

From June 23-27, 35 monastics from 23 monasteries and Dharma centers, representing Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana traditions originating from Asian countries such as Thailand, Burma, China, Japan, Vietnam, and Tibet, convened at Shasta Abbey in Mount Shasta, northern California, for the 14th Annual Western Buddhist Monastic Conference. DM Heng Sure and Bhikshunis Heng Yin and Heng Je represented Dharma Realm Buddhist Association. The theme of this year's gathering was Monastic Culture and Education, and from June 24-26, there were presentations and discussions every morning, afternoon, and evening. Topics included "Approach to Requisites", "Considering Monasticism", "Creating the Western Dharma Monastery", "Cultivating Seniority and Leadership Style", and "How Will Buddhism Fare in North America?",

the concluding presentation by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, who presented by phone. In addition, there were discussions on how Western Sanghas relate to their Asian origins and teachers, and a lively evening of musical sharing, including performances by the Shasta Abbey Choir, American Buddhist folk music from DM Sure, a rendition of "Star Spangled Compassion" from Sravasti Abbey, and Buddhist children's songs from Deer Park Monastery. Participants also attended the morning meditation and beautiful morning service, with organ playing, along with Shasta Abbey resident monastics.

There was an overall feeling of greater trust and openness developing among the group after so many years of gathering. Each participant had the opportunity to learn how other Buddhist monastics practice and train new monastics, and what challenges

來自二十三個寺院精舍代表南傳、北傳、藏傳，分別傳承於亞洲泰國、緬甸、中國、日本、越南和西藏的三十五位僧眾，於六月二十三至二十七日雲集在加州北邊夏斯塔山的夏斯塔寺舉行第十四屆西方佛教僧伽會議的年會，實法師與比丘尼恆音、恆哲代表法界佛教總會出席與會。今年的主題是「僧侶的文化與教育」，由二十四日至二十六日，每天早晨、下午與晚間有緊湊的報告與討論，題目分別是：「探討必需的資糧」、「考慮出家」、「成立西方寺院」、「修行資深與領導的風範」和最後由菩提比丘法師電話扣入談「佛教在北美處境如何」。此外，現場討論西方僧眾如何與自己亞洲根源與師父關係的適應，還有一場生動的晚間音樂饗宴，由夏斯塔



A Report on the Western Buddhist Monastic Conference 2008 **2008年西方佛教僧伽會議**

By Bhikshuni Heng Yin Translated by Bhikshuni Heng Je

they face. The issue of gender equality was focused upon as being a major factor for Buddhism to flourish in the West. Some of the nuns present expressed their pain at realizing that nuns were treated as second class citizens in their Asian tradition; there is an opportunity to change this when nuns start monasteries and monastic training programs in the West.

Throughout the conference, we realized how fortunate we were to be Bhikshunis in the lineage of the Venerable Master. We have not experienced the lack of training, opportunity for ordination, guidance, facilities, financial support, and respect, that nuns in various other traditions have encountered. Moreover, we realized how wise and skillful the Venerable Master in adapting Buddhist practice to Western culture; for example, the Venerable Master adopted a very democratic and egalitarian approach to teaching and training disciples, allowing them ample opportunities to try new things and learn from their mistakes in order to realize their potential. As nuns in DRBA, we barely notice any gender bias inherited from Asian culture, due to the Master's skillful adaptation of traditions. And we cherish the fact that we have a large community of nuns in which to practice and learn – something that is not so common in certain other traditions.

We also learned some practices from other Buddhist monasteries which may be adapted to our own monastery. For example, Abhayagiri Monastery holds bi-weekly communal meetings where all the monastics can listen silently or express what they are grateful for, what they regret, and what they feel hurt about. This opportunity

to share feelings contributes to the harmony of the Sangha. One monastery is completely solar-powered, and driving is discouraged. Lay disciples are encouraged to observe car-free days, and two electric vehicles provide transportation on campus. Most of the monastery's vehicles run on vegetable oil, including recycled kitchen oil produced on site. Another monastery also follows many of these practices, avoiding driving as much as possible, and using cloth rather than plastic bags, for shopping. All the monasteries practice recycling, composting, and vegetarianism as well.

Everyone agreed that the environmental destruction is a critical issue and voted the theme of next year's conference to be "Monasticism and the Environment" (same as the Gethsemani III Retreat theme). The conference will be held at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, tentatively scheduled for the second week of October.

寺僧眾合唱團、恆實法師的美國佛教民歌、室羅伐寺以美國國歌為曲調的演唱和鹿野苑寺的佛教兒童歌曲。與會者每天和夏斯塔所有住眾共修打坐和有精彩風琴伴奏的早課。

經過數年的聚會，與會者全體認同在這僧團中展現出更大的信任與坦誠。在這裏，每一位都有機會學習其他僧眾如何修行、訓練新血以及所面臨的挑戰。性別平等是討論的中心，因為要使佛教在西方發揚光大這是一個要素。有些出席的僧尼表達在亞洲傳統中尼眾是次要地位，自己的痛苦體會；有機會改善這種情形，那便是尼眾若在西方設立寺院和訓練僧尼。

在整個會期中，我們感受到身為宣公上人座下的比丘尼是何其幸運！在許多其他宗派中尼眾經驗到未訓練、受大戒、指導、財務照顧和尊敬等的缺乏，對於我們卻都沒有體會過。再者，我們也感受到上人將佛法融入西方文化的方式何其睿智與善巧！例如，上人採用非常民主平等的方式教化訓練弟子，為了幫助弟子發揮潛力，給予許多機會讓他們放手嘗試並從錯誤中學習。在法總裏，歸功於上人因地制宜的善巧，我們比丘尼幾乎沒意識到在亞洲文化上性別歧視的問題。我們也欣慰於法總有龐大的尼眾僧團，在其中共修同學的事實——這在其他某些傳統中可不是平常的。

我們也學到其他佛寺的一些作法可為我們參考的。例如：無畏寺每半月舉辦的自治會議，所有參加的住眾可以沉默或表達自己的感激事、遺憾事和傷心事，藉此分享心情來促進僧團和合。有一寺院寺內全用太陽能，不駕車。居士要遵守無車日，兩輛電車在廟上載乘；寺院的车大多數都用蔬菜油，包括自製的回收廚房油。另一寺院也有許多這類措施，盡量避免開車，購物時使用布袋。與會所有寺院有資源回收、堆肥和素食。

與會者一致同意環境破壞是重大的課題，並投票明年的主題為「出家與環境」（與Gethsemani第三屆議題相同）。主辦單位是萬佛聖城，時間暫定為十月第二週。

（比丘尼恆音文/比丘尼恆哲中譯）