

AMERICAN BUDDHIST WOMEN

Encouraging Inclusion Across American Buddhisms

The USA National Branch of Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT of Sakyadhita USA

The first tenant of SUSA's mission is to establish an inclusive alliance of Buddhist women in the U.S., across all traditions, lineages, practices, ethnicities and life styles. Most Buddhist practice groups are made up of people who have little contact with dharma practitioners from other traditions, practice types or ethnicities. About two years ago, the board of Sakyadhita USA wrestled with this question of and realized that in order to establish a sisterhood of Buddhist women in the U.S., we first have to get to know one another. We saw that an electronic magazine (an eZine) in which American Buddhist women across all types of practice groups could share their stories would be one way of getting acquainted with our sisters. The eZine we established was the one you are reading now, *American Buddhist Women*.

This issue is No. 4 of this quarterly eZine. Nearly a year ago in the first issue, Winter 2014, four Buddhist women from across the country and members of a monastic community shared the stories of their lives and their practice. The Spring 2014 issue featured the program of the 9th Annual Buddhist Women's Conference, on "Dharma Women: Custodians of the Planet," which SUSA co-sponsored with The Buddhist Council of the Midwest. In addition, we were fortunate to be able to publish in the issue a special feature article by pioneering scholar of Buddhist feminist theology, Rita M. Gross, titled "Precious Birth, Precious Earth—A Buddhist View of Sustainability."

In the Summer 2014 issue, four Buddhist women shared their stories about dharma's role in helping them care for their aging mothers. In the current issue, four American Buddhist women write about dharma's role in mothering their own children. These women's personal stories demonstrate how dharma practice can undergird and support us practically and spiritually during our most challenging life circumstances. These issues are still available for download on the SUSA website at www.sakyadhitausa.org
(Continued p.13, **Message**)



Charlotte Collins
SUSA President

Sakyadhita Sisters: Our Lives, Our Stories, Our Practice Mothering & Dharma



Jacqueline Kramer (center), her daughter (left) and granddaughter (right).

From the Hearth By Jacqueline Kramer

During a recent weekend I had the great joy and honor to speak with a mothers group. We all sat in a circle, mothers, babies and myself, talking about the challenges and pleasures of our mothering experiences. It was lovely to have babies crawling all around us as we talked. Being with these moms and babies reminded me of why I started the Hearth Foundation and why I committed to serve mothers. There are two main threads that led to this calling. The first is, I come from a family that adores children. When my father or mother saw a child, anywhere, they'd immediately get down on their hands and knees and start playing with them. They were never more joyful than when encountering little ones. My daughter and I have the same impulse of delight in babies and children. The second is born out of a stark awareness of how, in cultures throughout the world, and in Buddhism in particular, even in women's Buddhist teachings, mothers are seldom taken seriously as candidates for awakening.

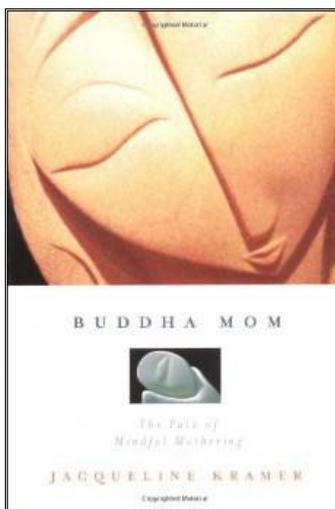
My Buddhist practice and studies began in earnest three years before getting pregnant. When considering whether I might become a Buddhist nun, my teacher, Annagarika Dhamma Dinna, said to me, *“If you were meant to be a nun you would know it. No, you should become a shining example.”* I wasn’t sure what sort of shining example she was referring to. I certainly had my fair share of issues and couldn’t even fathom wanting to be a model of anything. But, after applying Annagarika’s thorough teachings, which were grounded in the Sri Lankan Theravadin tradition and included the abhidhamma, the suttas and some vinaya, to pregnancy, birthing and being a mother and homemaker, my perspective changed. I was astonished at how useful this wisdom and these practices were in my daily mothering and homemaking. I was also surprised at how little was written on this important subject. It wasn’t “I” who was to become a shining example. It was the Buddha’s teachings that were the shining examples, waiting to be translated for 21st century mothers. Mothers are natural vessels for spiritual growth. I noticed how the women around me, even those who didn’t have a dedicated practice, were growing spiritually in leaps and bounds when becoming mothers. Selfless service, check. Unconditional love, check. Letting go, check. If this much growth was taking place without teachings, how much further could these women go given some real support? I kept wondering, *why is no one talking and writing about this?*

I was to discover that the main reason mothers have been so underrepresented in Buddhist language, stories and practices is because Buddhism has developed largely through a monastic lens. Even though most Buddhist centers in the US today cater to lay people they still retain the monastic model, which includes long periods of retreat and the need for a controlled environment. If you want to test this out, try bringing a baby to a meditation hall or Zendo! Life in the home holds different challenges, and offers different opportunities, than monastic life. In monastic life there is quiet and prescribed routines. Home life can be noisy, messy and unpredictable. In the monastic lifestyle large periods of dedicated meditation are possible. For a mother to leave her home and family, even just to attend a one-week retreat, can be a hardship on her and her young family. Even everyday sitting meditation can easily become one more thing on the to do list rather than a joy. But mothers have advantages over monastics in other areas. Mothers have a PICC line (peripherally-inserted central catheter) into the heart of unconditional love so they need very little practice

to realize the Bodhisattva vow of love for all beings. Their lives are seeped in selfless service and they are challenged to let go of attachments amidst the heat of the strongest possible attachment- mother to child.

One of the brilliant aspects of the Buddha’s teachings lies in how permeable they are to each new culture they enter. In order to make this tremendously useful wisdom relevant to new populations it must be translated into the real time, everyday lives of the people they are serving. Each culture makes its own adaptations, but the basic tenets remain constant. The interest is in awakening. The Four Noble Truths, the suffering caused by liking and disliking, the Eight-Fold Path ethics, and other foundational teachings—all these teachings have the agility and universality to apply to any culture and living situation, not just to an Asian style monastic setting. Since a significant portion of the population consists of women who are mothers in homes, it behooves us to make the teachings accessible to them.

When the Buddha taught an ox herder, he used ox metaphors; when he taught a thief, he used stealing metaphors. Hearth Foundation works with today’s mothers, so we work with metaphors around things like traffic jams, washing the floor, letting go of cherished plans, and cooking stew. Before sharing how we go about this, there is something I’d like to mention. Once, when I was giving a talk to a large audience, a man came up to me afterwards angry as a hornet. He said, *“What about fathers, don’t they count?”* Throughout the many years I have been giving talks on mothering as a spiritual practice, this issue inevitably arises. My answer is always some form of, *“I’ve never been a father so I can’t speak with authority about their experiences.”* Fathers are very important and they have their own set of challenges, although, sometimes the father takes on the role of a mother. Sometimes a father’s challenges may be the same as those faced by mothers and sometimes they are different. We can’t ignore the fact that a mother’s body holds the baby in an intimate embrace for nine months, that her body is designed to nourish the baby and that her hormones offer a different experience of early parenting than a father’s experience. Mothers are different from fathers and, never having been a father, this is why I focus on teachings for mothers, although many of the Hearth lessons are applicable to both men and women and we have had a couple of fathers come to Hearth.



Cover of *Buddha Mom: the Path of Mindful Mothering* by Jacqueline Kramer

In 2011 my book, *Buddha Mom: the Path of Mindful Mothering*, was published by Tarcher/Putnam (now Tarcher/Penguin). *Buddha Mom* is part memoir—field notes from my 20-year experiment in applying Buddhist teachings to pregnancy, birthing, mothering and homemaking—and part basic Buddhist primer for mothers. Hearth Foundation was formed as a response to requests for teachings after *Buddha Mom* was released. Since the book had excellent distribution, requests came in from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, England, New York and other locations. It was clearly not possible for me to go to each place to teach, so I developed online teachings designed to form loosely woven groups of women for the purpose of support, friendship and to develop Buddhist home practices. Lessons, which were sent out via email each week, were created around major Buddhist tenets as they related to a mother's experience. These lessons are available on request on the Hearth website (<http://www.hearth-foundation.org/>) The lessons include: setting up a home meditation practice, the Four Noble Truths, the Eight-fold path, the Five Precepts, the Three Refuges, perspectives on relationships using the Sigolavada sutta, everyday practices for busy parents, death and dying for the family, as well as some other topics relevant to moms. The intention in each of these lessons is to do my best to make this immensely valuable wisdom relevant and available to busy moms.

Hearth is a work in process. We have found that teaching online is not as intimate as face-to-face contact. People feel less engaged when there is no actual location where they need to physically show up. Unless the online teacher exerts tremendous effort, the group members tend to disappear. For that reason, Hearth is now exploring the option of helping moms create small groups in their homes. This project involves writing up formats and offering tools and training manuals to support group leaders. We are also offering Hearth lessons and guidance in using the lessons to sanghas that are looking for materials to support families in their congregations. In addition to the lessons, Hearth offers a monthly newsletter featuring a dharma talk, which is available to anyone who would like to be on our mailing list. We are also working on references for families as well as suggestions of children's books and activities that reinforce Buddhist values for families.

We are a young organization and, although our goal of creating mother-friendly Buddhist teachings and resources has remained consistent, we continue to experiment with different modalities. There is a need for the creativity and application of many hands in this field, a field that has been non-existent for centuries. It takes many hands and minds to build something substantial. We invite people who feel called

to this work to join us. We are looking for web-savvy people, teachers interested in helping create workbooks for home sanghas, midwives, doulas, book reviewers, and others who are interested in working as a group in order to create tools and inspiration for home practice.

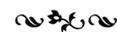
Our world is changing. It's hard to believe that most women were illiterate until recently! Women are now being educated in great numbers, many of them becoming mothers. A whole body of literature and resources for mothers is only beginning to be created. Although Buddhism's respect for laywomen has been obscured by cultural norms, the core Buddhist teachings have much to offer the mothers who are bringing up the next generation of Buddhist practitioners. Although there are teachings for those rearing the next generation of Buddhas, there have been almost no teachings specifically designed for the mothers themselves to become Buddhas as they live the householder's life. Mothers are as capable of awakening as anyone else and deserve our sincere efforts and support on their path. Buddhism cannot become firmly established in a culture until it is firmly established in the home lives of our families.

The Hearth blog—a forum for discussion of the Hearth monthly dharma talk
<http://awakeningathome.org/>

The Hearth website
<http://www.hearth-foundation.org/>

You can learn more about the Hearth lessons, read dharma talks and learn about some of our members on this site.

Order *Buddha Mom* at:
<http://www.amazon.com/>



Jacqueline Kramer, author of *Buddha Mom—the Path of Mindful Mothering* and *10 Spiritual Practices for Busy Parents* has been studying and practicing Buddhism for over 30 years. In 2008 Jacqueline received the "Outstanding Women in Buddhism Award" at the U.N. day for women in Thailand for her work teaching Buddhism to mothers. She is founder and director of the Hearth Foundation which offers online lay Buddhist practice classes designed for families, a monthly newsletter and other resources for mothers seeking spiritual support and inspiration. The Hearth Foundation has students from Australia, Argentina, New Zealand, Europe, the U.S., Canada and many other countries. As a former vice president of Alliance for Bhikkhunis (www.bhikkhuni.net) she is actively engaged in supporting Theravadin women's monasticism. She is also an Advisory Board member of Sakyadhita USA. Jacqueline lives in Sonoma County, California, with her daughter and granddaughter.



Lulu Cook (left), daughter Ace (center), and wife Julie.



Queer Mamas *By Lulu Cook*

Among the memories of sangha activities to which my wife and I have brought our daughter, a few stand out. We practice in the Theravadin tradition, particularly with Dharma Punx/Against the Stream and with the bhikkhuni sangha. Our daughter is 13 now, and over the years these groups have offered many opportunities to expose her to the dharma, although it sometimes requires a little extra effort to make it all work. It's been worth it for the sense of spiritual home and belonging we have, even though our family may look a little bit different (queer, tattoo-ed, pierced, occasionally with bright blue and pink hair) than others who practice in these groups.

When we offer service at Aranya Bodhi Hermitage, for instance, we are fortunate to be in the company of the Dhammadharini bhikkhunis. There is a depth of practice here that is quiet and concentrated in a way that our rambunctious

family is not. We bring energy, noise, and willingness to work when we arrive for volunteer weekends. The nuns offer their welcome and dedication, and dharma teachings tailored to the challenges we face in lay life. They also graciously look the other way when we sneak snacks at all hours – growing teens do not take kindly to the notion of no meals after noon! We have never felt that being gay, having a child, or coming from the whirl of lay life have kept us from participating or being welcomed with love. We just have to plan a little bit differently to meet our family needs as well as not intrude too much upon the needs of monastics who are keeping the Vinaya. For our family, we appreciate the access to such deep practice and dharma teaching, as well as the opportunity for our daughter to understand that service and generosity are important values in our home. We hope that our service benefits the community of the Hermitage as deeply, in different ways. With both sides offering understanding and accommodation of the differences, we all benefit.

More frequently, we participate in our weekly sitting groups with the unique demands of being parents, whether our daughter comes with us or we had to make arrangements

for her in order to be able to attend sangha ourselves. At a recent evening dharma talk at Urban Dharma in San Francisco, Vinny Ferraro was teaching, and due to a variety of family logistics, our daughter had to come with us. She sprawled on the ground between my wife and me, reading quietly during the meditation period and throughout the dharma talk, garnering only a few looks from fellow practitioners at her apparent lack of interest in the program. As we headed out for sorbet afterward (nothing like a bribe to ensure good behavior from sulky teens!), Vinny asked our daughter how she enjoyed the evening. Her response: "It was as boring as all the rest of them, so I didn't really listen." Vinny was able to appreciate her frank assessment of things, and laughed. We left feeling grateful for such a welcoming sangha, through which our daughter hears the dharma, even if reluctantly.

And she is listening, although she pretends otherwise. She offers the teachings back to us, prodding us with questions like, "Was that wise speech, Mama?" Or when stuck in traffic, "Well, this is an opportunity for you to practice!" We use the Buddha's teachings to help her explore and understand her teenage world. The angst she may feel about the murky terrain of teenage friendships can be held in the light of the First Noble Truth, that we will all experience discomfort, unease, and dissatisfaction in this life. As parents, we hope to gently guide her toward an understanding that this is not personal, it will all change again, and she does not have to take any of it as an eternal comment about who she is or her ultimate worth. She has also offered on her own the idea that it does not matter if we are part of a queer family or not, because we all have the same opportunity for awakening, no matter what our gender, sexual orientation, or other aspects of our physical form.

The sanghas of Western insight tradition have been a wonderful ground from which our family moves out into the complex challenges of contemporary lay life. We are grateful for the ways we've been able to participate, and for the exposure of our daughter to a welcoming and inclusive understanding of the dharma. She has her own spiritual journey to walk as she grows older, and we respect that. We hope that the lessons she has learned about the Four Noble Truths and the values of generosity and compassion will be woven into the ground that supports her, no matter what her own practice looks like.



Lulu Cook is trained to facilitate dharma groups by Noah Levine (*Against the Stream/Dharma Punx*) and she is a student of Amma Thanasanti Bhikkhuni's training program for women in the dharma. She co-facilitates the Oakland *Against the Stream* weekly meditation group. She is employed as a registered dietitian nutritionist specializing in sustainable wellness for our personal health as well as that of the environment. She finds that lay life, relationships, and parenting are fertile grounds for dharma practice and awakening.



Lisa Battaglia with 2-year-old son, Ethan.



**Slow Down, Lay Low, Be Present:
Three Gems of Motherhood
by Lisa Battaglia**

I am an intense person with a "Type A" personality who moves at a fast pace and thrives on productivity. I am also a relatively new mother. (My son, Ethan, is two years old.) With all of the joys and challenges of being a mom to a toddler, I have learned three life lessons that resonate with Buddhist values: slow down, lay low, and be present.

Gem #1: Slow Down. Did I mention I move at a fast pace? Ethan has taught me to literally slow down. For example, walking from the car to the store to run an errand. Suddenly, my "I'm on a mission" pace comes to a startling halt

as I hold the hand of a toddler who ambles along, pausing at interesting things in the parking lot along the way. When I truly slow down—and I don't mean just physically, I mean mentally, letting go of worries, anxieties and packed time schedules—I start to see and experience the world through the eyes of a two-year-old. Wow, that car is blue! Yes, I see the doggie. Being über-productive and fast-paced gives way to a mindfulness and appreciation of the little things that go unnoticed, that is, until I slow down.

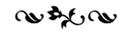
Gem #2: Lay Low. I mean get on the floor. There is nothing more silly and pleasurable than playing with Ethan on the ground, on his level. Letting him crawl all over me as I lie on the floor, crouching behind furniture to play “hide-and-seek,” sitting with him on the ground to pick up rocks or feel the texture of grass—all of these things require lowering my stature, both physically and figuratively. Letting go of pretense, letting down one's guard, and putting oneself in a posture of humility is profoundly liberating. It is also grounding. In our touch-starved world, laying low and feeling the warmth and weight of a child's body is such a simple and connecting experience.

Gem #3: Be Present. One of the cardinal Buddhist teachings is the truth of change. I am constantly reminded of this as I witness how quickly Ethan is growing and changing. Many people have advised me to enjoy every moment of motherhood, because it goes by so quickly. I know they are right. Every day, Ethan does or says something new. The flip side is, things he did when he was a baby are now only captured in memory, anecdote, or photo. Ethan teaches me to be present, to be mindful of this day, this moment, this experience. Being present also means being present to oneself. For me, this translates into taking some time for myself. This usually takes the form of a morning run: just me, my thoughts, and the rhythmic sound of my feet hitting the pavement. It is meditation in motion.

In the *Anguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha extols mothers for their love and support of their children: “They take care of them and nourish them and show them this world.” Ethan also nourishes me and shows me this world. He has taught me boundless love. He has also taught me to slow down, lay low, and be present.



Lisa Battaglia is Assistant Professor of Religion at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama.



How My Buddhist Education Has Helped Me With The Daily Ritual of Raising Teens

By Karen Gelinias



Karen Gelinias

Like the cliché says “You will find love when you least expect it.” That is how I found Buddhism, and it found me. In 2010, I had been supplementing my full time domestic duties as a wife and mother to two young children by practicing yoga, taking various courses and attending workshops. Around the same time I was asked to officiate at a friend's wedding, then another friend's wedding, and then referrals to do more weddings came. From then on a spiritual shift came into my life. I felt a deep responsibility to develop my spiritual self, one that had never

been awakened, and to act as an agent for something above and beyond the mundane activities in my present routine.

I was not raised with any faith or religion, although my family is culturally Jewish. I had married into a Catholic family, but did not feel that was my spiritual path, and I became increasingly drawn to Hinduism and Buddhism. I decided that in order to serve the couples I was marrying, I should have a deeper understanding of their religious backgrounds, and I began to pursue an MA degree in Comparative Religion. It was very important for me to go to a smaller school, not a big campus with a bunch of twenty-year-olds, somewhere where I would fit in being an ‘older’ resuming student with a family. With some determination I was able to find a small Buddhist-founded university in the Los Angeles area called University of the West, and it was from then on my affair with Buddhism began.

I entered into the MA program with an emphasis in Comparative Religion and I vividly remember walking into

my very first class. There were monks and nuns, and I was so excited to be among them! How was this happening? How can I be sitting next to a Buddhist monastic, in a tiny classroom, discussing Durkheim and the Buddha? I was in awe. Then, slowly I started to realize “we have a lot in common.” Not in the way we ‘live’ our day-to-day lives, but in the way that we share and study Buddhism and religion in order to connect with, and serve others.

Now, my love for my monastic friends is great, as well as for my lay friends and professors. I found a sangha at school. We are a colorful and eclectic community of lay and monastic Buddhists studying, practicing and meditating together. I never planned on this path, but I know that it is very, very special. I still have not found one tradition or teacher to follow exclusively, partly because I am surrounded by such incredible Buddhist diversity at school, which makes it hard for me to choose.

Without knowing it, Buddhism came into my life at the most crucial time, just when I was going to need it most. From my initial academic introduction to Buddhist studies a very personal relationship evolved. Gradually, my reading and writing of Buddhist topics for school began to bleed into the way I function as a mother. When I started my studies, my children were ten and seven. Now, five years later, I am attempting to raise teenagers with a Buddhist lens. Trust me, I am far, far from perfect and sometimes act impulsively before I pause, and practice what I preach. Yet, my intention is to try my very best to keep the dharma close to my heart so that I can reach for it at any moment.

Right now I am practicing how I see my children for who they are as individuals, separate from me. The sweet days of tiny overalls and one-piece zipper pajamas are long over, along with the adoring smiles that meant I could do no wrong. I could wrap my babies close to my body in the assorted sling contraptions I owned, and like we were one, we would venture out into the world. We would play at the park,

have picnics, go to music and art classes, and visit grandma. I made mommy friends and they made baby friends. After a full day of togetherness Daddy would come home from work and we concluded with dinner, a bath, and books. My life was sheer bliss and my little children were the source of my happiness. They were and still are my everything.

Now, fast forward to the teenage years. My “attachment style” parenting doesn’t seem to work in the same way it used to. My practice is deeply connected to the act of “letting go” and I do this with genuine love and compassion. No longer do they want to share their personal space with me, and god forbid I ask too many questions or talk too much (aka “nag”). We no longer embody that ‘oneness’ I felt when they were babies. My children are growing up.

Yet, they still need me. Actually, they need me now more than ever. I’d like to say we are in transition right now, as they are just barely figuring out how to navigate basic life skills, like transportation and how to get fed if I am not home. My role is to demonstrate and to teach, being able to embrace impermanence as part of life’s reality, and then to let go...

This is kind of “letting go” is not so different than the personal “letting go” that happens privately, for my own emotional or psychological salvation. This “letting go” is experienced daily, almost hourly, as I interact with my mini-adults, who are barely able to figure out what they want. I am tested constantly as I face the ongoing set of negotiations and the discomfort of having to say “no” when I feel they are making unsafe, or rather, un-smart choices. So far, the push back and crabbiness that arises has been manageable. I think they understand why my husband and I don’t let them just do whatever they want, like going to anonymous high school parties and getting into other teenagers’ cars. They may ask, but they already know the answer.

Sometimes they treat me in a let’s say “less than lovely way”, and you would think I had done something really awful



Karen's kids

when all I asked is “How was your day?” or “Will you please feed the dog?” I am glared at, or completely ignored, and I think to myself, “If this was ANYONE else there is no way I would tolerate being treated like this...”. Don’t get me wrong, they don’t always act this way and quite often they are my sweet angels, but again, how in the world would I accept this kind of moody, grumpy behavior from any other person? And of course, the reason is the same for any parent. These are our babies. They really have no idea how to function as adults, which makes for a few very unstable years where their heads and their hearts don’t always align, and they are totally unaware of how they treat their mom. Again, I practice letting go...

We talk a lot in our house. Probably too much if you ask my kids. When difficult situations occur and our emotions spin out of bounds, we need to all get back on track. We sit down on the couch and express our frustrations. If I think they are not being nice to me, or unkind to each other, I remind them to practice *metta*, loving-kindness. If they are upset with each other or with my husband, or myself, they are able to communicate this and we apologize. Sometimes our talks can get pretty intense as the hormone-induced emotions rise high and the egos take over. At times we can be sitting and talking for a very long time until some shift begins to happen. We often cry, and eventually just let it all go...

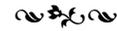
There is nothing to prove, no winning or losing. Our love for each other always outweighs the direction of our egos. When we really let go, we are able to see one another for who we really are, and to create more space in order to move freely within our family. Our family practice of letting go is a means toward releasing unwanted sensitivities and egos in order to Be present for each other.

Unlike when they were babies, I think now my “attachment” parenting is more about what I wish for my teenage children. I want them to be happy, healthy and successful in all life’s experiences. I am attached to wanting them to be caring and loving human beings. I continue to model and to teach, but now I try to give them space because this is their life story now. They are amazing young adults who are evolving into mature, independent spirits and I definitely don’t want to get in their way.

I would like to believe that my Buddhist approach to raising my children would not have happened without the gift of my Buddhist education at UWEST.

This flowing river of change is our being. As we learn that nothing is worth grasping on to or identifying with, we begin to realize that the purpose of meditative awareness is not to have good or bad experiences, pleasant or unpleasant experiences, but to see how we relate to all phenomena and learn to act on them more skillfully.

—Lama Surya Das



Karen Gelinias received her M.A. in 2013 at University of The West in Rosemead, California. She is continuing her Buddhist education in a new program, the Doctorate of Theology in Applied Buddhist Studies, which allows her to take classes in both the religious studies and chaplaincy departments. She is interested in feminist issues within Buddhism, including immigrant Buddhist women in the U.S. and goddess worship within the faith. Her current focus is related to contemporary American Buddhist women and the worship of Kuan Yin, which she hopes to develop into her dissertation. She names her primary influences as Rita Gross, Judith Simmer-Brown, Sandy Boucher, Thich Nhat Hanh, Sylvia Boorstein, Reggie Ray, and H.H. the Dalai Lama. She lives in Monrovia, California, with her husband and two teenage children. She has just joined the staff of SUSA’s *American Buddhist Women* as a staff writer.



White Tara the Divine Mother



(L. to R.) Dr. Richard P. Reilly, OMC President, Dr. Elise DeVido, Monica Unti, M.A., BCC, and Rev. Michael Stuart, M.Div., M.A., BCC, participate on an inter-religious panel on "Caring for the Dying: Spiritual Journeys," at Olean Meditation Center, Olean, NY, 11/8/2014.

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SPECIAL REPORT

**CARING FOR THE DYING
 SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS WORKSHOP
 Olean Meditation Center, Olean, NY
 November 8, 2014**

by Elise DeVido

On Saturday November 8, I participated in inter-religious panel called "Caring for the Dying: Spiritual Journeys," part of the series "Conversations on Well-Being" held at the Olean Meditation Center (OMC) in Olean, NY.

According to OMC President Dr. Richard P. Reilly (Professor of Philosophy Emeritus, St. Bonaventure University), "...part of the motivation in scheduling a program on caring for the dying is to enable the community to more clearly understand the spiritual dimensions of dying and caring for the dying. Another aspect of our motivation is to inform our community about hospice care and about opportunities to be a hospice-volunteer and/or be trained in hospice-care."

In addition to myself, the panelists included Monica Unti, M.A., BCC, who works at Crossroads Hospice in Canton Ohio as Catholic chaplain, and Rev. Michael Stuart, M.Div., M.A., BCC, an ordained minister of Word and Sacrament of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and Spiritual Care Manager of HomeCare & Hospice of Western NY.

The panel was divided into two sections, the first on the spiritual journey of the ill and dying and the second on the spiritual journey of the caregivers. However each panelist agreed that the spiritual journeys of the ill and the caregivers are intimately intertwined to various degrees and also we must "...listen with 'the ear of your heart.' We have but the moment we're in." (Kathie Quinlan, RN, *Blessing our Goodbyes*)

Monica Unti recently obtained certification through the National Association for Catholic Chaplains (NACC) and related her experiences working at the Crossroads hospice. She shared with us what inspired her to become a hospice chaplain. The theology she studied at college is a strong foundation for her work, but even more was the example set by her father. When Monica and her siblings were young, their father brought them on Sundays to visit the elderly in hospitals and nursing homes. These compassionate visits made an indelible impact on Monica, and she feels she was called to work with the elderly. Even with elders suffering from dementia and severe depression who may be unable to speak much, she finds other ways to connect: play music for them, touch their hand, ask about their lives and memories, to be a companion for them in their loneliness and pain.

Reverend Stuart shared his insights on what is hospice care and how he sees the hospice spiritual counselor as a "soul friend." The modern hospice care movement, founded by Dame Cicely M. Saunders, encompasses "pain management, emotional and spiritual support, and family counseling." Tellingly, "...the word hospice is the root word for 'hospitality' and 'hospitals.'" In his presentation he quoted from Hospice Net: "Hospice understands that 'there are two different dynamics at work when a patient enters the final stage of the dying process. On the physical plane, the body begins to shut down but on the emotional-spiritual-mental plane, the spirit of the dying person begins the final process of release from the body, its immediate environment, and all attachments.'" (www.hospicenet.org)

Often at the end of life, Rev. Stuart said, "...the spiritual part of who we are as humans is often where we experience our deepest wounding which impacts our whole person" and this is where a well-trained spiritual counselor can help as a "spiritual friend" to the sufferer. Stuart sees a rich history behind today's hospice spiritual counselors, not only due to the legacy of hospices during the Middle Ages but further back to the Celtic tradition of "anamcara," soul friends. Anamcara and today's hospice counselor share the qualities of being a "compassionate companion for others; spiritual

midwife during life transitions; [and] lifelong student of the inner life.”

I spoke from a Buddhist perspective regarding my recent experiences caring for, together with my father, my chronically ill mother. I stressed that the phrase “caring for the dying” seems to imply a substantive boundary between us (the living and “healthy”) and “others,” the ill and dying. However if we see this in a non-dualistic way, in fact we are not only caring for the sick and dying (“others”) but in doing so we are caring for ourselves because quite frankly we are dying too. So our caregiving for others is not only a practice-run for when “our time comes someday” but is a powerful way of living, right in the moment, step by step towards an understanding of life and death. Joan Halifax writes “we are joined by the bonds of impermanence.” Related to the notion of “boundaries” is that caring for ill and dying relatives involves mutual processes: the relationship between the caregiver and the ill person changes, as does the relationship between the caregivers, hopefully towards more understanding and love.

Some Buddhist methods and insights have been helpful to me over the past several years, such as: birth and death are a continuum and all is impermanent; cultivate the virtues of patience and equanimity; realize the compassionate, contemplative and productive power of silence (related to this is a practice of what Thich Nhat Hanh calls “deep listening”); and learn to sit with and see through powerful emotions. I’ve also learned from the advice of Frank Ostaseki (Zen Hospice Project) about being a compassionate companion: Welcome everything, push away nothing; bring your whole self to the experience; don’t wait; find a place to rest in the middle of things; and cultivate a “Don’t-know” or “Beginner’s” mind. This doesn’t mean confusion, denial or willful ignorance, but means to cultivate our enlightened mind, before opinions, judgments and concepts arise that cause suffering like fear, anger, despair, loneliness, grief, pain, and jealousy.

In sum, it was very inspiring to see panelists and audience members engage in discussion about the spiritual and practical dimensions of hospice, palliative care, illness, and death pertaining to the individual, family, and community.

Resources:

*www.hospicenet.org

*Frank Ostaseki and the Zen Hospice Project http://www.pbs.org/witheyesopen/mourning_counsel_ostaseki.html

*Shyalpa Tenzin Rinpoche, *Living Fully: Finding Joy in Every Breath* (2011)

*Kathie Quinlan, RN, *Blessing Our Goodbyes* (2011)

*Richard P. Groves and Henrietta Anne Klausner, *The American Book of Living and Dying: Lessons in Healing Spiritual Pain* (2009)

*Joan Halifax, *Being with Dying: Cultivating Compassion and Fearlessness in the Presence of Death* (2009)

*Judith L. Lief, *Making Friends with Death: A Buddhist Guide to Encountering Mortality* (2001)

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

From Jan Watts

Jan Watts is a mental health counselor who for the past few years has been providing short-term counseling to military members and their families on military bases globally. She sends this thank-you to Sakyadhita USA after she spent three months working in South Korea. Jan lives outside Boston, Massachusetts.

Earlier this year, I spent three months in South Korea. Charlotte Collins from Sakyadhita USA was kind enough to put me in contact with Dr. Eun-su Cho who is Professor in the Department of Philosophy at Seoul National University, as well as vice-president of Sakyadhita (International). I am delighted to have this eZine forum to express my deepest appreciation for the many kindnesses that were extended to me by Dr. Cho, Ms. Heewon Park who was a secretary for Sakyadhita Korea at that time and Bong-ak Sunim, Abbess



Jan Watts in front of Geumryun-sa temple, So, Korea.

at Geumryun-sa, a nunnery at which I stayed for a couple of nights. Dr. Cho was immediately welcoming and invited me to participate in two events sponsored by Sakyadhita Korea. I remember feeling such warmth at this unhesitating welcome. When I arrived in Korea I discovered that I was not only invited, but that there was to be no shortage of effort to

coordinate my getting to these events and to Geumryun-sa. As a westerner coming to Korea for the first time, this really was unexpected and very heart-warming. From contacting Bong-ak Sunim on my behalf, so that I might stay for the weekend at her nunnery, to arranging for one of her students to meet me in Seoul and escort me to the nunnery, Dr. Cho went out of her way to look after me, not least hand-delivering me to the right ticket booth at Seoul's huge bus terminal for my return journey home! The Sakyadhita Korea retreat on Saturday morning was held at Jinkwan-sa, a spectacular and famous temple outside Seoul, and my time at Geumryun-sa was especially profound in large part through meeting Venerable Bong-ak, a regent member of Sakyadhita Korea. As a new member of Sakyadhita, this experience has been so meaningful. Surely, the litmus test for all religions is whether or not the qualities of compassion, generosity, kindness, and other-focus are clearly visible and directly experienced, if religion is to mean anything at all? If the world at large operated with a tenth of the open-hearted caring I received during my time in South Korea, it would be a much better place.

Regarding her practice, Jan writes: My main tradition (if I have one) would be *vipassana*, although of late I have been more exposed to the Tibetan tradition. In terms of length of time of practice & study, I would say I was a dabbler for twenty years starting in the late 90's. In 2009/10 I took a very good foundational two-year course at Gaia House in the UK (I am a native of UK) called the Committed Dharma Practitioner Program and since then have become much more serious, which is not to say solemn, about regular, daily practice. I have always studied and attend teachings from good teachers as much as I can.

—Jan Watts

On "Caregiving to Our Mothers," Summer 2014 issue

From Berget Jelane

"These stories are wonderful. Thank you all. Berget"



RECOMMENDED READING & RESOURCES

In accord with this issue's theme of motherhood and mothering, a rich and insightful book is Reiko Ohnuma's *Ties That Bind: Maternal Imagery and Discourse in Indian Buddhism* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

Through a survey of maternal imagery in pre-modern South Asian Buddhist literature, Ohnuma demonstrates how Buddhism has had a complex, ambivalent, and even contradictory relationship with mothers and motherhood. As Ohnuma contends, "Symbolically, motherhood was a double-edged sword, sometimes extolled as the most

appropriate symbol for buddhahood itself, and sometimes denigrated as the most paradigmatic manifestation possible of the attachment to the world that keeps all benighted beings trapped within the realm of rebirth" (4). Ohnuma's study provides critical insight into Buddhist depictions of motherly love and grief; the role of the Buddha's own mothers, Queen Maya and Mahaprajapati; the use of biological processes that surround motherhood, such as pregnancy, gestation, and breastfeeding, as metaphors for spiritual virtues and attainments; and the relationship between motherhood and Buddhism "on the ground," that is, as it existed in the day-to-day lives of Indian Buddhists. While attitudes toward and imagery of mothers range from "the best" to "the worst," motherhood was never treated with indifference. Indeed, as the title of Ohnuma's book indicates, motherhood is a tie that simply cannot be broken.

—Lisa Battaglia



Quote from a good book on Zen and Mothering
Momma Zen: Walking the Crooked Path of Motherhood
By Karen Maezen Miller

Trumpeter Books, imprint of Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2007

...first, take a breath; second, tell yourself, *I can change*. You can change in an instant. You can change your mind. You can change your timing. You can change your approach. You can change your words. You can laugh instead of scream. You can hop on one foot. You can step away from the fray instead of stepping in. You can give up, give in, and go in a completely different direction than you'd like to. ...*What then? What next?* The Zen master has told you, "You embody the golden breeze." You *are* change. You have infinite power to relax, to release, to change, and thus to change everything...(p. 50)



ONLINE RESOURCE

Plum Village Mindfulness Software and Mindfulness Practices

<http://plumvillage.org/mindfulness-practice/mindfulness-software/>



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Visit the Hearth Foundation Website

"The Hearth Foundation is dedicated to the spiritual growth and well-being of parents through study, practice and community building activities. While our core philosophy is Buddhist, we draw on all Wisdom traditions to further positive parenting experience through everyday practice."



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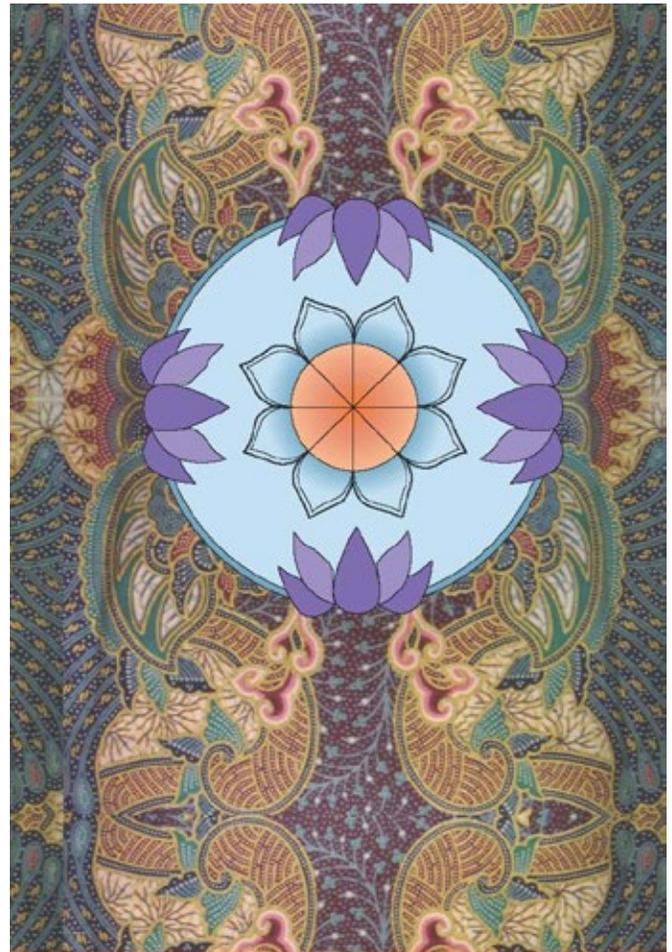
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The 14th Sakyadhita International Conference will be held June 23-30, 2015 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Yogyakarta is the capital of Yogyakarta Special Region in Java, Indonesia. It is renowned as a center of classical Javanese fine art and culture such as batik, ballet, drama, music, poetry, and puppet shows. Yogyakarta was the center of a refined and sophisticated Javanese Hindu-Buddhist culture for three centuries, beginning in the 8th Century C.E.

14th Sakyadhita Conference
Registration is Now Open

Program ∞ Abstracts ∞ Registration Information at
<http://sakyadhita.org/conferences/14th-si-con/14th-si-con-abstracts.html>



Sakyadhita

14th International Conference
on Buddhist Women

"Compassion and Social Justice"

Yogyakarta

Indonesia June 23 to 30, 2015

American Buddhist Women

A Quarterly eZine
Published by Sakyadhita USA
P.O. Box 1649

Ridgecrest, CA 93556
www.sakyadhitausa.org

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Submissions are gratefully received for "Sakyadhita Sisters-USA: Our Lives, Our Stories, Our Practice" and for "Join the Conversation." "Announcements" to promote your programs or dharma center are welcome. Send submissions to: susa@sakyadhitausa.org



MEMBERSHIP

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<http://sakyadhitausa.org/pages/membership.html>



DON'T MISS THE WINTER 2015 ISSUE

of American Buddhist Women

"Beauty. What's Buddhism Got To Do With It?"

Coming on Valentine's Day



(Message, Continued from Page 1)

Through the year, *American Buddhist Women* has received many appreciative comments from readers, now numbering nearly 500. Sakyadhita USA's membership has also climbed by twenty percent. The members of the SUSA board want to thank everyone, both contributors and readers of this year's issues. We especially want to express our gratitude to the generous women who took time to write articles and to participate in this community-building effort. I want to thank the SUSA board for their commitment to this work and the unflinching effort they have invested in each issue. We want to invite our readers to continue to read and consider contributing to *American Buddhist Women*.

Sending warmest dharma wishes for the close of this year and the beginning of the next!

Charlotte

Charlotte Collins, President
Sakyadhita USA



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



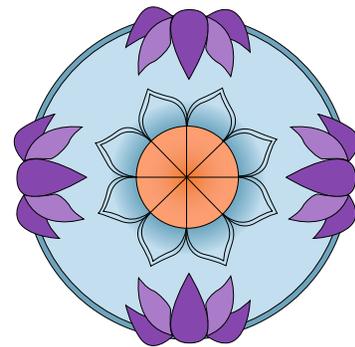
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SUSA's Mission

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

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