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Aspects and Values of Buddhism for the Women of the West

By

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Living in India, which is not yet linked into the electronic autobahn at quite the screaming pace of the rest of the world, I received my information about this conference in two barely legible faxes, which arrived more than three weeks apart and presented me with two different titles for my paper. The first was "Aspects and Values of Buddhism That Are Attractive to Peoples in the West" and the second was that printed in the conference program, "Aspects and Values of Buddhism for Women in the West." These are rather different topics, but in another way they are not so different.

In that half the "peoples in the West" are women, the first topic in a sense includes the second, but one might approach the topic quite differently if considering it purely in terms of what Buddhism has to offer women. However, I think that certainly in the past and probably still now, most Western women encounter Buddhism first as a religious system, an idea system, or a way of being in the world, without much thought as to how it fits with feminist values, and only after time are forced to confront it in those terms. Thus, that is how I will approach the topic as well, first looking at those aspects of Buddhism that are attractive to Westerners in general, and then considering specifically what Buddhism does or does not offer Western women.

It is certainly the case that Buddhism is a religion a great many people in the West these days find attractive and interesting, and there are a number of specifically Buddhist ideas, practices, and ways of describing the world that one can point to explain this. However, it is also fair to say that any analysis of what aspects of Buddhism are attractive to people in the West will probably tell us as much, or more, about the current situation in the West and the mindset of Western people as it will about any intrinsically attractive qualities of Buddhism.

Still, to begin, let us look at some of the particular aspects of Buddhism that often come up when Westerners talk about what has drawn them to Buddhism. Yet, before beginning, the point must be made that in speaking about the "Buddhism" that Westerners are drawn to, it is not necessarily something that would be recognizable to someone who has grown up in a Buddhist culture. This has to do both with how Westerners are generally exposed to Buddhism and with the nature of Buddhism itself. Regarding how we are exposed, let me use myself as an example. I first read about Buddhism in a book by Houston Smith called *The Religions of Man*. After that initial exposure, I took a year long college course on Buddhism that purported to cover the key Buddhist doctrines as expressed by the major Buddhist traditions. Then, after a year of college spent studying in India, I

spent a period of several years studying at a Tibetan Buddhist center in the United States. I had been there more than two years before I heard anything that had the slightest relationship to what I had studied in my college course. Now this is not only true of Buddhism, I had the same experience regarding Hinduism, which I studied in college courses for a year just before going to India, and discovered when I got there that I had learned nothing that gave me any assistance in understanding the vast display of Hindu religiosity that surrounded me in the Hindu center of Banaras where I was studying.

How could this be? It has a great deal to do with the Western way of approaching things, including living religions, seeing them primarily as idea systems, something to think about and understand. Whereas people born into the Buddhist tradition generally approach their inherited religion beginning with what you *do*--visiting the temple, making offerings, and so forth--most Westerners are introduced to Buddhism as an idea system--often through books or a college course, and sometimes through meeting with Asian teachers of the Buddhist tradition, either those living in the West or through travel to Asia. And although in the latter case, it might seem that a trained Asian representative of a Buddhist tradition would be passing on that tradition exactly, in fact, modifications have already been made just by dealing with Westerners and even more by a teacher being in the West as evidenced by the fact that the majority of serious students of Buddhism in the West are lay, whereas in Buddhist countries serious study and practice of the religion is mostly left to those who are ordained. With Asian populations, lay people primarily operate in the support roll of making the offerings that support the ordained sangha (and in most Asian countries, the very term "ordained sangha" is redundant since lay people are not considered sangha).

Thus who is studying Buddhism and how is already different for Western Buddhists. What they are studying is also different because Buddhism is reaching the West in a way unprecedented in all its previous transmissions from one culture to another. In most other occasions when Buddhism traveled from one culture to another, it was one specific form of Buddhism. Now, all at one time, the Theravada, Mahayana, and tantric Mahayana Buddhist traditions as practiced in Burma, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Laos, Viet Nam, China, Korea, Japan, Tibet, and Mongolia are all available in a sort of vast smorgasbord of Buddhism. This is a very rich offering. But, it also means that what Westerners see as Buddhism is often "a little of this, a little of that"--essentially what is found attractive in the various traditions, rather than any one tradition in all its aspects.

Another important factor that must be taken note of is what basically different preconceptions Westerners bring to the study of Buddhism. We have grown up in a relentlessly materialistic, rationalistic culture that accepts as given scientific principles and ways of looking at the world (whether correctly understood or not can be debated); that accepts a historical view of world and culture; and that is deeply skeptical of anything that smacks of religious superstition. This world view does not yet pervade all Asian cultures, though it is making rapid inroads, and thus "born" rather than "become" Buddhists often believe things a "become" Buddhist not only doesn't, "become" Buddhists don't want to accept many of those beliefs as "truly Buddhist". Professor Jan Nattier has a very interesting article in *Tricycle* magazine where she discusses cogently just how different the Buddhism followed by most American converts is from that known by Asians born into the tradition.[1] Speaking from my own experience, even after more than twenty-five years of studying Buddhism, most of it directly from Tibetan teachers, with more than half that time spent living in close proximity to Tibetans, I still find that my understanding of and absorption of Tibetan Buddhism are markedly different from that of Tibetans who have grown up in the tradition.

Finally, before I turn to the topic at hand, I must insert one last caveat, which is that all of the points that follow about what Westerners find attractive about Buddhism are drawn from actual conversation and discussion, and since most Westerners come from a background of the Judeo-Christian tradition, whether practicing members or not, sometimes what persons find attractive is grame in an appositional way to ideas and practices they have grown up with. Nothing that follows is meant as a criticism of the Judeo-Christian tradition but is merely descriptive of how some people have reacted to it or described their experience of it. And just as much as a "born" Buddhist and a "become" one are seeing very different Buddhist traditions, so a "born" Christian or Jew often sees their tradition very differently than a "become" one, and usually it is not at the sophisticated level of a theologian or someone ordained.

Having completed this very long introduction, what are some of the Buddhist ideas Westerners find attractive? First, Buddhism offers a straightforward and at the same time comprehensive description of the nature of reality. A core Buddhist teaching is of the Four Noble Truth, the first of which is the truth of suffering. While this has often earned Buddhism the appellation of being a "pessimistic" religion, Pope John Paul II's book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*[2] being a recent and somewhat controversial case in point, there are many who find it offers a way of describing the world that mirrors their experience and then offers a way to transform that experience. For, Buddhism does not stop with merely identifying suffering, it posits a cause for that suffering, which

although hotly debated in its technical description among different Buddhist schools, is in essence one's own inappropriate behavior motivated by a misperception of the nature of reality. Buddhist teachings then say that because this is a misperception rather than an intrinsic fault, it can be overcome, and then posit a course of action that leading to the cessation of that suffering.

This complex of the four truths is I believe an important key to what Westerners find attractive about Buddhism. Coming from a Judeo-Christian tradition that posits an omnipotent all powerful creator God, a source of suffering that is an "original sin" without much seeming relation to an individual person, and a salvation that cannot be coerced from this all powerful God but requires a "leap of faith", many Westerners are drawn to what they see as a rational and in fact not overtly religious description of the world that offers them a means of remedying their situation by their own efforts. (Interestingly enough, many lay Asian Buddhists might not recognize this description.) The technique for changing one's situation best known in the West is meditation, again something that is very much within one's own hands. Thus, Buddhism is perceived as a rational idea system offering a systematic program of actions and ethical guidelines that can be used to better the human situation. Specifically, the root problem is seen as a mental one and numerous specific techniques for transformation of the mind are offered.

Because of the lack of a creator God in Buddhism among other things, there have been Western scholars who have asserted that Buddhism is not a religion. Although for them this was a defect of Buddhism, and, in fact, is patently ridiculous, in that Buddhism in its various cultural forms has served as the *religious* support and solace of millions of followers throughout Asia for more than two thousand years, the fact that it can be seen as not overly religious accounts, I believe, for a good deal of its contemporary appeal. People who have grown up in a primarily secular society without much sympathy for church institutions and religious dogmas that seem anti-rational are drawn towards something that offers them meaning, values, and ameliorative techniques, all offered with the potential of freedom from much of what is seen as negative about religion, at least as many of those who are drawn to Buddhism have experienced it in their childhoods.

Thus Buddhism can be seen as religion without the religion and also as a set of ideas and practices one can take on without necessarily becoming Buddhist. This has to do with the ways described above that many Westerners are exposed to it, but also has much to do the way prominent Buddhist teachers known in the West today such as His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet and the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh from Viet Nam present Buddhism. Both teach extensively without seeking to convert, and Thich Nhat Hanh, for instance, has said, "Buddhism is more of a way of life than a religion an experience that is worth trying. It is open for everyone. You can continue to be a Jew or a Catholic while enjoying Buddhism." [3] The Dalai Lama is equally specific in articulating that it is not necessary in the least to become Buddhist in order to appreciate the value of various Buddhist ideas and to reap the benefits of Buddhist practices such as meditation, and he is quite willing to say that it is not necessary even to be "religious" per se. In an interview with Jean-Claude Carrière published in *Tricycle* magazine, the following exchange occurred: [4]

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: "I believe deeply that we must find, all of us together, a new spirituality. This new concept ought to be elaborated alongside the religions, in such a way that all people of good will could adhere to it."

Jean-Claude Carrière: "Even if they have no religion, or are against religion?" His Holiness the Dalai Lama: "Absolutely. We need a new concept, a lay spirituality. We ought to promote this concept, with the help of scientists. It could lead us to set up what we are all looking for, a *secular morality*. I believe in it deeply. And I think we need it so the world can have a better future." He then went on to speak about the benefits of peace of mind that he experiences every day as a result of his spiritual and meditation practices and to emphasize their value for everyone, regardless of religious conviction. The Dalai Lama consistently emphasizes in his teachings those aspects of Buddhism that he feels speak to the needs of the world at large.

Also worth noting in the context of the above discussion is that fact that figures such His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh offer impressive models of a non-materialistic, non-dogmatic, non-exclusive spiritual way of living in the world.

Another important reason so many in the West find Buddhist ideas attractive is how directly they address critical issues facing the world today. For instance, the Buddhist doctrine of interdependence, the fact that nothing exists in and of itself and that all things are interrelated, is a powerful concept that is directly applicable to ecological issues, such as the preservation of the environment, and to economic issues around the evolving global economy. Similarly, the Buddhist world view that sees humans as just one among life forms fits perfectly with an ethic that

is seeking to see all parts of the universe as valuable and deserving of concern, not giving a position of exclusive privilege to just humans or to humans of only one race, gender, or belief system. Buddhist prayers are made in terms of "all sentient beings"--all that lives, human and non-human. In various Buddhist traditions one can find ways to include the inanimate world in that sphere of responsibility as well, such as Zen teachings that find the Buddha nature in rocks and trees, and Tibetan teachings that speak of the sacredness of all--the vessel and the essence (*gnod bcod*), the inanimate and the animate world. These teachings provide religious foundations to counter the commerce-driven view that unrestrained consumption and even destruction of resources and species for the enjoyment of the privileged few is justified.

In a similar vein, not necessarily the most popular Buddhist teaching, but to my mind, one of the most important, is the Buddhist doctrine of "satisfaction", the concept that a little is enough. In diametrical opposition to the yuppie slogan, "He (or she) who dies with the most toys wins," Buddhist teachings emphasize the senselessness of the accumulation of material possessions, for they do nothing to assist with what is truly important and in fact distract from it. At the time of death, whatever one has accumulated in the way of material goods is of no use; the only thing that matters is the state of one's mind--the good qualities one has accumulated there.

Thus far, I have concentrated on Buddhist ideas and ethical teachings that Westerners find attractive. Equally or more attractive to many is the fact that Buddhism offers people a way of being in the world, particularly practices of meditation, that many find helpful. Across its various traditions, Buddhism offers many different techniques for working with the mind and it is those that have drawn adherents in the West. Of particular interest are zazen from the Japanese Zen tradition, the meditation practices of the Theravada tradition as practiced in Burma, Thailand, and Sri Lanka, and the meditations of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

Meditation is not Buddhist per se, and further many non-Buddhists practice Buddhist meditation without becoming Buddhist. For one within the Buddhist tradition and set on the Buddhist goal of enlightenment, there is always the hope of attaining the highest goal, and many strive for it. However, there are also benefits along the way. Mindfulness meditation offers people a way of changing their experience of the world, a way to step back from a purely reactive way of being. The directed analytical Tibetan meditations on the nature of cyclic existence, the reality of death, techniques for developing compassion, and so forth all offer people a way of changing their ingrained ways of understanding and reacting to the world.

People from many professions--social workers, psychologists, therapists, and so forth find that there are techniques they can bring into their work that help them to be more effective in their efforts to help others. This is perhaps the first time there has been such wide scale co-opting of religious techniques for essentially secular purposes, but it is clearly a use of the tradition that many Buddhist teachers are happy to encourage.

Thus, these are some of the things that draw Westerners to Buddhism--a way of describing the world that makes sense, ethical principles to live by, models to follow, and a set of very specific practices that can be done, both to improve one's life in the present and directed towards enlightenment in the future.

What does all this have to do with women? I believe that all of these things are what draw Westerners in general, both men and women, to Buddhism, and I have heard all of these points described specifically by women. Among the Western Buddhist communities, women generally make up half or more of membership. I think it would be fair to say that whatever it is that draws people to Buddhism, it draws women and men equally. Although gender issues have become more important in recent years, I do not think that they are a primary factor in the initial attraction of Buddhism.

What I do see as a major factor is that when persons approach Buddhism as a new religion, they see it with fresh eyes, in an idealized form, as it should be rather than as it perhaps is. Some years ago when participating in a panel on "Women in Buddhism" that was part of a Buddhist-Christian Dialogue conference, I was struck by the fact that as women struggle to find a place in the major religious traditions that they find affirming and that allows them growth and realization of their potential, there was the interesting situation of Western women with a Judeo-Christian upbringing affirming all the positive values for women that they found in the Buddhist tradition, while Asian women with a Buddhist upbringing did not recognize and had not experienced such egalitarian Buddhism and were finding their potential for value and growth within the Christian tradition.

The fact is that all of the world's major religions, however they started out, have over the centuries become decidedly patriarchal, absorbing this patriarchal bias even into their core doctrines, and women everywhere have to struggle to reclaim for themselves a position of equality and value. Perhaps this is more difficult to do within

that which is familiar and ingrained, where one sees clearly the hypocrisy, than it is in that which one approaches fresh, not seeing, not even knowing all the wrong that has gone before.

What does a Western woman newly approaching the Buddhist tradition find? On the positive side, there is a vocabulary of equality--it is clearly stated in the earliest texts of the tradition that enlightenment is equally possible for men and for women. The early literature is full of stories of women who demonstrated that potential and became enlightened--just as enlightened as their male counterparts. Although Buddha is a male, his maleness is less of an issue than the very male God/Jehovah of the Christian tradition (feminist efforts to transform this notwithstanding), and, because the Buddha is a very different sort of figure than the omnipotent Judeo-Christian God, there is not the same affect of submission and obedience to a male authority figure. Certainly to someone newly approaching the Buddhist tradition, there is an appearance of equality. Also, because so much of Buddhist prayer and supplication is phrased in terms of "all sentient beings", women are not continuously confronted with a male centered vocabulary (or need not be; it is very much a function of translation).

In addition, the Buddhist tradition did not create the same polarities as the Western one. As opposed to the dualities of man/women, culture/nature, reason/emotion, black/white of the West, in which women invariably fall on the lesser side, the Buddhist Mahayana tradition offers the pair of method and wisdom, masculine and feminine, the two essential wings of the bird flying to enlightenment. Thus, on a deep symbolic level (even if not necessarily in everyday reality) the feminine is valued and in fact essential for any true spiritual development. Although this is not explicitly stated, once enlightenment has been thus defined as the fullest development of the masculine and feminine potentials, it is clearly an androgynous state, not a hyper-masculine one, and this is readily seen in much Buddhist art. For instance, in the Tibetan iconographic tradition, male and female Bodhisattvas, those manifesting compassionate activities in the world, such as Avalokiteshvara and Tara, are often almost indistinguishable in representation.

Further, there are strong feminine figures within the Buddhist tradition. For instance, within the Tibetan tradition, there is Tara, the embodiment of compassion just mentioned. She is famous for having vowed to achieve complete enlightenment in the female body, rejecting suggestions that she seek to be reborn as a male in order to enhance her progress on the spiritual path. There are also historical religious figures such as Yeshe Tsogyal (ye shes mtsho rgyal, eighth century) and Ma-jik-lap-drön (ma gcig lab sgron, 1055-1153) who were renowned practitioners and teachers. And within this century, one of the most famous meditators and teachers of either sex was the Shugsep Jetsunma Ani Lochen (blo-chen, 1865-1951). Thus women looking for role models can find someone to look up to and emulate.

But, what else do women approaching the Buddhist tradition find? A textual tradition with far too many nasty comments about women, calling them temptresses and so forth, and talking about the "lowly form of women". A tradition regarding admission of women to the ordained order which says that the Buddha initially refused to admit them and when he finally did so accompanied it with the prediction that this would shorten the lifetime of his teachings (that prediction has already been exceeded, so it would seem the ordination of women was not so dire after all). Along with reluctant admission of women into the order came rules that make the most senior nun subordinate to the most junior monk.

Across the Buddhist tradition, the institutions of Buddhism are overwhelmingly male, the money and power of the Buddhist tradition are almost exclusively in male hands, and the teaching role is primarily in male hands as well. In all Buddhist cultures (one might argue the case for China being an exception) the nuns lag far behind the monks in almost every way. In all the Buddhist traditions except the Mahayana tradition found in China, Korea, and Viet Nam, full ordination for the women either never was introduced or has been lost, and in those areas where it is not found, the male establishment is not predisposed towards its reintroduction. In the Theravada tradition, the nuns are not even considered members of the "sangha", a status which in Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand would entitle them to some state support. Although there are notable and shining exceptions, women interacting with this male religious establishment regularly encounter levels of overt sexism that are no longer tolerated openly in the West.

Finally, there is the whole question of the sexual abuse of women by male Buddhist teachers, a problem across the entire Buddhist tradition (and one might add across all religious traditions and in fact all cultures) but particularly evident in the tantric Buddhist traditions where sexual imagery and energy play a major role and in the Zen tradition where most priests have no vows of celibacy. There is much to be said about this issue, which basically boils down to gullible women and rapacious men, but it is perhaps best saved for another forum.

Just to touch on it briefly, on the tantric side, the issue is well epitomized by two recent books by Western women which have generated a great deal of discussion--Miranda Shaw's *Passionate Enlightenment*[5] in which she argues for the existence of a tantric tradition in which women are full and empowered partners in the quest for enlightenment and in fact are seen as a source of spiritual insight and power, and June Campbell's *Traveller in Space*[6] in which she describes a tradition where women are simply the objects of use of men who have co-opted all power and authority and are intent merely on their own purposes. Without addressing any of the complex and interesting issues raised by either book, it is worthwhile to point out that Shaw is describing a situation she has recreated from a dim past through a new hermeneutic of textual interpretation, describing a tantric tradition that flourished in India in the eighth to twelfth centuries. Campbell is describing an almost current reality, basing her exposition on personal experience with the Kagyu tradition and one of its most eminent lamas in the 1970 and 80's. Quite aside from differences of viewpoint and agenda of the respective authors, the mere fact that one is writing of the developmental years of a tradition whereas the other is describing an entrenched establishment one thousand years later may be the most significant factor in explaining the wide discrepancy between them.

Where does all of this leave Western women today? Buddhism is a religion that travels from culture to culture, and it is one that changes considerably from in the process, to the point where Buddhists of one culture sometimes find their religion almost unrecognizable in another. Buddhism affects the cultures it enters but it is also affected by them. Thus, this occasion of Buddhism being introduced into Western culture is a time of tremendous potential for change--both of Buddhism and of Western culture. This has positive and negative aspects. I have already commented above on how what the West has come to know as Buddhism is a hybrid that up till now has not existed. On the one side, only some aspects of Buddhism have come through, mostly the more theoretical and practice oriented--in the west we know little about the way Buddhism is lived and experienced by most of its millions of Asian adherents. On the other hand, as already mentioned, the full diversity of the very rich Buddhist tradition in all its cultural forms is represented in this process of cultural transmission. Thus, although there is no way to get exactly any one tradition as it exists in its culture of origin, there is a chance to get the best of many traditions

The Dalai Lama frequently advises Westerners interested in Tibetan Buddhism to seek its essence and not be distracted by cultural accretions. This of course is much more easily said than done, and up to now the "pick and choose" approach to Buddhism has led to a fair amount of superficiality and to a lot of people who have approached Buddhism merely as an idea system and not taken it enough to heart to have the transformative effect on their lives they might have hoped for. (The Dalai Lama also says that if you want to see change in your life from Buddhist practice, say in terms of how angry you are, look for progress over ten or fifteen years of practice, not expecting great transformation in weeks or months.)

Generally the introduction and absorption of Buddhism into a new culture is a process that requires two hundred years or more to reach a point where it has really been absorbed, understood, and taken on the distinctive flavor of the new culture. Since this process has now begun in the West but is certainly not complete, for Western women, it is a time of great potential.

There are various ways that Western women can approach Buddhism. One is to see it merely as a tradition offering some helpful ideas and techniques and to take those that are helpful while ignoring the misogyny. Another, for those who are seriously interested in Buddhism per se and in taking on Buddhism in a life-absorbing fashion, is to take a stand now and refuse to accept and adopt those elements that are sexist and not affirming of women. This can be done at all levels of the tradition. The Pali canon reports that just prior to his death, Buddha offered his followers the opportunity to give up all the minor rules of conduct and forge their own. This chance was not taken, but it could be. In fact the Japanese Buddhist tradition abandoned almost entirely the vinaya of the Pali canon and chose for the most part not to be a celibate monastic tradition. Western women can simply refuse to accept rules of conduct that place them forever inferior.

A major problem for faith for modern adherents and particularly for modern scholars in the Asian Buddhist traditions is the fact that much of the tradition is based on ideas of lineage--on unbroken transmission of teachings and traditions from one person to another going back to the time of the Buddha and on the fact that the whole Buddhist canon is seen to be the word of Buddha, whereas Western scholarly study of the same quickly finds holes in the lineages of transmission and suggests that much of the canon, certainly the Mahayana and tantric texts, were written well after the Buddha's death. This is an issue that each culture has to face in its own way, but I would suggest that we in the West are so deeply influenced by Western ideas of historiography and so basically indisposed to ideas of teachings that transcend the rational (such as that Buddha himself spoke each and every of the scriptural teachings and some were many were simply hidden till the time was right for them to appear) that we should simply not make the attempt and settle instead on a canon that isn't sexist or patriarchal.

Rather than argue issues of whether Buddha really said such and such and if so, why, in that Buddha himself said, "Don't simply accept what I say but analyze my teachings as a goldsmith analyzes gold, by cutting, burning, and polishing, let's simply declare that sexist comments about women do not pass that analysis and should not be included in the canon to be followed. There are plenty of teachings that are not sexist--let's take them and leave the rest behind. To me it seems patently obvious that an enlightened being is not sexist, and that sexist teachings were not spoken by an enlightened being.

Similarly, regarding the near exclusive control of Buddhist institutions by men and the issue of abuse by Buddhist male authority figures, Western women are in a very different situation than their Asian sisters in that there is no established Buddhist order and cultural mores that they need to live with. Therefore, Western women can insist that things be set up differently from the start. As far as abuse goes, they need to say no and organize to reveal and stop those who perpetrate it. Although the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, for instance puts a heavy emphasis on reliance on one's spiritual teacher, it does not recommend mindless reliance. Tsong-kha-pa emphasizes examining a teacher carefully before relying on him or her, and the Dalai Lama has said again and again that one should not simply follow blindly, but rather if asked to do something against one's conscience, should politely excuse oneself and refuse. Clear standards exist and those who exceed them should not be tolerated.

Buddhism in the West has not yet fully confronted the issues of money and power--being a new religion there isn't much of either yet, and to some extent Buddhism in the West is still in the more idealistic phase of truth to the ideals rather than entrenched institutionalism. Those issues will have to be faced, at least to the extent of deciding how much one wants to participate. Actually, the poor representation of women in the historical annals of Buddhism does not, I believe, reflect so much their absence. I think there have always been sincerely practicing female Buddhists including many who have attained high levels of spiritual realization and been great teachers. What they have not been is part of the power establishment and hence not part of the recorded histories. This may be an omission to be rectified or it may reflect that all along they have simply been truly doing what the tradition says it is all about. The challenge is to find a middle path that leaves a trail for others to follow without compromising the true spirit of the Buddhist teachings.

Of course none of this is simple or easy. It requires that women work together and that they do so with a great deal of good will. They need to support each other, and they need to be clear on what their aims and goals are and move towards them. It requires tremendous effort and discipline. If women want an improvement in the overall situation, they have to take the responsibility for creating it for themselves. It is not up to someone to create it for them and hand it over. Of course it helps immensely to have figures like the Dalai Lama speaking out in firm support of all attempts to achieve a genuine equality, but in the end the situation of western women in the Buddhist tradition as it evolves in the West is going to be what Western women make it.

Notes

1] "Visible & Invisible: The Politics of Representation in Buddhist America," *Tricycle* V, No.1, Fall 95, pp.42-49.

2] Alfred A. Knopf, 1994.

3] *Tricycle* IV, No.4, Summer 95, Interview with Thich Nhat Hanh, pp.31-38, quotation from p.31.

4] *Tricycle* V, No.1, Fall 95, "Global View: A Conversation with the Dalai Lama" (in conversation with Jean-Claude Carrière), pp.34-39, quote from p.39.

5] Princeton University Press, 1995.

6] George Braziller, 1996.