

*Doing zazen at Zen Mountain Monastery*

Why We Need Monasticism

INTRODUCTION BY AJAHN AMARO

Many classical Buddhist texts, of both Northern and Southern traditions, emphasize that monasticism plays an essential role in the health and longevity of the religion and its dispensation. However, in the West, the vast majority of influential dharma teachers over the last forty years have been lay practitioners, or at least householder lamas and Zen priests, such as Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, Suzuki Roshi, Sharon Salzberg, and S.N. Goenka.

Notable exceptions to this trend include Bhante Gunaratana and Ajahn Sumedho, and the late Lama Thubten Yeshe, Master Hsuan Hua, and Roshi Jiyu Kennett. These teachers and their monastic communities have all had a profound influence in their own way, yet the numbers of those making a monastic commitment remains small.

As far as the Asian immigrant communities in the West are concerned, there is no doubt that the forms their faith took in the old country are to be preserved at all cost. However, for those who were born and raised in the West, the encounter with Buddhism—and Buddhist monasticism in particular—raises questions such as: How important is it for the monastic path to be an element in Western Buddhism? Will women ever have an equal place in the monastic order? Since Buddhist monasticism was shaped by the various cultures it was exported to in Asia, what will it look like in the West?

In Buddhist mythology, the monastic plays the role of the fourth of the Heavenly Messengers, the one that caused Gotama to leave the palace, take up the life of a monk, and seek enlightenment. In order for messengers to do their job successfully they must be faithful both to the intent and

meaning of the sender, as well as to the language and mores of the ones who are to receive the message; otherwise the communication won't get through.

Today, the challenge for Western Buddhist monastics is how to be a faithful messenger. That is, one who embodies and respects the values of the source, yet who is also faithful to the values of this time and place.

If the messenger favors the origin and doesn't pay heed to the language of the recipients, the message can become unreadable, with no more spiritual relevance than some of the antiquated religious forms already found in the West. If they lean too far in the other direction, over-adapting to fit the dharma du jour, the message can become so twisted in relation to its original meaning that its roots become severed and the receivers are orphaned from the ground of their tradition.

The Buddhist monastic order is the oldest human institution still functioning under its original bylaws. It's an entity ripe in years, but whether it sits in the endangered species category or that of the hardy perennial remains to be seen. Where survival and flourishing are concerned, a lot depends on the skill and faith of the individual messenger, but, in addition, much also depends on whether the society wishes to hear the message, even if it's being conveyed in an appropriate mode.

The following discussion will explore many of these issues and, in particular, how and why the monastic messenger might still be useful in the world.

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Dallas Becker has her head shaved prior to taking *anagarika* vows at Sravasti Abbey near Newport, Washington.

BUDDHADHARMA: Let's start with our overarching question. How important is the monastic path for Western Buddhism?

BHIKKHU BODHI: Buddhist monasticism owes its origins to the life story of the Buddha himself. When the Buddha decided to set out on his quest for enlightenment, he didn't remain a prince in the palace and practice Vipassana a few hours a day. After he became disillusioned with birth, old age, sickness, and death, he glimpsed a wandering ascetic walking through the streets of Kapilavastu. That became the model he emulated. He adopted the lifestyle of a monk, and after his enlightenment, when he wanted to make the path to enlightenment open to others, he did so by establishing a monastic sangha, so that those who were inspired by the ideal of nibbana could follow the same path the Buddha had followed.

Throughout Buddhist Asia—in the southeast countries as

well as in the Himalayas—it's been extremely important to preserve the monastic sangha. It's taken as a representation of the third jewel, the visible manifestation of the Aryan sangha, meaning the sangha of the noble ones. Now as Buddhism comes to the West, there are many challenges that make the existence of a monastic sangha difficult here, but it is a necessity if Buddhism is to flourish in America.

AYYA TATHAALOKA: When I was young and saw depictions of Buddhist monastics on television, in movies, and in magazines like the *National Geographic*, I felt a strong affinity with them, a call within me to monastic life. As long as there are those who feel inspired to take on the monastic life, it's important that we make that kind of life available. I'm so glad it's been a possibility for me, not just something historical I could read about in a book.

Earlier in my monastic life, there weren't that many monasteries in North America. We had to go to Asia, which was hard on one's health. Although it was wonderful in many ways, it was also challenging to learn a new language and culture. In the last decade, I've found that more people have been calling for monasteries to be located here in the West, so that we can live a monastic life in our home cultures.

ROBERT THURMAN: Monasticism is critical for the future of Buddhism in America. There is a tendency in American Buddhism not to think so, and to argue that monasticism was appropriate in Asian society but not in America, where most practitioners are bound to be lay practitioners. The idea that we don't really need monasticism here is very wrong. The source of it is an unwitting Protestant ethic that is unwilling to have people pursuing a life path that doesn't involve producing things. But in fact, one of our problems is that we overproduce things and it would be good to have a lot of people who are not producing things.

The monastic institution was a brilliant sociological invention of Shakyamuni Buddha—something distinct from forest ascetics, who are completely out in the jungle so to speak, as he had been, and distinct from the city priests, who operate at a temple in a town. The monastics were located a short distance from town, so they could come in to collect alms and food and maintain a connection with the populace. They were also far enough away to have some retreat from the hustle and bustle, yet not be utterly isolated.

What Ayya Tathaaloka was saying about it being easy to be ordained is very important. Monasticism is a society-transforming institution that is the only institutional antidote in human history to militarism, the bad habit of most human societies. For Buddhism to really take hold in the West, society has to be slowly changed in such a way that it will support

monastics as a vital part of society. And if American Buddhism turns in such a direction, we could see a renaissance in Buddhist monasticism in the next century or so.

JAN JAN CHOZEN BAYS: Even among my own dharma brothers and sisters, I encounter questions as to why would we need ordained people and why would we need monasteries as a place to house them or train them. In the Zen tradition, of course, people who are ordained also have aspects of lay life, so it's not so surprising that the question would arise.

The Buddha said that the fourfold sangha of bhikkhus and bhikkhunis (the ordained sangha), and upasakas and upasikas (the lay sangha) is essential. Today, we need a wide-mouth funnel that many types of people can fit into, one that makes the buddhadharma accessible and is very creative about the forms in which it's presented. We've done well with that, but as a result we now need even more anchoring at the deep end of the spectrum. The danger of the wide-mouth funnel is that Buddhism will become too shallow, and therefore diluted and commodified. It will be mala Buddhism: if I wear a mala and I like the Dalai Lama, I'm a Buddhist.

BUDDHADHARMA: If the monastic element were to disappear from Western Buddhism, what would happen?

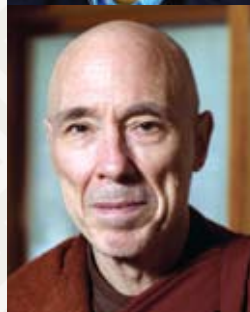
ROBERT THURMAN: In traditional Buddhist terms, Buddhism itself would disappear. A few years ago when *Time* magazine did a big thing on Buddhism coming to America, I said at the time that I didn't think it had arrived yet, because there's really no significant indigenous American Buddhist monasticism. There are a few traces here and there, but it's not widely accepted.

Also, on a deeper level there would be no asylum for certain people. There would be no place for those young people who don't want to have a family, produce, adopt a profession, or join the military. There would be no place for people who really

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BHIKKHU BODHI is a senior American Buddhist monk and scholar who was ordained in 1973 in Sri Lanka. In 2002, he returned to the United States and now resides at Chang Yen Monastery in Carmel, New York. He is the president of the Buddhist Publication Society and chair of the Buddhist Global Relief organization.



JAN CHOZEN BAYS is co-abbot of Great Vow Zen Monastery in Clatskanie, Oregon. She received priest's ordination and dharma transmission from the late Taizan Maezumi Roshi. She is also a pediatrician, wife, mother, and the author of *Mindful Eating*.



AYYA TATHAALOKA is an American bhikkhuni and cofounder of the North American Bhikkhuni Association. In 2005, she founded the first women's monastic residence in the Theravada tradition in the western United States. She is currently the resident teacher at Bodhi House in the San Francisco Bay Area, and is establishing a women's monastic hermitage on California's Sonoma Coast. Last October, she served as preceptor in the first Theravada bhikkhuni ordinations in Australia.

(PORTRAITS CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): JANE L. WECHSLER; BRINKMAN PHOTOGRAPHY. UNKNOWN; RICHARD RETHMEYER.

The idea that we don't really need monasticism here is very wrong. The source of it is an unwitting Protestant ethic that is unwilling to have people pursuing a life path that doesn't involve producing things. —Robert Thurman



Morning service at Great Vow Monastery in Clatskanie, Oregon.

want to devote themselves to lifelong meditative, intellectual, emotional, and psychological development, living at a very high ethical level. Monasticism creates a privileged life for someone who wants to achieve the ideals of the Buddhist path.

BHIKKHU BODHI: Whether one takes a Theravada perspective or a Mahayana perspective, the final goal of Buddhism involves the complete abandoning of all the defilements that keep us in bondage to samsara. A monastic person might not have advanced very far in the actual inner renunciation, but the outer lifestyle of the monk is designed to facilitate that inner renunciation. Through the profession of their vows, the monastics adopt a life of celibacy, a life without possessing material resources or money. It's a life that is in principle dedicated to the inner work of completely purifying the mind.

Even though laypeople living at home, practicing the dharma on their own, can practice very diligently, the

monastic form provides the ideal conditions for the achievement of that inner state of complete renunciation. The monastic lifestyle represents in a manifest and visible form the achievement of the final goal, the achievement of that state of complete inner renunciation. Without the presence of a monastic sangha in the West, the final goal of the Buddha's teachings will not be so visible. In that case, one can easily mistake the goals to be simply about living mindfully in the here and now, experiencing presence of mind in the present life, without seeing that there's a transcendent goal toward which the Buddha's teaching is pointing.

JAN CHOZEN BAYS: What Bhikkhu Bodhi said about having a visible, alternative way to live is important. We've adopted "a career day for mystics," which was advocated by Matthew Fox. When I first heard about this idea, I liked it because so many young people have come to us saying, "I wish I had known about this alternative when I was younger, when I was eighteen and desperate." Now we go out to career days at colleges and set up a booth for the monastery.

ROBERT THURMAN: [laughs] That's great. Is it alongside the military recruitment?

JAN CHOZEN BAYS: Yes. How did you know?

ROBERT THURMAN: [laughs] Well, that's the competition.

JAN CHOZEN BAYS: They put us next to the CIA, and they were actually very friendly. When we did it at the University of Portland, many people came to the booth and said how glad they were to have us there as an alternative. Even the military people and the police said that.

Monasticism is an important alternative way of living. Although monastics interact with the outside world, the distractions, pressures, and temptations are significantly reduced. The Buddha was so practical. He was always looking at how to maximize the amount of life energy and time devoted to the pursuit of liberation. When he looked at clothing, food, and shelter, he was always looking at it with an eye to how we can devote the majority of our resources to the pursuit of liberation. We don't have a television here. We get a newspaper once a week. So there's not this constant obsession with what's happening in the world. On a normal day we end up with four hours devoted to meditation, and during retreats it's eight to ten hours, which you can't possibly do in lay life.

AYYA TATHAALOKA: At any stage along the path, when it's in one's heart to do something more than practice for a few minutes or hours a day or go on some short-term retreats, when one feels motivated to give body, mind, and heart to the path 100 percent, on an extended basis, the container of the monastic life is there to make that possible.

Monasticism is an important alternative way of living in which distractions, pressures, and temptations are significantly reduced. On a normal day we end up with four hours devoted to meditation, and during retreats it's eight to ten hours, which you can't possibly do in lay life. —Jan Chozen Bays

Monastics need not be solitary hermits, or *paccekabuddhas*, off in a mountain with no contact with anyone. Rather, they may be visible in the world and have a connection with everyone in it. The way of monastic life laid out by the Buddha in the Vinaya is not only an expression of his great wisdom but of his great compassion for everyone. The monastic life is not only an excellent way of living for people in training. It is equally so for highly accomplished practitioners. It's a wonderful way for them to share themselves with the world.

BUDDHADHARMA: One of my teachers said monasticism is important because it's clean and complete. It's like a canvas backdrop that gives us a frame of reference for complete devotion to practice.

JAN CHOZEN BAYS: Ideally it's clean, but not always.

BUDDHADHARMA: Naturally, like any path, it has its own ups and downs.

AYYA TATHAALOKA: It is also possible for monasticism to be done improperly, such as when monastics, or even whole monasteries, start living for reasons other than the practice or become involved with other businesses. Although the form of monastic life might still be there, something else is going on.

BHIKKHU BODHI: We shouldn't cherish too many romantic illusions about the monastic life. There are many monasteries in which monks misbehave and become involved with other things besides the practice, study, and transmission of the dharma.

JAN CHOZEN BAYS: Such as selling lucky lottery numbers.

BUDDHADHARMA: Some people have come into monastic institutions and been disillusioned with what they found there. What ensures that the monastic container is maintained and that what happens there really is the complete renunciation you've been speaking about?

JAN CHOZEN BAYS: First of all, disillusionment is part of training. Everyone comes into monastic training with illusions about what will happen, what they'll become, what the teachers are like. To maintain the container, there has to be a monastic rule. In Theravada Buddhism, it's the Vinaya. In

other monastic traditions, there are adaptations of that, but we all have a rule and that's vital.

I once asked Ajahn Amaro what happens when you have someone who's so clearly enlightened, like Ajahn Chah, and then in the next generation there's nobody who seems to have that power or that clarity. In response, he emphasized the importance of the Vinaya. As long as people are subject to living that life, it becomes a field of cultivation for enlightened beings of various grades to arise. One of the functions of the monastery is to keep the dharma wheel turning, to honor and preserve traditions that have been time-tested over thousands of years. Through how we carry our body, speech, and mind, we're keeping the dharma wheel turning so that enlightened human beings can keep appearing.

BUDDHADHARMA: Is a charismatic figure like Ajahn Chah needed to lead a monastic tradition?

BHIKKHU BODHI: It seems there are two models of monastic life. One model, which is very common in Asia, originates because a monastery centers around a deeply experienced, realized, and skillful teacher. He attracts students and ordains them, or he attracts those who are already ordained. Then, he becomes the *de facto* leader, the decider, the one who runs and controls the whole monastery. As long as he's a wise, accomplished teacher,

the monastery will run smoothly and everybody will conform to his desires and live together harmoniously. But sometimes the person who winds up in the position of power in the monastery is obsessed with power and tries to dominate and suppress others. In that case, the monastery will often fall apart.

ROBERT THURMAN: The Tibetan tradition is steeped in the charismatic approach. Their system of reincarnate teachers is unique among Buddhist societies. We are all a reincarnation of somebody, of course, but Tibetan Buddhism makes an institution out of it. When reincarnate lamas were brought up as monks, which was typical, that was usually beneficial. Conforming to the Vinaya kept them from becoming too powerful. But in the diffusion of Tibetan Buddhism

Shika Gento calls monastics to lunch at Mount Baldy Zen Center, in California's San Gabriel Mountains.





Monastic residents doing laundry at Gampo Abbey in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia.

around the world, the reincarnates are often not monks, which sometimes causes problems.

BHIKKHU BODHI: The other model of monastic life is based more on partnership and community among the monks or nuns. Someone is invested with the office of abbot, perhaps by election. It can be a rotating position. But the one who exercises the authority of abbot doesn't have the capacity or the authority to make decrees on their own—they are subject to control from the monastic community. Within this structure, the monks or nuns will be entitled to speak their own voice, offer opinions, and even criticize the leader. This model seems closer to what the Buddha himself envisioned in the Vinaya, but over the centuries the tendency has been for monasteries to center around one strong charismatic leader.

ROBERT THURMAN: There is wisdom coming out of the Vinaya even for dealing with the problem of leaders who are too powerful. In Tibetan monasteries, for example, the bursar, the one who looks after financial affairs, is never the charismatic meditation teacher. In this country, I've seen situations where the leader has both the economic function of control of the monastery's livelihood (either through donations or business interests) and also is giving initiations and ordaining. Combining those two is a recipe for trouble. They tend very much to be separated in Asian traditions.

A similar lack of separation occurs in Zen in this country. There's a lot of confusion about what a monk is, and the

line between a livelihood-earning person and a monastic gets blurred. I think that stems from the Meiji Restoration's decision to make monks get married, in order to break the power of Japanese monastic institutions. For the majority of Zen history, it was much more Vinaya-oriented, and monks were celibate and renunciate. As a result of this nineteenth-century innovation, however, you have people who are called "Zen monks" who are married with two children and a job. That's something the Zen tradition has to look at.

JAN CHOZEN BAYS: That is true, though we do honor the distinction. We refer to ourselves as receiving monastic training because the container is a monastic container, but we call ourselves priests, not monks.

ROBERT THURMAN: That's good. It's important to be clear about the differences.

BUDDHADHARMA: What about the relationship of the monastic sangha to the large community of practicing lay Buddhists? At times it seems like there is little relationship of one to the other.

BHIKKHU BODHI: In the American Theravada community, there seem to be two tracks. One track is attracted to monastic forms. Those on that track don't necessarily become monastics themselves, but they're attracted to monks and nuns as visibly representing Buddhism. They're eager to have monks and nuns come and settle in the U.S., and they want to support them. They're very much drawn towards traditional Buddhist



A Shuso Hossen ceremony at Zen Mountain Monastery in Mt. Tremper, New York.

teachings. They want to learn the dharma broadly, as well as in a way that applies to their own life.

The other track is what is now called the Vipassana community. They were originally attracted not so much to Buddhism itself but to the practice of meditation, almost as a self-sufficient discipline. They follow teachers who teach Vipassana meditation. In their discourses they draw upon sayings from the Buddha, but the teachers themselves are not intent on establishing a Buddhist presence in the U.S. but rather are teaching a particular practice of meditation for the immediately visible benefits that come from that practice. Their style of teaching is usually not grounded in the doctrinal framework of Buddhism, including the teaching of kamma, rebirth, the full exposition of the four noble truths, the full exposition of dependent origination. Rather, it draws selectively from teachings of the Buddha that contribute to the practice of Vipassana meditation.

ROBERT THURMAN: Those who support monastics are generally Asian American and those who practice Vipassana are generally Euro-American, no?

BHIKKHU BODHI: Not really. Of course there's a tendency for the Asian Buddhist population in the U.S. to center around monasteries, but there is also a significant portion of the American community drawn to the monastic way of life.

ROBERT THURMAN: Is that so?

BHIKKHU BODHI: Yes.

AYYA TATHAALOKA: Yes, there is definitely interest in monasticism among American Buddhists. Here in northern California it's growing tremendously. Many lay Buddhists have called for there to be a monastic presence. Before I moved to the Bay Area, when I would visit, people would ask, "Why do you have to leave? Why can't we have a monastery for women here?"

When the number of people reached critical mass, we went ahead with establishing a monastery here. Some of the laypeople also wanted to be able to train and ordain here. At that time, there was a men's monastery, Abhayagiri, in California. But women also wanted to train in their home country. They didn't want to have to go abroad and deal with the huge costs, the visa difficulties, and the health challenges.

Today's monastics are going to have to be much more aware of what is happening in the world. As the gap between rich and poor widens, monastics are going to have to present a Buddhist perspective on issues such as war, poverty, and ecological destruction. —Bhikkhu Bodhi

When I was younger, I encountered monastics who would put down lay practitioners as if the laity were beneath them. When I returned to the U.S. and began to encounter Western Vipassana communities, I encountered people who put down monasticism as if it were a dinosaur. I do think that is beginning to change. Our model must be, as Rev. Chozen said, the Buddha's simple notion of the fourfold sangha. I think of it as a good vehicle with four wheels. If each is steady and the whole vehicle is in balance, we can all move forward effectively, mutually supporting and uplifting each other.

BUDDHADHARMA: Traditional monasteries were built and maintained through both citizen patronage and royal patronage. Can such institutions be developed and maintained on a large scale in the West?

JAN CHOZEN BAYS: One big difference is that in the West we have separation of church and state. Very few here would want any one religion funded by the government. So, we will not enjoy royal patronage here. This provides the same incentive that the Buddha established for his monastics to help them stay close to the lay population. We have to educate Westerners about the difference between the more isolated form of monasticism familiar from the Catholic tradition and the more permeable approach of Buddhist monasticism.

ROBERT THURMAN: Yes, even using the term “monastery” to describe Buddhist *viharas* creates some confusion. Traditionally, the Buddhist monastic sangha was not so much into being solitary—they interacted strongly with the lay community. The Buddha's order was that you must beg for your food, so you have to interact with the lay community every day to get your lunch. It's not about hiding from society.

JAN CHOZEN BAYS: Also, one of the important roles of monasteries, or whatever we choose to call them, is to be available to anyone in need, to be a place where people can put away their concerns for the world. Almost every person has within them a monastic voice, a calling to step aside from life as a personality and step into the unconditioned. Then the larger community can begin to think of the monastery as an extension of itself, and may even begin to call it “our monastery,” as has

started to happen around here. Grassroots support is the foundation of Buddhist practice in America. The donations may be mostly small donations, but they come from wide sources.

BUDDHADHARMA: What about support for large institutions, with a hundred or more monastics?

BHIKKHU BODHI: It would be difficult to support monasteries of that size here, but that is not necessarily the model we need to follow. In Sri Lanka large monasteries are not very common, except for monastic training centers. The typical vihara in one of the countless towns and villages will usually have two or three senior resident monks, a few novices, and that's it. The temples don't get much support from the government. They're supported by the people.

I would say it would probably be healthier to have a larger number of smaller monasteries spread out over different parts of the U.S. than a few large institutions.

AYYA TATHAALOKA: Even in Thailand, the majority of monasteries are smaller. There are larger ones that have royal support and also ones that develop around a great teacher, which is a very organic development. There are people who make offerings of a little bit of food each day or a small amount of money, but there are also wealthy people seeking out teachings, and they offer greater support. The support of wealthy patrons is something I can very much see happening in the United States and is already happening here to a degree. In the U.S. economy a few people have an enormous amount of wealth, and if those people benefit from the dhamma they may make the kind of donations that could lead to much larger endowments.

ROBERT THURMAN: Many people may benefit from meditation, from the wide funnel that Chozen Bays talked about, and they will support that development, but perhaps a few will see the benefit of supporting the development of Buddhism itself, and will truly be generous and support people who want to devote themselves full time to the teachings.

BUDDHADHARMA: As Buddhism has moved into different parts of the world it has always changed in some way. Can we develop alternative forms of monasticism other than lifelong ordination for people in the West?

Ayya Tathaaloka (center) and a fellow monastic on alms rounds near Bodhi House in the Bay Area.



I'm not an advocate of institutionalized temporary ordination. The temporariness of it can reduce the meaning and sincerity behind undertaking monastic ordination—the intention to dedicate oneself fully to the final goal of enlightenment. —Ayya Tathaaloka

BHIKKHU BODHI: In Sri Lanka, where I lived as a monk, it hasn't been customary to give temporary ordination. In this respect, Sri Lanka is different from other Theravada countries like Thailand and Burma, where temporary ordination is an integral part of the Buddhist culture. I don't have direct experience with it, but it seems that it could be an effective way to help people who are not intending to live as monastics their whole life to acquire some experience of what it means to actually live as a monk, to get firsthand experience of living as a member of the sangha. They'll come to



Meal prep at Zen Mountain Monastery

appreciate the hardships as well as the benefits and pleasures of monastic life, and it could tie them more closely to the monastic sangha. It might also make them willing to throw their support behind those who want to live as monastics full time.

AYYA TATHAALOKA: I have many friends who have been monastics for a period of time, whether because they took temporary ordination or because they disrobed. Some have gone on to become excellent Buddhist teachers. I appreciate what they say about the usefulness of having ordained. However, I'm not an advocate of institutionalized temporary ordination. I acknowledge the beneficial aspect of it, but I also recognize that there is a detrimental aspect. The temporariness of it can reduce the meaning and sincerity behind undertaking monastic ordination—the intention to dedicate oneself fully to the final goal of enlightenment. Without complete renunciation, ordination can become trivialized.

BHIKKHU BODHI: A viable alternative, then, would be to have laypeople live at a monastery for an extended period of time, which we call being an *anagarika*.

AYYA TATHAALOKA: Yes, the Buddha recommended that people take periods of time like that, which we now call temporary monastic retreat.

JAN CHOZEN BAYS: I agree completely. Ordaining and then disrobing can become like collecting another merit badge. Our current scheme is that people have to live here for at least a year before they can even request ordination, and then they're a postulate for at least a year. It's a gradual entry into the life, so that they understand what they're getting into. There's nothing more discouraging for our lay sangha than getting very

excited about someone taking ordination, coming to the ceremony, supporting the ordained person, only to have the person quickly step back out again.

BUDDHADHARMA: How do you see monasticism evolving as it develops further in the West?

JAN CHOZEN BAYS: The evolution we're looking for is already happening. Peter Gregory says the marks of Buddhist practice in the West are, first, the increased role of women; second, the fact that the canon is accessible and can be studied by everyone; and third, that laypeople are not content to just be

financial supporters but also want to be taken seriously as practitioners, including spending some time perhaps in the monastery practicing full time. We also need to increase the interaction of monastics with communities. For example, we need to have people in ordained clothing going into schools occasionally and interacting with children.

BHIKKHU BODHI: A significant aspect about Buddhism in the West is not simply the ordination and greater participation of women, but that the feminine presence is going to transform the expression, understanding, and presentation of Buddhism significantly. It strikes me that the classical presentation of Buddhism has a very masculine flavor. One struggles against the defilements, to defeat them, cut them off. As the feminine aspect becomes more prominent, it's going to soften the presentation, but not in a compromising way. It will bring to manifestation certain elements already embedded within the Buddhist tradition that have not yet come to full expression.

ROBERT THURMAN: Shakyamuni was a little hesitant about female monastics, not because of anything against women. It was because, as a sociologist, he could see the resistance of the chauvinist Brahmins. The release of women into this kind of lifestyle would be resented. Today we have a different economy and a different type of education, and the bhikkhunis should be as developed and as honored as possible. There will likely be more of them than the bhikkhus, which will probably be a very good thing.

BHIKKHU BODHI: There's also going to be much greater interaction between monasticism and the world, such that monastics will take on the responsibility of functioning as what I would



Monks from Abhayagiri Monastery going for alms in Ukiah, California.

call a Buddhist conscience for the world. In traditional monasticism, Buddhist monastics are supposed to remain detached from the world, even though they're interacting with laypeople to receive their alms and to preach the dhamma. But today's monastics are going to have to be much more aware of what is happening in the world. As the gap between rich and poor widens, monastics are going to have to present a Buddhist perspective on issues such as war, poverty, and ecological destruction, reminding us that the primary values in human life should be compassion, loving-kindness, justice, and equity.

Monastics will also provide greater opportunities to laypeople to live at the monasteries, to study the dhamma extensively and in depth. In traditional Buddhist culture, specialized learning in the dhamma is considered the preserve of the monastic community, and the monks preach to laypeople on a very simple and practical level. But now, because laypeople who embrace Buddhism have higher levels of education, they want to understand dhamma more extensively and deeply. Part of the responsibility of the monastic community will be to transmit high and deep dhamma, not only to other monastics but also to laypeople

who have that interest. It will also be important for Buddhist monastics to relate with monastics and spiritual practitioners from other religious traditions.

Finally, in the United States we have a melding of all of the main Buddhist traditions, which you don't find in Asia, so there's going to be much more interaction between monastics of these different traditions. Every year we have a monastic gathering where monks and nuns from all traditions who have taken full ordination come together to discuss areas of shared interest and concern.

AYYA TATHAALOKA: It's hard for me to say how I would see monasticism evolve in the future, because I'm right in the midst of it. When people come here, they sense something. I see it in their eyes and in their demeanor. I hear it in their speech, and I see it expressed in their actions. I would have to say if you want to know what monasticism looks like in the West, then come and spend time with us. Do a temporary monastic retreat. See what it looks like. We are living the process of evolution. **BD**



Replacing the altar cloths at Great Vow Zen Monastery.

(TOP) TOU DESIGN, SAKRAPEE TOU MEECHUKANT, (BOTTOM) GREAT VOW ZEN MONASTERY