) in Olean, Western New York, held its Grand Opening Ceremony on Sunday, October 20, 2013. The OMC is non-sectarian and welcomes all persons for meditation, contemplation, and prayer, whether Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, or of other spiritual traditions. The OMC will also host lectures, study groups, and retreats. Though I now live in North Carolina, the Southern Tier Sangha is with me always.



Olean Meditation Center, Olean, NY. For more information, visit: <http://oleanmeditation.org>



Abbess Ayya Gunasāri (nun, center), Ayya Dhammadhirā (right), and Ayya Dīpā (left), Anagarika Pañanandi (white robe), Mahapajapati Monastery, Yucca Valley, CA

### **Ayya Gunasāri, Ayya Dhammadhirā, and Ayya Dīpā Mahapajapati Monastery, Yucca Valley, CA**

Mahapajapati Monastery is a small haven for bhikkhunis (fully ordained nuns) of the Theravada tradition. Currently we are three bhikkhunis living here in this beautiful high desert region of the Mojave Desert in Southern California. Currently in residence are Ayya Gunasāri, Ayya Dhammadhirā, and Ayya Dīpā. We are supported by the generosity of lay people who see the value of having Buddhist ordained nuns studying, practicing, and contributing to the shape of Buddhism in Southern California. Our lineage died out over a thousand years ago. The Theravada bhikkhuni lineage is being re-established with the help of many courageous people.

We invite you to join us for chanting and meditation at 6 p.m. on Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Wednesday and Thursday. We also invite you to come for our Tea and Dhamma program at 5 p.m. on Monday, Wednesday or Thursday. The Tea and Dhamma program is an informal meeting where a brief reading from a Dhamma book is shared followed by discussion, with questions welcome.



Mahapajapati Monastery, Yucca Valley, CA  
www.mahapajapati.com

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Dakini Power: Twelve Extraordinary Women Shaping the Transmission of Tibetan Buddhism in the West**

Reviewed by Carol Winkelmann

Michaela Haas. *Dakini Power: Twelve Extraordinary Women Shaping the Transmission of Tibetan Buddhism in the West*. Boston: Snow Lion, 2013. (325 pages).

Author, reporter, columnist, lecturer, and media consultant, Michaela Haas shows how ordinary women become extraordinary exemplars and leaders as they transmit dharma and reshape Buddhism in the West.

In this beautiful book, Michaela Haas offers readers inspirational life stories of 12 accomplished female practitioners and teachers of Tibetan Buddhism in the West. *Dakinis* are female embodiments of enlightenment. The term is derived from an ancient Indian dialect, Prakrit, or Sanskrit. Initially dakinis were minor deities associated with non-Brahmanical traditions but, with the development of Indian tantras, the dakinis became more central deities. They are guides, wisdom messengers, and protectors. Further, in Tibet, dakinis evolved from being understood as specific female deities to being associated with wisdom—that is, wisdom into emptiness. In the words of contemporary teacher, Khandro Rinpoche, the dakinis “denote the enlightened principle of non-duality which transcends gender” (2). Surely the women in this book embody dakini power in their works and lives as teachers, writers, translators, founders of monasteries for women, and directors of spiritual centers. These 12 women illustrate, through Haas’ nuanced prose, this power to transform conventional ways of thought.

Haas’ introduction explores the meaning of the dakini principle despite the difficulty of putting into words the elusive ways of the “ethereal awakened ones.” Referencing the practitioner-scholar, Judith Simmer-Brown, among others, Haas allows for all the complexity and ambiguity of the dakini. To paraphrase Simmer-Brown: On the secret level, the dakini is the formless wisdom nature of mind. On the inner, or ritual level, she is a meditational deity, embodying Buddha nature. On an outer subtle-body level, she is the vital breath, the energy, of tantric yoga. Or she is a living person, teaching by example. Finally, she is the feminine and thus all women may be seen as a manifestation of the dakini (2-3). Haas helpfully reminds readers that, despite the ambiguity and complexity of the principle, the function of deities in

Vajrayana Buddhism is “to purify neurosis and connect with a deeper level of awareness” (4). As such, the dakini appears in many forms—from playful to wild to wrathful—and she fulfills many functions. In light of persistent cultural ideologies that present women as inferior beings, such as in India and Tibet, or as less significant, such as in the West, the dakini has tremendous empowering potential.

The dakini-empowered women presented in subsequent chapters by Haas are Asian and Western: Jetsun Khandro Rinpoche, Dagmola Kusho Sakya, Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, Sangye Khandro, Pema Chodron, Elizabeth Mattis-Namgyel, Chagdud Khadro, Karma Lekshe Tsomo, Thubten Chodron, Roshi Joan Halifax, Tsultrim Allione, and Khandro Tsering Chödrön. The biographies, composed of anecdotes, interviews, historical notes, contemporary accounts, and personal experience, relate how the women found Buddhism, their teachers, and their own dharma path through challenges, obstacles, and sometimes mistakes as they journeyed toward lives now widely recognized for extraordinary insight, courage, and inspiration. Undeterred by gender bias in traditional teachings or sexism in the sangha, these women found their own visions, their own voices, rendered by Haas with poignancy, humor, and power.

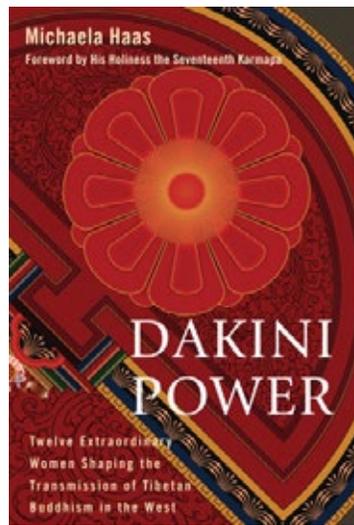
Importantly Haas illuminates, through these life stories, different gifts and leadership styles so needed in our times. Celebrated and still fully committed to others, the women represent diversity and change. They are lay and monastic, married, never married, divorced, mothers, daughters, sisters, sangha leaders, learners, locally and globally involved. They live celibate lives, family lives, ordinary and extraordinary lives—that is, lives with all the complexities, ambiguities, and sometimes unresolved tensions of actual lives in the twenty-first century. They attest to the possibility of motherhood balanced with practice and study, of monastic commitment realized through full involvement in the wider community, of ordinary women achieving excellence through contemplation and action.

In short, Haas shows readers how dakini-defined lives

are guided by sublime and practical teachings, that is, not bounded by restricted gender ideologies of either the past or the present. Buddha taught that females as well as males could attain enlightenment. Indeed many female practitioners know the words of the 8th century Vajrayana master, Padmasambhava, quoted by Haas at the beginning of her text: “Whether male or female, there is no great difference. But if a woman develops the mind of enlightenment, her potential is supreme” (1).

Still, the women selected by Haas in validation of Padmasambhava’s words have differing views of issues that can sometimes divide spiritual communities. In Haas’ own vision, however, difference is appreciated as yet another way that energetic and enlightened awareness, the dakini principle, manifests. Indeed, one of Haas’ particular talents is to broach critical topics—such as the full ordination of nuns, the life work of Karma Lekshe Tsomo, and sometimes controversial topics, such as the value of lay people studying the vinaya or sexual relationships with

teachers—with directness and delicacy. Pema Chodron exemplifies the wisdom of equanimity regarding the latter, that is, the sometimes bewildering sexual behavior of her teacher, Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, with students and our own polarizing tendencies to make him and others into saints or sinners: “For so many of us that’s our heritage, to make things one hundred percent right or one hundred percent wrong,” Pema Chodron says. “It has been a big relief to me to slowly relax into the courage of living in the ambiguity” (133). Equally lifted up by Haas are the views of Roshi Joan Halifax who has had considerable ties to Tibetan Buddhism even after she became a Japanese Zen priest. Halifax believes that transgressions of teacher-student boundaries are violations of the three jewels, the Buddha, dharma, and sangha. Clearly Haas took the advice of her teacher, Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche, who suggested she should not gloss over significant issues. Haas takes up the words of women as they talk in sometimes contrasting ways not only about meditation and compassion but also, as she writes, “about power and abuse, seclusion and seduction, logic and faith, devotion and rebellion” (12). For Western women readers interested in mean-



Dakini Power



Michaela Haas

ingful social change, this well-managed transparency and directness is likely most welcome in discussions of topics of such magnitude to our lives. The capacity, the wisdom, to deal skillfully with contradictions and contrasts are the substance of contemporary feminism. Haas accomplishes this and she subtly invites us to do the same.

Other moments in the lives described in this book are simple in beauty and inspiration. The “queen of dakinis,” Khandro Tsering Chodron, now deceased, was universally recognized as a supremely accomplished practitioner of contemporary times. Yet she was a “hidden master,” the spouse of a realized and recognized teacher. She taught by her “sheer presence, beauty, and example” (271). Having lived through the tumultuous times of the take-over of Tibet by the Chinese, the poised and discreet Khandro Tsering Chodron lived a life of legendary devotion, utter humility, and full simplicity and naturalness. Haas’ tribute to this gentle teacher is as powerful as those she designs for other exemplary women in the book, such as the never reticent Tenzin Palmo or the “international ping-pong ball,” Thubten Chodron. The metaphorical reference to Thubten Chodron’s frequent travels worldwide is only one illustration of Haas’ energetic prose—here, about a very energetic teacher.

Indeed, if Haas has left any praise relatively unsung in this wonderful book, it is perhaps in not always recognizing the energy of the many ordinary women behind the scenes of such inspirational biographies. Buddhist women undoubtedly need female role-models; after all, we continue even today with the intellectual labor of amending the historical accounts to include women whose achievements have been left out. We also are experimenting with new styles of leadership—such as those embodied by some of the very women Haas showcases, including Khandro Tsering Chodron and Pema Chodron. Whether the women in *Dakini Power* are more gentle or more fiery, like the many manifestations of the dakini, there are many hard-working practitioners behind the proverbial curtain who have made it possible and continue to make it possible for these 12 women to achieve what they have so commendably achieved. These are the numerous women (and men) who contribute in so many ways to their work. They work in offices, monastery kitchens, sanghas. They take loving care of shrine rooms. They bring tea to teachers or dishes to potlucks. They organize and/or attend retreats, workshops, and lectures. They donate monetarily. They edit the books and sell the books of these teachers; they buy and read them. They hold together small and shifting meditation groups year after year in places where teachers can rarely visit. These are the Asian women and the Western women who—like you,

gentle readers—are also manifestation of the dakini as they practice devotedly, oftentimes volunteer tirelessly, and offer merit generously for the long-life and prosperity of these and other teachers, ultimately for the great benefit of rooting Buddhism in the West. Like the dakinis, creative leaders manifest when the time and place calls for change. This is certainly the condition in the West as more and more women look toward Buddhism, and engage it, as the touchstone for deeper spiritual development. In short, the interdependence of all women is the key to the success of some women as leaders worth emulating.

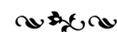
No single writer can cover every theoretical exigency, nor would wish to attempt to do so. Indeed, Haas does plenty: Other topics undoubtedly of interest to Western readers include discussions of non-violent communication, technology, work with prison inmates, social justice, teacher-student marriages, the novel option of having children visit parents who are in retreat, the clash of Buddhist cultures (East and West), controversy about practicing in English or Tibetan, individualism, consumerism, secular ethics, science and spirituality, death and dying, and more.

Ultimately, Michaela Haas has given us beautifully-wrought spiritual biography, perhaps at its finest. She offers readers portraits of 12 women, who through determination and resistance, wisdom and compassion, changed their lives in ways that can inspire further change in our own. These courageous leaders and teachers, imbued with dakini power, are helping to shape the future of Buddhism in the West. They are accomplishing this, in no small measure, by energizing and enlightening our own ordinary but potentially deeply dharmic paths.

Carol L. Winkelmann, Ph.D., is a professor at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio, where she teaches linguistics and gender & diversity studies courses. She belongs to the Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. She’s interested in Tibetan nuns in India and the development of Buddhist women’s leadership.



Dr. Carol Winkelmann



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## BOOK REVIEW: OLDIES BUT GOODIES

### **The Quantum and The Lotus: A Journey to the Frontiers Where Science and Buddhism Meet**

Revised by Arlette Poland

Matthieu Ricard & Trinh Xuan Thuan, *The Quantum and The Lotus: A Journey to the Frontiers Where Science and Buddhism Meet*, Three Rivers Press, 2001

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matthieu\\_Ricard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matthieu_Ricard)

<http://www.trinhxuanthuan.com/sben.htm>



Dr. Arlette Poland

Time, interdependence and the need for Intelligent Design are among the notions that are discussed by two great minds that are both articulate and passionate about their own knowledge and what they can learn from each other.

Imagine a Buddhist who is a scientist. Put that person in conversation with a scientist who becomes a Buddhist monk. Add in the fact that the scientist is from Viet Nam and the monk is from France. Now you have the mix that makes this book such an exciting and informative read.

We learn that the monk was a science major in college when he discovered the Buddha Dharma. He attained his Ph.D in the sciences and then took his vows to be a monk in the Vajrayana tradition. The scientist was raised in a Buddhist family but knew very little of the Dharma and cared even less for it. He was educated in both France and the U.S. and is now an astrophysicist.

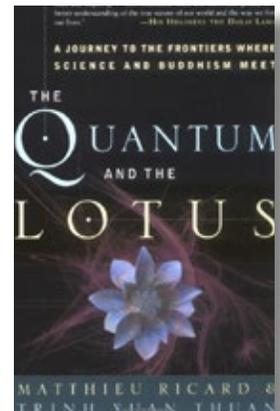
The two men meet at many venues over time and have many discussions. The notion arises that perhaps their discussions could prove to be a valuable and interesting book for some other people. So, they begin recording and writing.

Thus, we get this wonderful read and learn not only about the world of physics and astrophysics (and much more) but also about the Buddha Dharma.

For anyone who follows the Dharma, this book can inspire us to know that the Dharma reaches well beyond our lives and karma into the realm of modern sciences. It helps us to know the relevance of the Dharma even in today's technological world.

In nearly every chapter, we learn of a new concept or discovery in physics and how it might coordinate with the teachings of Nagarjuna or Shantideva – or the Buddha himself. We learn how physics has shown us that sunyata is not just an 'empty' (pun intended!) concept, but is also a symbol or way to express the true nature of reality at all levels including the subatomic. We learn that galaxies and stars influence the events on earth as much as atoms and molecules shape them. We learn that pratitya samutpada is a great way to understand Heisenberg's (famous) Uncertainty Principle wherein nothing can be absolutely certain, independent or predictable. Only probabilities exist.

The theme of the book is that the sciences are looking for and find concepts that help define, describe and decipher the workings of the universe. Meanwhile, Buddhism looks for applications of this information that might help all existence to suffer less and have more of that happy-stuff in our lives. The monk repeats this point in many chapters pointing out the context where it is applicable.



The point of the theme is not to denigrate science but to show that scientists are not letting the philosophical or metaphysical impact of their discoveries reach into their lives. Many scientists are not allowing the findings in physics to affect their view of the world and their place in it. For the monk, this is where the scientist and the Buddhist part company. The Buddhist is greatly affected by this information and uses it to further transform consciousness. The scientist uses the discoveries in physics to further validate their preconceived world view of parts and pieces that have no relation to each other (even though physics actually disproves these ideas of separation and independence).

One of the most important points that we can discover as we read this exciting series of dialogues is to know that our

own thinking/feeling—our own perspective and attitudes—participate greatly in our experience of the world. If we can realize that point, we can also realize how important our practice of the Dharma is—since our thinking/feeling is a major focus of practice and the most practical way to enhance the happy-factor and decrease the suffering for ourselves and others.

I highly recommend this book for the science minded and for those who want to know the sciences in more depth. This information is useful and inspiring to Buddhist practitioners both male and female. Physics and astrophysics are complemented by the Dharma and in particular by the understanding expressed by sunyata—as the true nature of all existence.

Arlette Poland, Ph.D., J.D., is a university professor whose specialty lies in Buddhism, Judaism and Science and Religion. She is also a Dharma student, bodhisattva and feminist. Dr. Poland lives in Palm Desert in Southern California. For questions or comments she can be reached at: arlette@powerthinking.us

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## GRATITUDE FOR OUR TEACHERS

A column to celebrate our Buddhist  
women teachers in the U.S.A.

by Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo and Charlotte Collins

Ven. Dr. Karuna Dharma contributed importantly to the growth of Buddhism in Southern California. In 1969 she undertook studies with Dr. Thich Thien-an, founder of the first Vietnamese Buddhist Temple in the U.S. She received Refuge in 1973 and Bhiksuni precepts in 1976. By 1979, she also had been awarded a B.A. in English; Master's degrees in both Secondary Education and Comparative Religion; and a doctorate from the University of California, Los Angeles. After the passing of Ven. Dr. Thien-an in 1980, Bhiksuni Karuna was appointed Abbess of the International Buddhist Meditation Center in Los Angeles.



Bhiksuni Karuna was an energetic pioneer in interreligious dialogue that began in 1980 with the establishment

of the Buddhist Sangha Council of Los Angeles, on which she also served for many years. In 1987 she was the Buddhist representative on the committee that planned the interreligious part of a program for Pope John Paul II's visit to Los Angeles. Under the auspices of the Buddhist Sangha Council of Los Angeles, a College of Buddhist Studies was established where she served on the Board of Directors. She was a Mahayana bhiksuni, but at the College she team-taught a course with Ven. Dr. Havanpola Ratanasara, Council founder, a Sri Lankan and the eldest Theravadin bhiksu in Los Angeles. Their course was "Buddhist History and Development" which traced the history of the various Buddhist traditions, describing how each developed and its contemporary relationship to the others. The course included several weeks on interreligious dialogue and soon became the college's most popular course. The course and Bhiksuni Karuna's many activities helped to spread a greater understanding of Buddhist history, philosophy and practice throughout the region.

In 1987, Bhiksuni Karuna Dharma attended the 1st Sakyadhita Conference on Buddhist Women in Bodhgaya, India, where she presented a paper on "Nuns of Vietnam" that was later published in *Sakyadhita: Daughters of the Buddha*. After that conference, she took the initiative in registering Sakyadhita as a non-profit organization with the State of California. At the 7th Sakyadhita Conference in Taiwan in 2002, she presented a paper on "Bridging the Gap with Interreligious Dialogue" that was published in *Bridging Worlds: Buddhist Women's Voices Across Generations*. At the 8th Sakyadhita Conference in Seoul in 2004, she presented a paper on "Buddhist Women's Contributions in the West" that was published in *Out of the Shadows: Socially Engaged Buddhist Women*. As the abbess of the International Buddhist Meditation Center in Los Angeles, she conducted ordinations for 50 nuns and served the Buddhist community in countless ways. Her story is told in Lenore Friedman's book, *Meetings with Remarkable Women: Buddhist Teachers in America*.

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### SUSA to Co-Sponsor Buddhist Women's Conference

The Buddhist Council of the Midwest will hold its Buddhist Women's Conference this coming year on March 8, 2014, in Evanston, IL The theme of the conference will be sustainability and maintaining a harmonious relationship with the earth.

The keynote speaker will be Venerable Pannavati, co-founder and co-Abbot of the Embracing-Simplicity

Hermitage in Hendersonville, North Carolina. Venerable Pannavati has been recognized internationally as an advocate for disempowered women and children, the homeless, youth in crisis, and other marginalized people.

Many of our readers know that March 8 is an auspicious day for a women's conference: It is celebrated globally as International Women's Day. Consider attending this 7th Women's Conference offered by the Buddhist Council of the Midwest: It's an intimate and diverse gathering of practitioners who are dedicated to learning more about how to develop wisdom and compassion and to network across traditions. The conference will feature an interfaith panel.

The conference will be held at Lake Street Church of Evanston, 607 Lake Street, Evanston, IL 60201. For further information, contact SUSA at [susa@sakyadhitausa.org](mailto:susa@sakyadhitausa.org) and look for updates in this Sakyadhita USA eZine, *American Buddhist Woman*.



Bhikkhunis at Mahapajapati Women's Monastery in the California desert (near Palm Springs) are in need of a lay steward to help them. SUSA Board Member, Ayya Gunasari Bhikkhuni, is Abbess of the monastery.

Lay stewards support the bhikkhunis in keeping their precepts. You must be a legal U.S. resident or citizen, have a valid drivers license and be willing to drive the monastery car, do the grocery shopping with monastery funds, cook a light breakfast each day, and cook and offer lunch to the bhikkhunis before 11:30 a.m. There are between 3 and 6 bhikkhunis in residence at any time. No cleaning is required.

The benefits for lay stewards are free room and board, a peaceful environment in which to practice, meditation instruction, group chanting and sitting 5 days a week. You also have access to an excellent library of books on Buddhism and free Internet if you bring your laptop. Interested persons should contact Ayya Dipa Bhikkhuni by

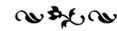


Ayya Dipa and Abbess Ayya Gunasari

phone at 760-369-0460 or by email at [info@mahapajapati.com](mailto:info@mahapajapati.com) with any questions or to receive an application. Since the bhikkhunis are urgently in need of help, please forward this announcement to anyone who might be interested.

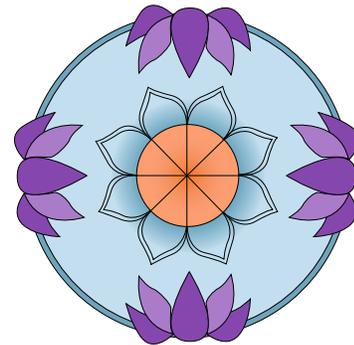


Sakyadhita is a Sanskrit word, which translates as "daughters of the Buddha." Sakya was the clan name of Gautama Siddhartha, the Buddha. The word *dhita* means "daughters." Sakyadhita USA, a branch of Sakyadhita International, was formed to serve Buddhist women in the U.S. SUSA was established in 2010 and is governed by a board of eleven lay and monastic women who live in the U.S. We have nearly 100 members spread across the country. Please consider becoming a member. You can read more about our goals and mission on the website and join the membership at: <http://www.sakyadhitausa.org>



Sakyadhita USA

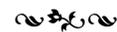
A National Branch of Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women



P.O. Box 877, Sierra Madre, CA 91025-0877

Email: [susa@sakyadhitausa.org](mailto:susa@sakyadhitausa.org)

<http://www.sakyadhitausa.org>



SUSA's Mission

- ☞ To establish an inclusive alliance of Buddhist women in the U.S.
- ☞ To promote dialogue among Buddhist traditions.
- ☞ To encourage wise, compassionate action for the benefit of humanity.
- ☞ To work for gender equity in Buddhist education, training, institutional structures, and ordination.

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