

**International Buddhist  
Meditation Center**

# Grand Ordination

**COMMEMORATIVE  
BOOKLET**



**December 10, 1994**

**Writings by Participants  
in the Ceremony**

# DECIDING ON ORDINATION

by Ven. Dr. Karuna Dharma

A year ago, as we entered our three-month training period, I looked at my four male disciples and realized that they were ready to receive full ordination. They had spent two years as atthangasilas and, at the close of training, two years as sramaneras. So I discussed it with them.

They were eager to take ordination. We decided that December would be good, as it would give us sufficient time to plan everything. In order to avoid conflicting with the World Fellowship of Buddhists' meeting, we determined that Saturday, December 10, would be the date. It was close to the date of the Buddha's enlightenment in the Mahayana calendar, making it an auspicious time.

The main problem was what form the ordination should take. Certainly, I would follow Dr. Thien-An's lead by inviting bhikkhus and bhikkhunis from all traditions. The major problem was that I had no female disciples ready yet for such a step. And no female had ever acted as upacarya for bhikkhus before.

In the Monk's Training class, I discussed this issue with my students and with Ven. Sarika, IBMC's head monk, who felt that since I was their teacher, I should play the primary role. Besides, we were entering a new era: Americans giving full ordination to other Americans. I thought about this important step often, wanting to make the Ordination fully legal, yet also hoping to play an important role in the Ordination itself.

Finally resolving to bring it up to the oldest bhikkhu in Los Angeles, I approached the most Ven. Dr. Havanpola Ratanasara, carefully stating the issue. After I posed the problem to him, he remained silent for several moments, thinking it over. Finally, he responded that he saw a way to resolve the problem.

I had asked him to be the upacharya, and the upacharya has the right to ask anybody he feels is qualified to take the role of upacarya. He said that is what he would do. At the ceremony, he would ask me to lead the ordination. After that meeting, I felt greatly relieved. The main problem had been solved. With his blessing, I was sure that other bhikkhus in Los Angeles would go along with it and accept my invitation.

I began to research our lineage line. I remembered seeing the lineage at the Vietnamese Temple in Los Angeles. I called its abbot, Ven. Thich Man-Giac, and he sent it to me. I carefully wrote down all the masters' names and typed up the list. I only had the Vietnamese names for the Indian disciples. I wanted them to be in

Sanskrit. The problem was resolved by a phone call to Ven. Thich Thien-Thanh, a Vietnamese elder and Sanskrit scholar. He was able to provide me with the original Sanskrit names. So, we now had the entire list, Indian masters in Sanskrit, Chinese masters in Chinese and Vietnamese masters in Vietnamese.

As our training progressed, we began our initial plans. I mentioned the Ordination at a meeting of the Buddhist Sangha Council of Southern California, thereby making the first contact with bhikkhus and bhikkhunis.

We would send to Vietnam for robes and bowing cloths. I had names of two people who could help us with this. In the meantime, we could get other things made here in Los Angeles. I tucked this info into the recesses of my mind while I began to work on a list of possible masters.

By August, I wrote the first letter of invitation, telling people we would be holding an ordination and asking if they would be willing to serve as an ordaining master or a formal witness master. Then I got on an airplane for Sri Lanka, where I planned to spend a month in a Buddhist ayurvedic hospital, receiving treatment for the paralysis resulting from my stroke. In the meantime, I left Chrys Thorsen, my administrative assistant, to work on the ordination.

By the time I arrived back in the U.S., we had quite a few positive responses. Now we had to determine whom we would invite to be ordaining masters out of the large list of masters agreeing to attend. Several masters had indicated that they would bring their students to be ordained.

A new concept began to form. Why not have three male and three female ordaining masters, splitting the duties of each role into equal male and female parts?

At the same time, Rev. Tenzin Khachoe was going on a retreat and asked permission to mention the ordination to the other nuns attending. I agreed to this, and she went to central California, taking with her the material we had produced so far. She returned to Los Angeles, indicating a number of women were interested in taking ordination. Would it be possible? I replied that only those women whose teachers were coming would be allowed to ordain. However, since Lama Zopa already had a commitment for that time, his students would be allowed, provided that Ven. Geshe Gyeltsen would be willing to stand in Lama Zopa's stead and that Lama Zopa personally vouched that each woman was ready for bhikkhuni ordination.

We also decided that anyone taking bhikkhu or bhikkhuni precepts would need to participate in a ten-day retreat with us prior to the ordination ceremony. In addition, we would encourage ordainees at other levels to attend if at all possible. I developed the

papers for both masters and ordainees that would need to be signed and returned.

The next set of materials developed included the letters to the masters explaining how the roles would be divided. I also indicated that if they brought students their duties would be to continue training their students according to Vinaya rules; that is, the student must stay a minimum of five years with the master following ordination, thus avoiding problems I saw manifested with people taking ordination at some temples and with some masters where training was not followed through.

I went to Santa Barbara to give a talk at a religious seminar. I returned not feeling well, and, a few days later, I went to Kaiser Permanente for a check-up. The result of tests showed I had an infected gall bladder that was loaded with stones. The surgeon admitted me to the hospital and started giving me an antibiotic intravenously. Because I am a diabetic, they decided on surgery the following morning. So, just at the beginning of the big push for the Ordination, I was bedridden.

Chrys went into ten-hour a day shifts, seven days a week, garnering volunteers to help out. We now had only two months left to plan the ordination.

The robe maker in Vietnam didn't understand the measurements I had sent him, and we had no robes. Mr. Hong Quang came over and personally called friends who were going to Vietnam, assuring them that the measurements were accurate. He told us he could not guarantee that we would get all the robes on time, so I made a priority list of what we needed the most urgently.

He also said that the gifts we had ordered for the masters were not available. So, we had to decide on different gifts. Besides the money gifts and a book by Dr. Thien-An, we ordered Buddhist flags to be brought from Sri Lanka by Ven. Sobhita, who was coming to attend the Ordination. Chrys and I checked Little Tokyo for bhikkhu bowls to be given to the fully ordained during the ceremony.

In the meantime, we went to the Thai temple in North Hollywood and ordered eighty bhikkhu bags from Thailand as gifts for masters and ordainees. Chrys created the design based on my description, and Ven. Samahito faxed it to Bangkok. We were rolling into high gear.

The letters from women wanting ordination were coming in. I dug up our ordination ceremony of 13 years ago, and, using it as a guide, I developed the various roles people would play. I asked Ven. Shanti and Ven. Sarika to act as the ordainees' representatives. They would have the important role of telling the ordainees what to do in the ceremony. They were already acting as training masters for my students while I was laid up.

Our first serious problem involved getting an elder Vietnamese master to participate. He was unhappy because I had not consulted with him about the ordination, but, when Dr. Ratanasara's explained, he agreed to be the number two male master, the assistant ordination master.

In the meantime, I had gotten a promise from Ven. Thich-nu Dieu-Tu from Sacramento to be the number two bhikkhuni, if her health held up. I went to Sacramento for Thanksgiving and gave Ven. Dieu-Tu a copy of the Ordination ceremony. A few days later, I called her, and she told me that she was very happy with the ordination ceremony and agreed to be the assistant upacarya.

Chrys and I were supposed to go to Thailand for a meeting of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in late November but determined that we could not get the ordination together if we were to take two weeks off for that, so we sent Ven. Shanti in our stead. By now, I was coming into the office several hours a day to help Chrys. Ani Tenzin Khachoe was coming in one day a week, and, with Cristina Beato-Lanz, they were doing a lot of the legwork. They purchased the dishes and silverware for the special lunch for the masters, ran many errands and made phone calls.

Ven. Geshe Gyeltsen, whom I had chosen as the male vinaya master, turned us down because he was one year short of the requisite dharma age to play that role. I called Ven. Yin Hai to ask him to be vinaya master since Ven. Gyeltsen could not. It would mean no Vajrayana person as an ordination master, but we were doing the best we could.

I had invited Ven. In-Quon Lee Sunim as female vinaya master. Now we had all our leading masters: I, an American in the Vietnamese Zen tradition, Ven. Dieu-Tu, a Vietnamese; and Ven. In Quon Lee, a Korean. For the bhikkhu masters, we had Ven. Ratanasara, a Theravada Sri Lankan elder; Ven. Yin Hai, a Chinese master; and Ven. Thich Man-Giac, a Vietnamese elder.

Chrys found somebody to make the robes for the atthangasilas, and I purchased the fabric. I also visited the Vietnamese woman across the street who agreed to make six kesas for us. Chrys arranged with the local Thai restaurant and a neighbor woman to provide food on the day of the ceremony. We prepared the empty rooms at the Meditation Center and began to assign them to our ordainees who were expected by December 1.

Chrys had arranged for the entertainment and the youth groups who were coming to help. Cristina Beato-Lanz lined up a photographer and a video tape man. Chrys arranged for one hundred white pigeons to be released at the proper time and found a floral shop that would provide us with thirty gallons of rose petals to be thrown onto the heads of the masters and ordainees as they

paraded from the Zendo to Ananda Hall.

On November 27, Rev. Migme Chodron arrived from Gampo Abbey. She immediately volunteered all her spare time, and Chrys put her to work: making name cards, preparing gift packs, and moving with the continuing flow of changes that occurred hourly. I went out to buy razors, needles and thread and other assorted necessities. The robes started arriving from Vietnam, and they all fit beautifully. We hired somebody to do the cooking for the ordainees' retreat, and Ven. Sarika made up the schedule of training events, arranging for the various masters to give talks. I spent my time at the computer, entering all the data for the ceremony itself. Every master and every ordainee would need a copy of the ceremony. The ordainees continued to arrive and to be picked up from the airport over the next few days.

The Vietnamese nuns arrived by auto late at night on Thursday, and, the next morning, they volunteered their help. Our cook informed us that she could not serve breakfast or lunch on Saturday. So, the Vietnamese nuns went to the market to buy needed groceries. I asked them if they would fix our first breakfast, and they agreed. Our cook appeared that afternoon to find the Vietnamese nuns already preparing dinner. She disappeared after that, and we never saw her again. We made up a schedule for the retreat participants to do the cooking, and everyone prepared wonderful meals.

By now, we had seven Westerners who were nuns in the Tibetan tradition, four Vietnamese nuns, three of my American disciples, plus seven others attending the retreat whenever they could. One more Vietnamese nun and monk joined us, and, later, a Vietnamese Theravadan nun asked for permission. Since I knew her master, I agreed, and she came to join the retreat. Another Tibetan nun joined us several days later, after she took care of her speaking engagements.

By now, everybody being ordained was at the retreat, except for a ten year old sramanera, who was still in school, and Rev. Puja, who was doing his student teaching in Lucerne Valley. I knew both their masters and knew that they were fully qualified and would arrive with their masters the day of ordination.

Then the crisis arose regarding the ordaining masters. Ven. Thich Man-Giac had been given a copy of the ceremony, and he objected to playing the assigned roles. He did not think it appropriate that Ven. Dieu-Tu play the same role as he would, since he was ten years senior to her. I explained that this was an international ordination, not a Vietnamese one, that Dr. Ratanasara had been invited as upajjaya, as he was the eldest monk, and that there were no older bhikkhunis available. Besides, she had been a nun for thirty-nine years and had agreed; I was not going to withdraw my

request. He refused to take the role we had invited him for, but said he would do a ten minute incense offering just prior to the ceremony, to which I agreed.

Over the next few days, I received suggestions from younger Vietnamese sangha members to make changes, but I disagreed, knowing that this ceremony had to be more American, more inclusive, not strictly in the Vietnamese tradition. Dr. Ratanasara and Ven. Shanti arrived back from Thailand, and I explained the situation. Since Dr. Ratanasara agreed with me, I knew we were headed in the right direction. I called Ven. Taizan Maezumi Roshi, asking him if he would take Ven. Man-Giac's role.

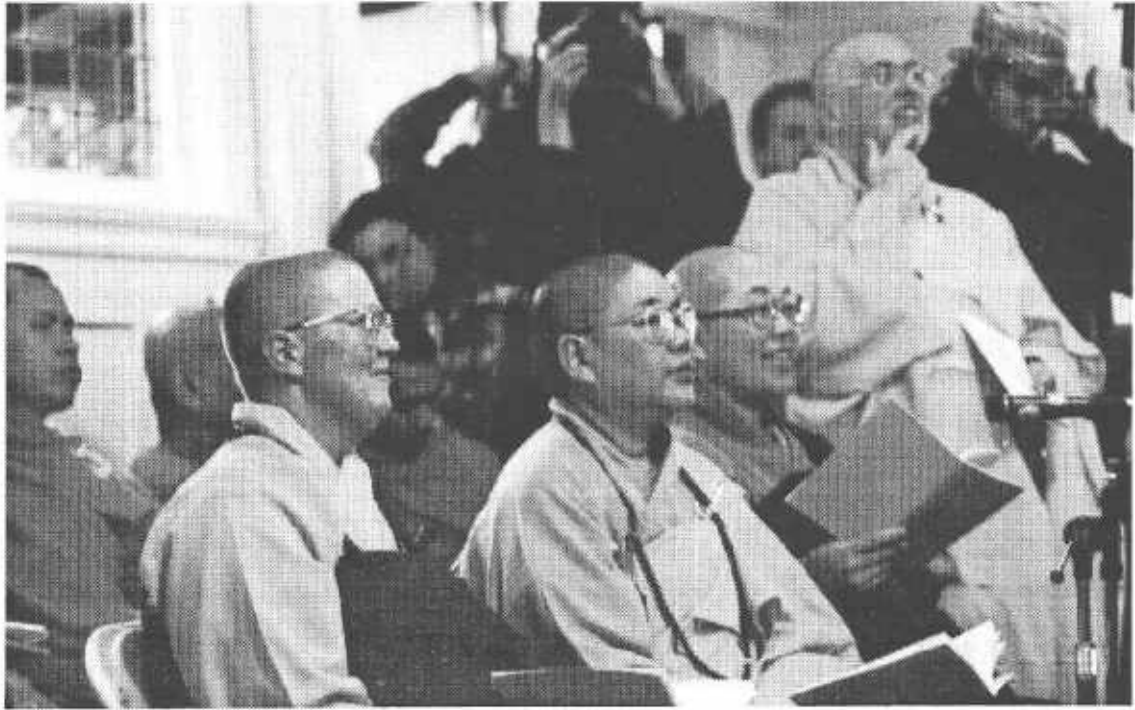
In the office, we were finishing up the details, and I was preparing ordination certificates. Chrys spent several days drawing the dragon that decorated them, and Columbia Printing printed them in glorious black and gold. Dr. Ratanasara, Ven. Sarika and I settled on names for everyone. Each certificate was individually printed, giving the ordainee's birth name, birthdate, type of ordination and ordained name. On the back was a list of masters attending, as well as the Lieu-Quang lineage line for 83 generations, harking back to Sakyamuni Buddha.

On Friday, December 9, we held our two-hour rehearsal. The atthanga-sila robes arrived without hemming, but they did arrive. Our bowing cloths were picked up in Wilmington, newly arrived from Vietnam, along with the last of the needed robes. I was in a very good mood. The retreat was moving well, with Ven. Sarika leading it and me giving vinaya instruction every night to the bhikkhunis-to-be.

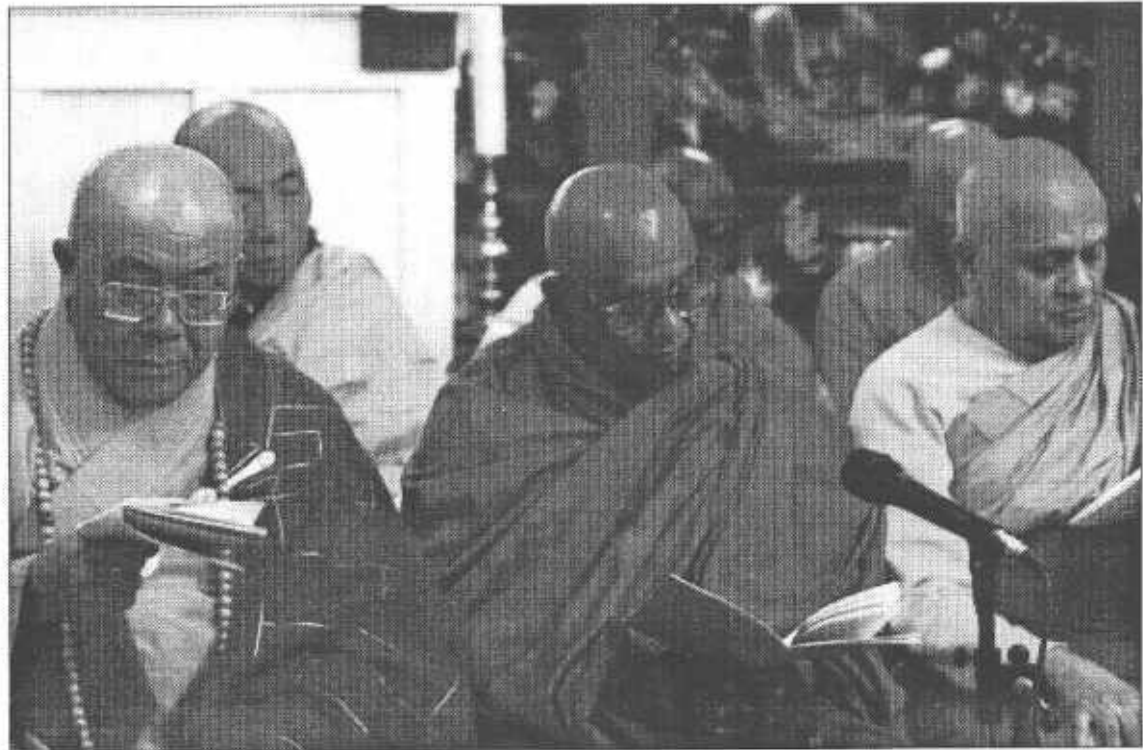
After the rehearsal, Rev. Thubten Chodron, who was attending as an informal witness, approached me with the concerns that Ven. Taizan Maezumi was a Zen monk, not a bhikkhu, and some of the nuns were wondering if that would make the ceremony less legal. The next morning, I took Ven. Maezumi aside to explain the problem, and he very graciously withdrew as assistant upacarya. I then asked Ven. Ahangama Dhammarama, the next eldest bhikkhu, if he would play the role of assistant upajjaya. He agreed, and we all lined up to process to the Zendo and begin the ceremony.

The ceremony lasted three hours and went off without a hitch.





*The three female acharyas (ordaining masters): Ven. Thich An-Tu (Karuna Dharma), Ven. Thich-nu Dieu-Tu, Ven. In-Quon.*



*The three male acharyas: Ven. Yin-Hai, Ven. Dhammarama, Ven. Dr. Havanpola Ratanasara.*



# Reflections on Buddhist Practice

by *Manavanatha Ratanasara*  
(*Alan M. Miller, M.D.*)

When I made the decision to participate in the Grand Ordination which was held on December 10, 1994, I took one further step on a path which has captivated me since my youth. As a child growing up in a Jewish home, I was enrolled in religious studies from age 6 to 16, culminating in *Barmitzvah* and Confirmation. While appreciative of the warm traditions, I recall strong feelings that the teachings were not providing me with that which I expected from a spiritual discipline. These doubts often led me to confront my teachers, and I suspect they were frequently dismissed as the musings of just another rebellious teenager!

What my teachers failed to comprehend was that I really could not reconcile my needs for an ethical and moral foundation for living and for a method to alleviate my existential *angst* with Western Judeo-Christian theology. I was not willing to buy into that mythology. I spent a few years dallying with atheism and agnosticism, finally realizing that these philosophical constructs may have seemed plausible and undoubtedly appealed to my intellectual side, but they left me barren of a comfortable eschatological solution and of a way to live compassionately and joyfully.

It was in this inquisitive, albeit unsettled, state that I found myself enrolling in classes in the Oriental Studies Department at the University of Pennsylvania in the early 1960's. I ended up minoring in this area, taking courses in Buddhism, Japanese literature and haiku along the way. After a hiatus of some fifteen years, I rediscovered this wonderful path and began to devour books by Alan Watts, Krishnamurti, Jack Kornfield, Joseph Goldstein, Thich Nhat-Hanh and Christmas Humphreys. It was then just a matter of time before I went on my first meditation retreat and discovered the elegant simplicity of *Vipassana*. Six years later, I took upasaka vows at the IBMC.

Buddhism was, for me, all that I had searched for in a spiritual path, satisfying all those needs to which I alluded before. I approached it, however, in a dry and intellectual manner, feeling that it was fulfilling what was required. This was before I permitted myself to partake of some of the ritual of practice.

I have traditionally recoiled from anything which contained a ritual experience, for a variety of reasons. Now I am beginning to feel enriched by my decision to become a practicing Buddhist, and I find that my spiritual endeavors, previously skeletal, have begun

to acquire a flesh and a substance unprecedented in my religious life to date. This is especially true as I attend services and feel the collective energy as we meditate together, chant in unison, listen to dharma talks and share cups of warm, fragrant tea on Sunday mornings. Every sound, the resonance of the bells and gongs, the sharp attack of the wooden sticks struck together or on the melodious gourds helps to nurture the inner rhythms which enhance practice.

It is as if my rationale to be a moral and virtuous person has new underpinnings, so much more sensible than when linked to a hierarchical, punitive supreme being. For this, I must be thankful for the Buddha's great wisdom and pragmatism. As well, I feel grateful to have found such a warm and stimulating community as the International Buddhist Meditation Center and the College of Buddhist Studies. I look forward to many wonderful years as we practice together in our quest to understand true reality and to depart the samsaric realm.



*Ven. Havanpola Shanti guiding the ordainees' participation in the ceremony.*

# Just to Sit!

*by Rev. Kusala Ratna Karuna*

Sitting in this hall, cool and still with morning dew  
breathing in  
breathing out  
mind and body flow to one

The ancient days of man in breath  
with posture from antiquity.  
All who have sat before  
found again in breathing.  
Door of liberation

Soft winds of heaven blow out the fire of this thought.  
A stream of cool awareness  
gives rise to the empty mind of watching.

Back and spine warmed by samadhi  
filling forgotten pathways.  
a sudden burst of light  
a lotus opens on a muddy pond  
bliss and happiness  
burned away  
by the heat of that primordial sun  
within

Perfection of the present moment has come to pass.  
The ancient rite has been performed.

I have looked into the many  
only to see  
a reflection of my self.

# Reflections on the Ordination

by Attha-Sila Satya Sarika  
(BabaClay Hathor)

I had great doubts before the ordination as to whether the ceremony would actually promote my spiritual growth. Ritual and ceremony had always been linked in my mind with the garish and pompous shows of powermongers. I viewed the ceremonies in which I had participated at the IBMC as exceptions to this rule because they were small and homey.

However, as the time for ordination came closer, it became clear that this was not to be a typical IBMC ceremony, but instead a grand hoo-haw. Nonetheless, I determined to be open to the ceremony as a vehicle of spiritual growth after my mentor, Ven. Sarika, told me stories of her experience with ordinations.

As I joined in the retreat weekend with the other sangha members, I began to realize how fortunate I was to be with these people at this special time. Everyone radiated the energy of their own heart with a great warmth embracing us all. During a teisho in which Ven. Karuna mentioned that this ordination may possibly be the high point of her life, I felt great gratitude toward all the circumstances and teachers who had led me to participate, and especially toward my own mentor for convincing me that I needed to stay for the entire week, rather than using the weekday time to move everything out of my room at the IBMC.

When the actual time of the ceremony arrived, I found that it was not a separate event from the week-long retreat prior to it but an integral part of it, signaling the end of the retreat and officially reminding us of the vows we had undertaken during training. I greatly appreciated the bells and whistles provided by the production managers, Chrys, Padmini, Christine and others, in the form of the 100 white birds, the darling kids dancing, the scarf dancer, and the music.

"Ordinary life" seemed filled with a calmness and peace that was noticeably different from my previous state of mind, as I drove back home to Utah with my son, despite his complaining about our return. That peace continues to touch my life, despite rather serious personal problems. I offer my deepest gratitude to all participants and organizers of the Grand Ordination.

Like a bird, he rises on limited air  
and flies an invisible course.

He wishes for nothing.

His food is knowledge.

He lives upon emptiness.

He has broken free.

from *The Diamond Sutra*

Gunaratana's Drawing  
Needs to be cropped to remove let-  
tering

*Upasaka Gunaratna Sarika*

# Making the Grand Ordination Happen

*by Chrys Thorsen*

People credit me with making the Grand Ordination happen as it did. I did give it the focus and energy needed to make the event magical. It's something I can do and do well. Thank goodness I *can* do such things; it redeems me for not being able to do a lot of ordinary things.

I thought it would be interesting to tell the story of preparation from my end. I'm not going to attempt to be chronologically correct nor to speak about every major facet. I'll just recount what stayed in my mind. Looking back, the whole thing is a blur, a collage of images. It was a kaleidoscope journey: fascinating, exhilarating, exhausting. The end result was a terrifically successful event.

I had put on many events before. I even bill myself as a "Special Event Producer " on my resume. But the honest truth about these things is that one person can only carry the focus, not the event itself. You crest the wave and steer it, but you don't create the wave. That requires an energy more awesome than any one person possesses. Magic and pageantry take a number of things: recognizing and seizing the right moment, a precipitation of certain conditions beyond anyone's control, short-term single-mindedness, obsessive attention to detail, a willingness to forego sleep and social life, just enough ego to enjoy being the visible focus, lots of love for the project, enough time to get it all done, and the legwork of lots of people.

In October, Mom (Ven. Karuna Dharma) wasn't feeling well. She came back from a conference, complaining of indigestion that wouldn't go away. It got worse. Sandra and I took her to Kaiser hospital and found out her gall bladder was in bad shape. They'd have to keep her. Mom's surgery and recovery preoccupied me until it was time to stage our second annual Halloween Carnival for abused and homeless kids. Ninety kids, eighteen attractions and eighteen hundred prizes took some coordinating. It was great. I was dead tired; emotionally and physically depleted. The day after Halloween, I wearily thought to myself, "Five and a half weeks to the Grand Ordination, and I haven't even started."

Rev. Karuna had done the early correspondence, laying the basic groundwork. There was an encouraging amount of interest from the forty or so invited masters. But I had no idea how the ceremony was supposed to go, what was to happen nor who would play what role. "What are the goals," I mused. I asked Rev. Karuna, and she said vaguely, "I have to find the old program from the first Grand

Ordination fifteen years ago."

That was not an adequate answer. What was the actual ceremony, and how many masters would it take? How would we conceptualize this event? We were making history, breaking ground and setting a precedent. But how would we do it?

The first obvious thing was to brainbust. Jot down, in no particular order, everything we wanted to see happen, from buying new dishes to inviting the media. I asked everyone for input; every goal, wish, hope, fantasy, practical need, and required item that we could think of went on paper, with no structure and no regard for how to do it. Most of the trappings and "glitter" I thought of myself. We would have people coming from around the globe to attend this event. Let's give them a taste of Hollywood. After all, this was L.A., and our visitors would have a certain expectation.

Desired colors, desired effects and all the whimsical minutia that came to mind were duly written down. I didn't allow any idea to be struck down prematurely by such talk as "It's too expensive" or "We could never do that." On paper, in the realm of imagination, everything was possible, and the first rule was not to discard something simply because it looked beyond our means or hadn't been done before. Time enough to be practical later.

The ideas were transferred to index cards and then organized into groups. The groups were general categories such as Ceremony, Publicity, Retreat, Preparing the Facility, People, etc., each with its own subcategories. We then created a time line, from Week 1 to Week 5, of what had to happen and when. There were over eighty things to do on the list, from finding rental doves to choreographing the procession. More ideas came up as we worked.

Many jobs required several days or a lot of traveling about. Most of the jobs required some kind of creative approach. It was obvious that we didn't have enough people to work on it.

Rev. Karuna and Rev. Sarika were working on the ceremony itself, on preparation for the monks and on the details of the retreat. Sister Padmini was handling the office. Everything else was really up to me. I realized that one of our residents, Cristine Beato-Lanz, had both organizational skills and some time on her hands. I offered her a job as my assistant, and she accepted.

By Week 3, the script still wasn't done, but Karuna was working on it. Cris and Ani Tenzin were laying out the floor plan for where masters and ordainees would sit. I was working from eight a.m. to ten p.m. every day and had taken to living above the office to save the commute time. I constantly worried that we would not get everything done in time. Sandra helped by querying Rev. Karuna in order to identify each ordination level, including how to spell it, what

was expected of each, how many precepts they took, etc. Finally I had it on paper.

Karuna wanted to revive the old IBMC logo from twenty years ago: three circles in a row, both hemispheres of the world with the Buddha in-between. It was too late to print new letterhead, but the design could be used elsewhere. I dug an old newsletter out of the archives, blew up the logo on the copy machine and set about to cleaning it up by hand. I redrew the Wheel and scanned all the images into the computer. I sketched freehand the design for the ordination certificates, using examples of traditional Chinese dragons as a guide.

The bhikkhu bags were designed with the redone logo. We faxed the design to Bangkok and gave Ven. Samahito of Wat Thai a blank check, trusting him to choose appropriate colors. I was anxious because we were depending on travelers from Thailand and Sri Lanka to bring the bags, gift flags, ground cloths, rakusus and other items that would be given to masters and ordainees. Some would arrive only a day or two before the ceremony. I tried to think of alternatives just in case. Karuna and I shopped in Little Tokyo for begging bowls and lanterns.

Every day, communications streamed back and forth: invitations, constant follow-ups, itineraries, instructions to participants, updated memos, press releases, tracking masters and candidates, cancellations, replacements. For a short while, our two computers, the printer and the copy machine all broke down. I brought in my laptop and portable printer. The fax machine was going constantly.

The new carpets in the Zendo and Ananda Hall looked great. We had to set up special lighting for the camera people. L. A. County Museum of Art was going to video document the event, along with our own camera crew. The Japanese children's taiko drum corps couldn't make it, but the Chinese folk dancers could. My sound engineer couldn't make it. I'd have to manage sound in three locations myself. Richard, the band conductor, didn't yet have the names of the musicians but assured me he would have a full line-up when the time came. I still didn't have the fanfare scored. Each day was so packed, I would put off composing music until night time, but, by then, I was too tired to do anything creative.

It was time for the Tibetan-tradition nuns to arrive. The retreat would start in a few days. The first arrival was Ani Migme Chodron. She was a blessing. She went to work for us at once, dividing up gifts, making offering boxes and name cards. Ani Ingrid also helped by preparing gifts for the three prisoners who would be taking refuge and five precepts from their prison during the ceremony. The other Tibetan nuns arrived. All Western women, they were



open, down-to-earth and fun. They ran errands, and their energy fired up everyone.

The Vietnamese nuns who came from Sacramento for ordination arrived at eleven p.m. I was still at the computer; my days now went from 8 a.m. to midnight. I looked out to see their van circle as Sandra flagged them down. We set them up in relative comfort in one of our houses. Early the next morning, the senior nun came to see Ven. Karuna, begging the master's pardon that they did not yet have the common kitchen organized but promising that it would be done in short order. Later that day, I was astonished to find every shelf carefully labeled in detail.

These nuns endeared us all; they were so sweet and courteous. They were amazing. Before I could say anything, they had taken the newly-made meditation cushions and stuffed them with kapok. They shopped for the entire retreat without complaint, and, when we needed the delicate lattice of the shoji screen doors repainted, they donned trash bags as smocks and set to it. Towards the end of the retreat, Rev. Nagacitta presented them with flowers, with the applause of the general assembly. They were nonplused at being the center of attention; the youngest one's eyes were wide, as though she was receiving a first-time birthday present. They immediately offered the flowers to the Buddha and put them on the altar.

A woman new to the IBMC suddenly appeared, wanting to help. She said she could plan perfectly and cook the most marvelous meals. We were grateful, for we had been unsuccessful in finding even a paid cook for the retreat. She created the shopping list, and the Vietnamese nuns went with her on the long, tedious trip to Price Club. They came back with tons of stuff in bulk, much of which we ended up not using. And then she faded away on the second day. The retreatants divided up the cooking chores, and, with a little extra shopping, it turned out all right.

The retreat was in full swing and going well. I had lost Cris and the other volunteers to it but managed anyway.

People started catching the flu left and right. I avoided becoming infected, convincing myself that I had a superhuman constitution and we couldn't afford any downtime for me. Then one morning, a few days before the ordination, I couldn't get off the couch. I was dizzy and nauseous. It took a lot of effort to just make it to the bathroom. Sitting there, I did some meditation on *form is emptiness, emptiness is form*, to dissociate myself from being so involved in feeling unwell. Letting go of being sick, I felt a little better.

I lay back down on the couch, trying to collect myself. I was startled out of my meditation by a woman's voice calling my name.

"What?" I demanded. No one was there.

In defiance, I said out loud, "Well, if you're going to visit me, whoever you are, the least you could do is help me get over the flu." No response.

A few minutes later, I got up and went downstairs. "You look terrible," was the general greeting. But within the hour, I was working full steam and, by two hours later, completely recovered.

The night before the Grand Ordination, the fanfare still wasn't completed. I announced that I was going home for the evening. I needed to work undisturbed to finish the music. Going upstairs was not isolated enough. The band was already hired, and I was nervous because I had heard the names of some of the players on the radio. These guys were no slouches, and I'd better have something decent for them. I had composed various chunks of the piece while driving on the freeway, humming them repeatedly to myself so I wouldn't forget until I could reach a piece of paper. I tried different themes out on Sandra. "Uninteresting," she'd say after I hummed a few bars. "Okay," I'd say. "How about this?" I'd hum some more. "Oh gods," came the reply, "that's so pompous." Eventually, I came up with an acceptable motif.

No creative ideas were coming. Then all kinds of wild fantasies flitted across my mind. I'd hand the musicians their checks in the morning and say, "Sorry, guys, the band's off. You can go home." Or I'd find some other piece of music. Or I'd call Dick and ask him to write it for me. "No!" I told myself firmly. "You're going to do it. We're going to have it. *And*, it will be good."

After a while, the ideas slowly came. One grudgingly led to another. As I tried them out on the piano, one phrase finally made my heart sing. I had the bridge. The basic motif I had already found. The rest was simple development and recap. Hallelujah, I had the final score. Now to copy the parts for the players. I headed back to IBMC. It was 11:00 p.m.

Sandra pulled up a little after I arrived. As she went upstairs, she said, "You know. I could swear I saw monks run back and forth across the street, between the temple and the college office. It seemed like Thien-An was among them, directing them. I think they're here to help with the preparations, clearing out any negative influences." I suggested that she go to bed as she must be quite tired to see such things.

Now it was 2:00 a.m. I was alone in the college office, and I was almost done with the band parts. I still had the P.A. and the recording mikes to set up, as well as the audio links for the camera guys. I had already prepared the masters' ready room, putting out cookies and aspirin. I also had the media packets ready. In the morning,

we'd ask people to fold the programs for us.

I stepped outside to cross the street. The night was still and warm. There was no hope of getting any sleep at this point, but I wasn't tired. The street was completely deserted, yet it seemed to me that it was teeming with activity. It was as dark as usual, yet there seemed to be a lot of illumination — as if many lanterns were lit and strung from tree to tree — with workers busily and excitedly scurrying about.

Standing there, in an empty street that was abuzz with energy and anticipation, was the most magical moment of the entire project for me. Perhaps Sandra *did* see those monks, I thought.

I set up the sound equipment as dawn slowly crept over the compound. The Vietnamese nuns were in the ordination hall just before light. Rev. Nagacitta appeared with hot drinks and food. Bonnie helped me lay cable. The security guards arrived for briefing. Pam took charge of the flags, the dancers' sound system and went to get thirty gallons of rose petals a florist had saved for us.

The masters were gathering in the ready room. I unashamedly directed cars to double park in our neighbors' driveways. The guests were arriving, chatting and reading the program. Keith Atkinson, the regional interfaith representative of the LDS church, greeted me with a grin and said, "You've done it again, Chrys."

The Grand Ordination went off basically without a hitch. Sandra's lips were so dry, she had trouble blowing the conch. There was no one to beat the drum, so Virya valiantly tried to and did okay. The one hundred white doves made the throng gasp in delight. Kids carried the flags, and our guests had a great time showering the procession with flower petals. Dr. Ratanasara had a rose petal clinging to the top of his head through most of the ceremony.

Rev. Vajra struck the big bell, but it couldn't be heard above the hubbub in front as people scrambled for a seat, jamming all entrances to Ananda Hall which was packed SRO. I wondered how the prostrating ordainees kept from klonking their foreheads on the butts of those in front of them.

We didn't get the guest book put out, and we had to take photo orders later. The camera guys interviewed me for some footage for the documentary, but my mind was so blank from fatigue that I asked Rev Karuna to take over. Lucky Altman, our good friend from the National Conference of Christians and Jews, invited us to an open house that afternoon at her place. "Thanks, Lucky," I said. "I'd be delighted to drop by, but I'll probably go home and die instead."

I left feeling content.



# INNER FITNESS

by *Attha-Sila Suvazna Upexsa Sasika*  
(Janet Sanders)

We live in a culture obsessed with physical fitness. Magazine covers, TV commercials and news reports constantly bombard us with visual and verbal messages about how we should look, what we should eat, how to fight cancer, cholesterol, tooth decay and wrinkles. And each day, we devote hour upon hour to the basic tasks of feeding, cleansing, clothing, exercising and resting our physical form.

We are heavily invested in how our body looks and feels, because, as human beings, we identify our bodies as *us*. We can point to this apparently solid form and say with some certainty, "This is me. Mistakenly, we believe that our "selves" are contained within the boundaries of the flesh.

As Buddhists, however, we come to understand that our physical form is not our true selves — and no matter how much work we put into maintaining it, the body will eventually succumb to sickness, old age and death.

How much more important, then, to get our *true selves* in shape — to spend a little time each day (a fraction of the time we spend taking care of our bodies) to:

- ✿ *Cleanse* the mind with meditation
- ✿ *Feed* the mind with the dharma by chanting or reading sutras
- ✿ *Heal and nurture* the mind by mindfully ridding ourselves of craving, aversion or ignorance

Developing and maintaining a program of inner fitness requires the same consistency and self-discipline it takes to watch our eating habits, quit smoking or stick to an exercise plan. Still, the rewards to be gained far outweigh the sacrifice. Just as an out-of-shape body cannot run the L.A. Marathon, an unfit mind cannot experience *samadhi*, the state of peace, openness and equanimity that is our true self. Instead, our minds are dulled by the defilements, called *kleshas* in Buddhism, of ignorance, craving and aversion.

We all understand what a fit, healthy body is, whether we inhabit one or not, but we may not know the characteristics of a fit mind. "Mind" in the Buddhist sense means consciousness, not intellect, as it means in the West. So inner fitness, from a Buddhist perspective, goes beyond our notions of mental health or intellectual acuity. To the meditator, the fit mind is:

- ✿ *One that sees clearly* things as they really are, without clinging, resistance, ignorance or delusion.

- ✿ 100% in the present moment with *no thinking*.
- ✿ *Relaxed and at peace*, unencumbered by craving and aversion.
- ✿ *Expansive*, encompassing the whole universe, with no boundaries between ourselves and others.
- ✿ *Pure consciousness*

This pure consciousness, not our body, is who we really are. Through the process of living in this *samsaric* world, we clutter up our consciousness with our likes and dislikes, our judgments and opinions, our focus on "I, my, me." Layer upon layer of these defilements build up to form the ego.

## The source of suffering

As much as we'd like to believe that this ego protects us from the pain and suffering of the world, exactly the opposite is true. The ego is a false boundary that we create. It separates us from others and from our own true nature; it is our only impediment to seeing clearly.

Because it is constructed of defilements, the ego is the *cause* of our suffering, not a defense from it. Our inner fitness program, then, must focus on *cutting through this ego*, this delusion, to the clear pure consciousness underneath.

In the Buddhist sense, cutting through ego doesn't mean that we will lose our personality or self-esteem. Rather, we are seeking to eliminate what psychologists might call the ego defenses. Once we drop these, we can stop taking our desires and opinions so seriously and begin to laugh at ourselves. Then we can begin to truly enjoy life.

## No substance

Just as we identify the body as "me," we also identify the ego as "me." We mistakenly think that the ego is solid and substantial, but, in reality, it has no permanent substance. This armor — this ego — that we build around ourselves is nothing more than the thoughts and feelings that spring from the *kleshas* or defilements:

- ✿ A *craving* thought is, "I like this. I want to grasp it and keep it. I don't want it to change." These thoughts cause us suffering because the nature of reality is impermanent.
- ✿ An *aversion* thought resists the way things are. For example, "I don't feel like meditating today. I wish the pain in my knees would go away. I wish I were thinner, younger, richer." It is this resistance to reality, not the situation itself, that causes suffering.
- ✿ *Ignorance* is lack of awareness of the true nature of reality.

Caught in delusion, we mistakenly think that our inner processes are truth. We may, for example, be certain that someone dislikes us when, in fact, we have never asked, so how can we know. If, based on our mistaken belief, we treat that person with hostility, chances are they really won't like us eventually. Similarly, we may try to "help" someone without asking what they need. Ignorance can devastate relationships and ignite wars. It is the root of pervasive social problems such as racism, sexism and homophobia.

Viewing the world through a veil of defilements is somewhat akin to looking out of a soapy window. We have a clouded view of what's outside the window, but, mostly, we just see the soap.

The object of our inner fitness program is not to reject or deny these kleshas. They are the raw material we will use to re-form ourselves as we move along the path to liberation. Gently, through the process of meditation, we must acknowledge our defilements, gently untangle them and eventually let them go.

## **A true-self workout**

Weight training builds muscles, and aerobics burns off fat. Meditation burns off ego, defilements and past karma. There are as many paths to inner fitness as there are to physical fitness. Some disciplines, such as t'ai chi, martial arts and yoga encompass both. These practices, along with some forms of Buddhist meditation, all have one thing in common — a focus on the breath.

The breath is the link between the mind and the body; it is the only involuntary function that can also be controlled — and it is the only "equipment" required for inner fitness. Mindful observation of the breath is a powerful tool for transmuting craving, aversion and ignorance into pure, clear consciousness. "When the breath wanders, the mind is unsteady, but when the breath is still, so is the mind still," states *the Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, the classic text on the Hatha Yoga school. In the *Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*, the Buddha says, "Without full awareness of breathing, there can be no development of meditative stability and understanding."

There are many ways of using the breath to move and transmute energy in the body. In yoga, deep breathing, in concert with the postures, is said to revitalize the body, steady the emotions and create great clarity of mind. One form of yogic breathing, *kapalabhati*, raises the *prana*, or life energy, up the spine with quick, sharp contractions. *Anuloma viloma*, alternate nostril breathing, balances the energy between the left and right brain hemispheres.

In Buddhism, breath meditation is a means of awakening to the impermanent, non-dual nature of ourselves and all things. By mindfully counting the breaths, one to ten and ten to one, or by simply observing the inhalation and exhalation, we develop deep concen-

tration and calm. Eventually, thoughts will stop, the boundaries between self and other disappear, and a sense of spaciousness arises. From the spaciousness springs compassion. Our own suffering lessens, and we begin to become lovingly aware of the suffering of others. This is the beginning of Bodhisattva action.

Try to set aside a few minutes each day — maybe ten minutes in the morning and ten minutes at bedtime — to sit quietly and carefully observe the wondrous process of inhaling and exhaling. It's a simple exercise with the power to change the world.

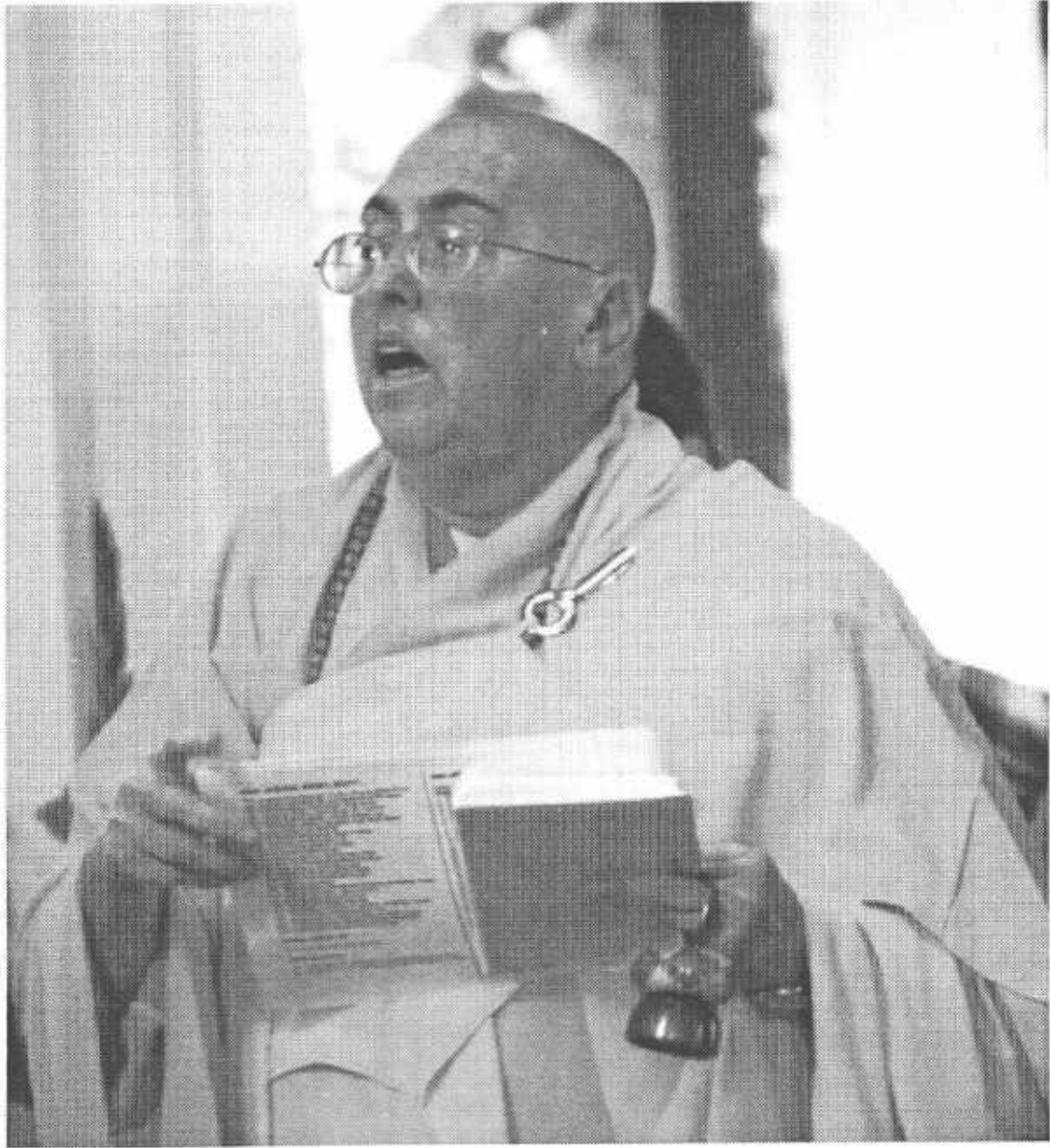


*Masters lead the procession from the Zendo to Ananda Hall, while on-lookers toss rose petals as offerings.*



Like a bird, he rises on limitless sky  
and flies on invisible course  
He wishes for nothing,  
His food is Knowledge,  
He lives upon emptiness  
He has broken free...  
The Diamond Sutra





# WORDMASTER

*by Lekhika Sarika  
(Cristina Beato-Canz)*

At ordination, my teachers gave me the name, Lekhika, meaning Skillful With Words or *Wordmaster*. Upon hearing this, one Person "nicked" my new name and called me "Kiki."

The only Kiki I ever knew was one of my first cousins who had a cerebral hemorrhage at birth. After that, he lived a healthy, happy, childlike life, playing with his toys and making beautiful abstract sculptures from discarded tin cans which he washed and meticulously tore and shaped with his bare hands without ever once cutting himself. He was very strong.

The only words Kiki ever spoke, from childhood until he died of pneumonia at age 43, were soft admonitions to himself, parroted from those who cared for him, such as, "Kiki, don't touch that; it's hot." or "Kiki, don't walk through there; you'll fall." Except for phrases like those, which he would repeat quietly to himself as he dutifully heeded each warning, he said no words at all. And he never got into trouble.

I think he was the real Wordmaster.

## **Virya, no virya**

*by Attha-Sila Virya Sarika  
(Peter Hammond)*

Dharma gate opens.

Dharma gate gone.

Save shit on shoe.

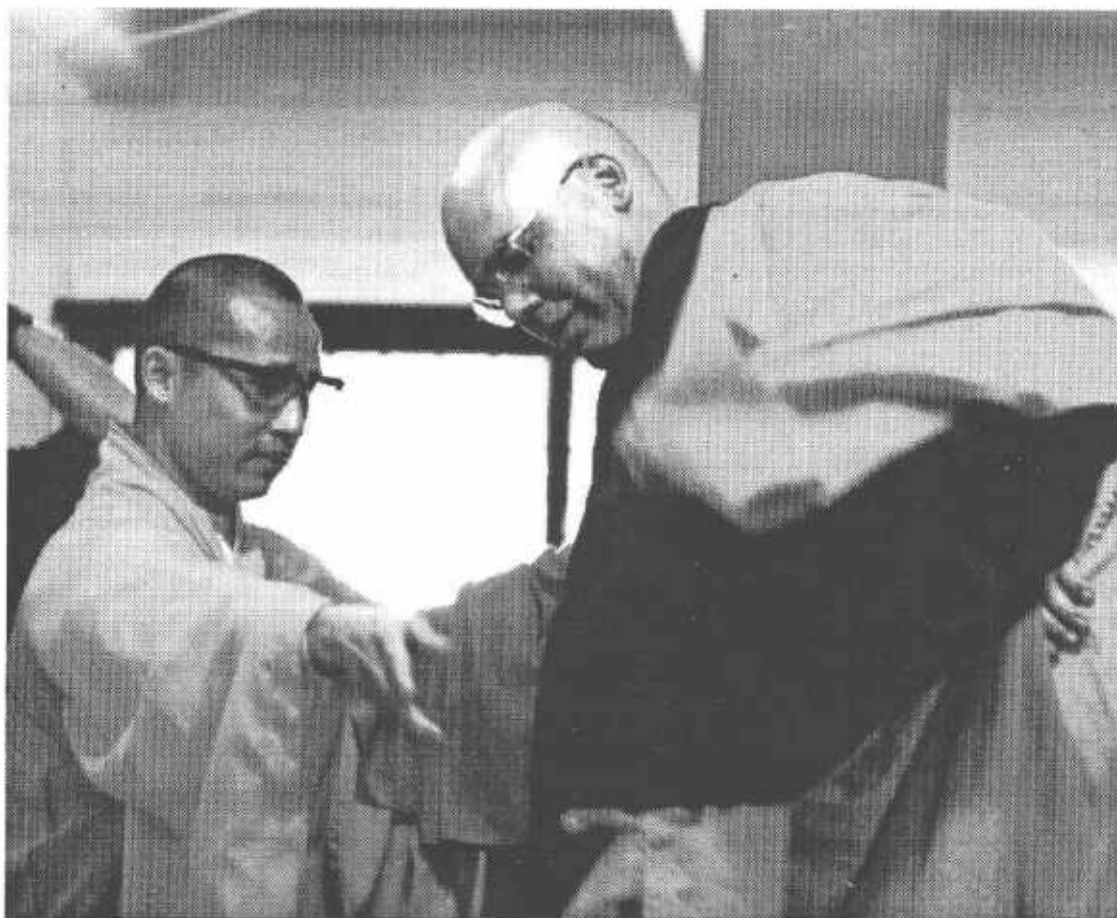
No gate, no shoe, no dharma, no shit.

Another gate.

No gate.      Just stars ...



*Ananda Hall is packed with ordaining masters, witness masters, ordainees and on-lookers as laypeople are the first to receive precepts.*



*Rev. Kusala receives his sramanera robes.*

# RETREATING INTO ORDINATION

*by Ven. Sarika Sharma*

In the midst of the hustle and bustle of preparing for IBMC's Grand Ordination, I was blessed with the job of leading the retreat and overseeing the training. I kept the same sitting schedule as the retreatants did and benefited from the energy generated by the participants, most of whom were training for ordination, energy that carried us all through the hours of intense practice with comparative ease.

Thirty-seven people took ordination at the ceremony. They spanned the different levels, from bhikkunis and bhikkus (fully ordained nuns and monks), sramaneras and sramanerikas (novice monks and nuns), attha-silas (advanced lay people), to upasakas and upasikas (laypeople). Anyone who was being ordained at any level was encouraged to participate in the retreat to the greatest extent they could. The entire retreat was mandatory for everyone taking full ordination. Others, who had job responsibilities, attended the first weekend and then the weekday evening activities.

Time and effort to prepare oneself for ordination is extremely important. To get the full impact of transmission from so many masters of long experience, ordainees needed to open the heart/mind, to raise the bodhicitta, and to be ready to receive the energy to nurture that seed and help it grow. A period of training and retreat is required for the effect to be most beneficial. Of course, all those preparing to take their next step had been in training for some time. Even the laypeople had been practicing Buddhism for a year or more. Those receiving full ordination had trained for many years.

The retreat was very powerful. Concentrating energy, focusing together, the years of practice filled the zendo with samadhi power. Chanting, sitting, walking, studying, all together-action made a cohesive whole.

Participants were from a number of different traditions, and we had the opportunity to share different styles of chanting and meditation. The discussions were stimulating, bringing together varying perspectives of basic Buddhist truths. The Vietnamese ordainees translated for each other and made important contributions despite language differences. Some of the masters involved in the ceremony were kind enough to come and give a dharma talk during the week retreat.

I was reminded of my own ordinations, three here at IBMC, and then bhikkuni ordination in Taiwan, with my own master, Ven. Thich Thien-An, as one of the ordaining masters. How exciting those ex-

periences had been, and how much they had changed my life. Now I was sitting on a different zafu, and I felt excitement and delight for my sisters and brothers who were moving along the path. I also felt the comfort of knowing the Buddhadharma would once more continue.

I was very proud of our Abbess, my dharma sister, who had been so influential in my own training, for taking this step to continue our master's work, taking the best of all forms of Buddhism, bringing all traditions together, providing women with equal opportunities and equal responsibilities in traditions where those rights may not be presently available. And I was so pleased with the male masters, especially those who don't have full ordination for women in their traditions, for participating in this ceremony, thereby upholding the Buddha's acceptance of women into the Sangha, an extraordinary attitude in the Indian society of that time.

I especially want to acknowledge Ven. Dr. Ratanasara, with whom I have had many discussions on the topic of equality of opportunity for women in Buddhism, for his support to Ven. Karuna and for willingly assigning her to be the leading master. Think of this, a bhikkhuni ordaining her own disciples, bhikkhus, when, for hundreds of years, nuns were not even allowed to teach monks. This is a return to Buddhist ideals, beyond intervening cultural influences.

Every monk (female or male) who participated expressed the essence of Buddhism by their involvement in a ceremony that honored all schools and traditions. No Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana. Just Buddhism in practice and in everyday life.

This is modern Buddhism. The best of all Buddhist traditions. The meeting of all sanghas to form one international mahasangha. Certainly this follows the footsteps of the Buddha.

And I'm sure I saw Dr. Thien-An, in the picture hanging over the memorial altar in the zendo, smile and wink.



A flame upon my head,  
A bodhisattva vow.  
Burning deep into me,  
A little ego ash.

— *Rev. Vajra Karuna*

## **The Yellow Robe**

*by Rev. Thich Tam-Hue*

*(Nagacitta Karuna)*

Locking the door, I enter a place known by few. As I walk to the nursing station, I am greeted by smiles of recognition, calls of "Buddha, Buddha" and eyes that see worlds different than mine do. This is the Asian-Pacific unit of Metropolitan State Hospital, and I am the Buddhist Chaplain. My temple! My congregation!

Today is special. Head shaved, beard shorn and mind carrying the memories of ordination. To celebrate my first service as a fully-ordained dharma teacher, I will wear the *yellow robe*. Putting on the robe, I see the image of a stranger reflected in the mirror. Who is this standing before me, and why does he wear the yellow robe.

The room is filled. Eighteen sentient beings with roots in Vietnam, Japan, Korea, China and Cambodia. No problem with language because we speak the silent words of the Buddha. We are family; we are sangha. They laugh and they smile when they see the yellow robe. They must touch it to reassure themselves that they have not been forgotten.

Kneeling in front of the altar, I gaze at the Buddha through wisps of incense offerings. The chanting, blessings and prayers are over, and now it is the time of the holy silence. It is profound, and I am struck with the mystery of Oneness that has filled our space. My eyes fill with tears. Tears not caused by smoke but by the knowledge of why I wear the yellow robe.

Oh, that my priest's robes were wide enough  
to gather up all the suffering people  
in this floating world.

— Ryokan

# ***How I Came to Be a Buddhist***

A Brief Spiritual Autobiography with Some Reflections

OR

"It Came To Pass But Not To Stay"

by *Devaguru Karuna*

(*Brian Kotrich*)

With gratefulness to Venerable Karuna, and just gratefulness in general, on December 10th, 1994, I was ordained a lay Buddhist and given the name Devaguru Karuna.

I feel I have come home after twenty years of wandering. Come home to where? Just come home. Nothing more.

Having come home, I have my own prodigal son story to tell. Yet when I try telling it, I soon get lost to where I can't see the forest for the trees. In trying to talk of this journey, I step back into what is like a twenty-year dream within a dream and lose my way again.

Three days after Labor Day weekend in 1974, I had a peak experience. Then I called it, "shaktipat diksha" (*transmission of energy initiation*). Now I call it kensho.

Perhaps I can also call it Manjushri's sword, because, although this experience forever changed me, holding on to it is like swinging a two-edged sword: one edge cuts through delusion; but, swinging back, the other edge creates delusion.

For twenty years I held on to this peak experience. I was like a person possessed by a vision, a vision fueled in part by a craving for bliss (*ananda*). I thought complete and perfect enlightenment meant always being on that peak. This was the image I had of a true master, a true guru.

What did I do for twenty years until I became a Buddhist? I used to think of myself as a professional seeker and finder of truth. I was like a wandering monk, searching through Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity for the right monastic community, the right place to plant myself so I would not waste the gift of this life.

I made long and short visits to Buddhist centers and monasteries, and I immersed myself at length in the religion and communities of both Hinduism and Christianity. I wanted to be a professional in the sense that I could devote all my time and energy to a life of prayer and meditation and not need a separate livelihood. I visited or lived with many religious communities; sooner or later I always left.

I finally found a community where everyone's reason for being there fits my idealism. You might say I founded my own com-



munity by meeting and loving a good woman. I convinced her to marry me, till death do us part. (This has become a topic with us lately). We sealed our commitment with two mostly wonderful boys. My days of freedom to wander the world appear over. My marriage usually feels secure, but not always.

The wedding was almost seven years ago. Ven. Karuna was there. I had met her several years earlier while I was a Franciscan Friar (member of a Roman Catholic religious order). The Franciscans and the InterReligious Council were having their respective meetings at Serra Retreat in Malibu. I sat across from her at lunch, and so began my involvement with IBMC.

I lived at IBMC from when I left the Franciscans until I got married. It served as a spiritual halfway house for me as I went to graduate school and got a teaching credential.

It was 1988 when Adriana and I married. My meditation practice and spiritual questing lay smoldering like an ember under the ashes of a fire that has gone out. In 1992 we bought 40 acres of isolated property near the White Mountains in Arizona. It was my new hermitage, my new zafu. Eleven hours of driving there put me where I used to get after twenty minutes of meditation, but it worked, and all the driving gave me plenty of time to think.

My practice grew again, and I made a little zendo in a trailer on our property so I wouldn't have to drive so far to meditate and get away from the noise of my life. I still made the trip out to my Arizona hermitage occasionally. As I drove, I revisited and reviewed what I knew of all religions and religious communities. I still could find none that met what I saw as my unique needs, because I was once again holding on to this peak experience. I was still possessed by the vision of complete and perfect enlightenment as always being on that peak. This was still the overriding image I had of the goal.

I started playing with the idea of starting my own religion. Although this is a very lonely path, there were some attractive elements. Perhaps the most attractive thing was all the new tax deductions I might get with incorporating as a non-profit religious business. It was quite a head trip for a couple days until I saw I couldn't settle on what the rules of my personal religion would be. My ideas and thoughts were changing. With no authority outside myself, what guarantee did I have against misleading myself. To what could I hold up my religious system and measure it — to see if it measured up.

This is the function of a scriptural canon. It is a standard against which things may be measured, and against which we measure our understanding and practice. Part of the teacher's job is to tell if we are doing the measuring properly or not. In Zen Bud-

dhism we believe our teachers' understanding connects to Shakyamuni Buddha's understanding through their lineage. When we learn to see reality with the same eyes our teacher sees reality, then we are seeing with Buddha's eyes. If this were not the case, I would still be practicing alone.

I continued to practice even though I saw founding my own religion was not a very wise thing to do. To experience, to dwell in union with God, was my life's purpose. Now it looked like my life would be over before the veil was ripped away. I had no doubt of my true nature, but I no longer knew how or what to practice. I not only held the notion that the goal was to always be on the peak but that I must attain this unattainable goal before I die.

Reflecting on this I thought about the bodhisattva vows; it was like taking medicine for a headache. The bodhisattva ideal now serves to dispel any anxious concerns about the future.

Reflecting also on my peak experience, I remembered how it settled to a sort of plateau awareness that I remained in for several months. This plateau must have sloped gently down. Over a gradual period of time I found myself back in the sea of samsara. I began to think, "If not the peak, how about the plateau? This is the Buddhas' Way. This is attainable now through my own efforts. This is the path. This is the Tao. It is said that the path is the goal."

At this same time, I came across several of IBMC's Monthly Guides. I read about the Grand Ordination. I read how Rev. Nagacitta, who is also married and has a family, would be ordained as a Zen Dharma Teacher. I thought, "If he can do that, I can do that."

I approached Venerable Karuna, asking her if I could participate in the Grand ordination.

She said, "Yes, that would be nice. How would you like to participate?"

"I would like to become a Buddhist."

"You would like to become a Buddhist?"

"Well, actually I already am — just not formally."

I feel very comfortable as a Buddhist. I am grateful. Grateful for the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. I am grateful for IBMC. I am grateful for Ven. Karuna, Ven. Sarika and Ven. An-Giao.

I am grateful in general, for this life and all its mysteries and wonders. To my sons, Michael and John, I gassho in gratefulness.

I am especially grateful for my wife Adriana, who has put up with all my eccentricities without divorcing me.

I am grateful. I have come home.



*Ordaining and witness masters gather for a group picture following the ceremony.*



*Class picture of the thirty-seven ordainees, laypeople, attha-silas, sramaneras and bhikkhu/nis.*

# WHO AM I?

*by Attha-Sila Padmini Karuna  
(Virginia Hanus)*

Who am I? — Nay, why am I?

No orator holding hearers in rapt awe.  
Wealth according to bankers, I've none.  
Sweet warbler's morning song is a solo.  
How dare I join his melodic trillings?

Sally Rand's dangerous flight isn't mine;  
I touch the stars from my pillow.  
Skillful surgeon's hands — hardly.  
I cut twigs from the Temple shrubs.  
An artist's touch brings life to strings,  
Awakening in them Old Masters' pieces.  
I use strings to sew a rip, tie a plant,  
Or crochet some mundane hat and scarf.

Yet, I've been blessed beyond all the others,  
Reaching out to be the pointing finger.  
How can an aria compare to knowing a pen-pal  
Who has taken Refuge behind cold steel bars?  
I've heard those in pain say, "I feel better"  
At my touch, no world-renowned one, just me!  
No gold to count or stack, yet I'm richer,  
Richer than all others. I walk in Grey Robes.

# ORDINATION: A NEW BIRTH

by Rev. Thich Tam-Tue

(Tiratna Priya Karuna)

We, as Buddhists, are taught not to brood about what has happened in the past or to worry about what will happen in the future. Instead, we are told that we must live to the fullest every moment as it comes, neither looking backward nor forward, but experiencing completely the present instant — the Now. This means that, in a sense, each moment can be considered a new birth — the past is dead, but, with each new breath, we embark on another glorious adventure endowed with limitless potential for growth and significant achievement.

However, as society has evolved, certain events have, by general consent, come to be considered the really important milestones in an individual's career. These are thought of as thresholds which mark the end of one phase of a person's life and the beginning of another. For a Jewish boy, a *Bar Mitzvah* is such an occasion, marking, as it does, not only the end of his boyhood but also his acceptance into the adult world. In the case of Roman Catholics, *Confirmation* and *First Communion* symbolize the passing from childhood to a level of greater maturity and responsibility. Other rites of passage that similarly mark an individual's growth and advancement to the obligations, opportunities and, perhaps, disappointments of adult life are the graduations from high school, college and graduate school, as well as the selection of a career and marriage.

So far, I have referred in general terms to the unfolding pattern of an average middle-class layperson's life. Such a person will be married with one or two children, will have a reasonably successful career and possibly will grow old and approach death without ever really having struggled to attain life's only worthwhile goals — a higher level of awareness as well as wisdom and compassion for all living beings. It is the tragedy of our time and culture that secular rather than spiritual values seem to permeate every aspect of daily life, and the desire for money, success and power has eclipsed, for most people, the aspiration for greater self-discipline, nobility of character, calmness, gentleness and equanimity.

In a Buddhist society in Asia that has not been totally corrupted by the unwelcome intrusion of Western material values, people with the karmic background and, therefore, inclination to join the Sangha probably would do so during their teen years, sometimes even earlier. These people pass from threshold to threshold within the structure of the Buddhist community as they pursue ever higher

levels of ordination. Therefore, they would not be concerned with matters that consume most of the time, resources and energy of the average layperson in America, that is, making a living, raising a family, preparing for retirement, etc.

However, in this country, Buddhism as an ever-expanding spiritual and cultural force of significant importance and influence is a relatively new phenomenon, therefore, it is not unusual for a person to have completed his education, to have received instruction in a religion such as Judaism or Christianity, and even to have had a career, marriage and children before taking up a serious study of the Buddhadharma. The person whose life has followed such a pattern is indeed motivated by a powerful karmic force. As he takes his first formal refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, he is experiencing a new birth of enormous significance; he is indicating categorically his rejection of so many of the values of the society into which he was born. The hedonistic pursuit of pleasure and self-indulgence as a desirable way of life has been revealed as empty, meaningless and dissatisfying. The time-honored scenario of the rugged individual who ruthlessly and aggressively rises from obscurity to the highest position of power and affluence by means of deceit, dishonesty and the treacherous and cruel manipulation of all who have had the misfortune to cross his path, not only holds no appeal, but, when measured against the ideals of Buddhism, seems pitiful, ludicrous, a waste of time, opportunity and energy.

While it may be fairly easy at the beginning stage for the new Buddhist devotee to realize that a life motivated by egoism, greed and a determination to achieve material success, no matter how many other lives are harmed in the process, must be avoided at all costs, it is highly likely that his self-awareness and capacity for penetrating introspection are, as yet, not sufficiently developed to deal with the really sinister, ingrained and entrenched evils lurking around the fringes of his conscious mind and comfortably ensconced in the murky realm of his subconscious. Among the most odious of these inner poisons are such attitudes as racial prejudice, feelings of superiority based on class or financial status and the tendency on the part of men to perpetuate all the ugly forms of male-chauvinism designed to deny women not only respect but equal rights and opportunities.

It will take time, study and intense meditation for the newly-born Buddhist aspirant to activate the Buddha-nature within himself to the point that he will be able to cleanse himself of the despicable accumulation of evil within. It has been there, possibly, for many lives, but now that his feet are at last on the right path, with the Buddha nature within as his infallible guide, the ultimate victory is assured.

The Lord Buddha told us to be lamps unto ourselves and to strive diligently — that is why we meditate, take courses and receive ordinations which symbolize the passing from one level of attainment and commitment to the next higher one.

Each level is more demanding than the last, since, with each step forward, one is required to increase his dedication and commitment to the highest ideals of truth, internally as well as in the outer activities of life. This gradual process is like a flowering, a metamorphosis as the Buddha-nature within the individual is allowed, more and more, to emerge and express itself.

Regrettably, there are some losses along the way as we find that we come to have less and less in common with previously cherished companions. They still continue to see life, its goals and purpose, from the old perspective that the Buddhist has now outgrown. In addition, conduct that may have been acceptable in the past no longer seems consistent with the code of morality and behavior that one has embraced as a result of a continuous exposure to the teachings and doctrines of Buddhism — boisterous, unmannerly antics or contentious argumentative attitudes have been replaced by a quiet dignity, the reflection of an inner stillness and peace. Unseemly displays of emotion, expressing excesses of anger, joy, frustration or grief, which may seemed like amusing personality traits in the past, have been outgrown and replaced by a stable emotional control and equanimity.

Sadly, then, a gulf gradually widens between the sincere Buddhist student and some of his former associates, with the result that friendships which were at one time mutually rewarding slowly dissolve and fade irretrievably into the mists of the past. Again we have been reminded of the inexorable operation of the great principle of anicca or impermanence. As our lives unfold, there will inevitably be some losses and adjustments along the way, but by now, we all believe that we have been led by our Buddha-natures to make the right choices, the literally inspired choices, which have caused us to follow the upward, winding path which ultimately will lead to the attainment of insight, awareness, wisdom and enlightenment.

As we give thanks to the Lord Buddha for leaving us the legacy of his exemplary life and teachings, we must be equally grateful to the Sangha that has guarded and transmitted the Buddhadharma to countless generations. At this particular time when we are considering the various levels of ordination and their importance, we should be especially thankful that the ordination system was created in the first place, so many years ago, and that it has continued to operate, century after century, always managing to train new candidates to take over the duties and functions of the older monks

who eventually pass on to fulfill their karmic destiny.

We have recently witnessed an outstanding example of the functioning of this system or process in the Grand Ordination which took place here at the International Buddhist Meditation Center. What is more significant than the fact that the system still works is the reality that it is still capable of growth and change. Most, if not all, ordinations in the past have been performed by clergy of a particular sect who have conferred ordination upon candidates belonging to that same sect. In the case of our recent Grand Ordination, the Ordination Masters, the Vinaya Masters and the Witness Masters represented not just Vietnamese Buddhism, our official lineage, but Theravada from Sri Lanka and Thailand, Vajrayana from Tibet, as well as Mahayana from China, Korea, and Japan.

Furthermore, not all of the candidates were recruited from the congregation of our particular temple, since a Vietnamese sramanera and several sramanerikas from other temples in Sacramento, Chicago and Virginia became fully ordained monks in our ceremony as did a number of sramanerikas belonging to the Tibetan Vajrayana tradition for whom full ordination was not available in their own temples.

Some very conservative critics may say that it is wrong to change or modify religious practices or traditions that have endured for centuries. I vehemently disagree with this point of view. We, as monks and laypersons who have taken refuge in the Buddhist religion, while respecting the legacy of the past, must think of Buddhism as a living, breathing thing, not a petrified corpse covered with cobwebs. We have a positive obligation to help usher Buddhism into the modern age and help make it relevant to the needs of contemporary society. We must not allow our religion to stultify like some others in which the adherents are so intimidated by a despotic hierarchy and sacrosanct tradition that they are unwilling to face and deal with such matters as the all too apparent need for universal family planning and environmental protection.

Buddhists must not follow, we must lead. Fortunately, we have, in the history of the expansion of Buddhism, an irrefutable record of flexibility and adaptability to gain initial acceptance and the eventual allegiance of millions of converts as it spread from India to the very different cultures of Southeast Asia, China and the Far East.

Now Buddhism has arrived and put down roots in the fertile soil of what has been called "The New World." Just as we are reborn each time we pass from one level of ordination to another, I hope that Buddhism in America will experience a new birth that will cause it to emerge refreshed, cleansed and reinvigorated.

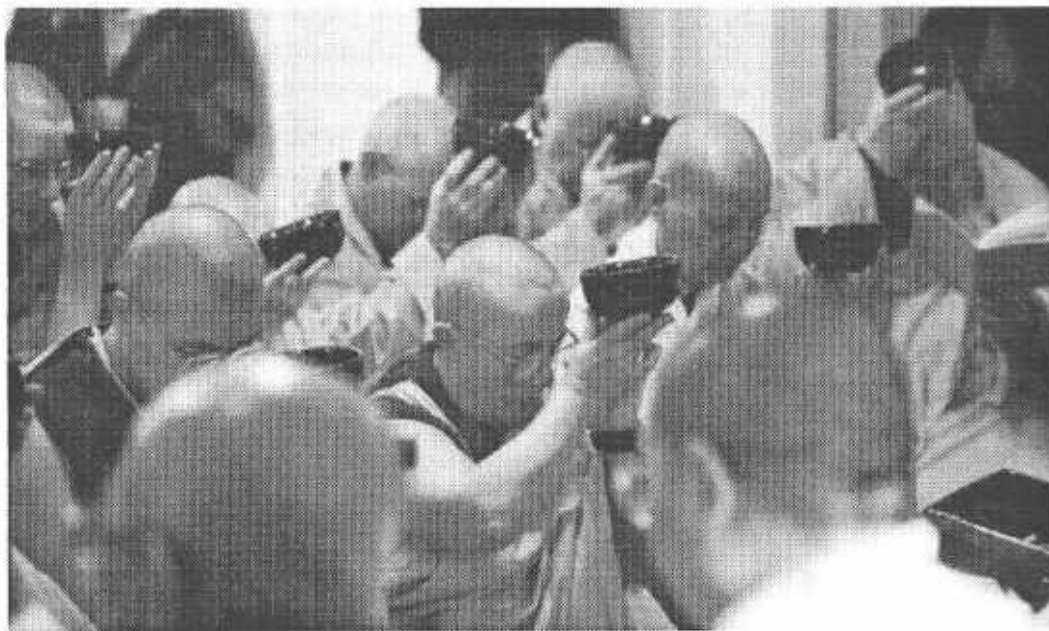
However, as Buddhism is adapted to the needs of the modern



world, one serious problem finally must be dealt with. This is a most reprehensible inequity that has endured for centuries in Asian communities. I am, of course, referring to the inferior status of women in the Sangha. Such a state of affairs is no longer tolerable as the world has come, more and more, to accept democratic and egalitarian ideals. At present, male candidates for full monkhood are required to take 250 vows, while bhikkhunis must take 348 vows. Furthermore, in several traditions, women are not allowed to advance beyond the sramanerika level of ordination.

I look forward to the time, in the not too distant future, when all candidates for full ordination, whether male or female, will take identical vows, since all clinging to such distinctions as maleness or femaleness, to being of one social class or another, to being a member of one race or another, will have been deemed irrelevant and discarded forever.

Then, from elements of Sri Lankan, Thai, Chinese, Vietnamese, Japanese, Korean, Tibetan and all other traditions of Buddhism, there will be forged a new, original, strengthened and revitalized, uniquely American Buddhism.



*Bhikkunis, bhikkus and dharma teachers receive their begging bowls.*



**International Buddhist Meditation Center**

928 S. New Hampshire Ave.  
Los Angeles, CA 90006  
(213)384-0850

Founded July 1970 by Ven. Dr. Thich Thien-An  
First Patriarch of Vietnamese Buddhism in America

Abbess: Ven. Dr. Karuna Dharma  
Vice-Abbot: Ven. Havanpola Shanti  
Head Monk: Ven. Sarika Dharma