

TAKING THE DHARMA INTO THEIR LIVES

A study of New Zealand women who have chosen
to undertake Buddhist practice

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a view of New Zealand women in Buddhism, based on information supplied by 62 women who have personally decided to undertake Buddhist practise. It excludes those from Buddhist family backgrounds. The aim of the study is to portray these women from sociological, religious, and psychological points of view. Survey techniques involved the use of interviews and questionnaires. Questions were predominantly open-ended in order to obtain both factual data and personal opinions. Chapters 2 and 3 record background data to provide an overview of the women, including their reasons for turning to Buddhism, and some of the ways in which it has influenced their attitudes and actions. Chapter 4 explains why 'conversion' is a proper term to use when describing these women's Buddhist practice even though it differs from the familiar Christian form. Chapters 5 and 6 describe what women and Buddhism each give to the other. They also include a criticism of Buddhism's patriarchal structure. Chapter 7 discusses the women's views on possible future changes to Western Buddhist communities in New Zealand.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
ABSTRACT	2
CONTENTS	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	5
INTRODUCTION	6
CHAPTER	
I THE SURVEY	9
1. Organization	
2. The Traditions Surveyed	
3. Structure	
4. Recording the Results	
II REPLIES TO THE QUESTIONS (PART ONE)	13
1. Demographic Section	
2. Practice	
3. Roles	
III REPLIES TO THE QUESTIONS (PART 2): PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT	27
1. How and Why	
2. Changes	
IV CONVERSION TO BUDDHISM	48
1. Are They Buddhists?	
2. What is Meant by 'Conversion'?	
3. Converting to Buddhism	
V WHAT BUDDHISM IS DOING FOR WOMEN	57
1. Psychological Benefits	
2. Spiritual Fulfilment	
3. New Meaning to Life	
4. An Integral Part of Life	
5. A Positive Path	
VI WHAT WOMEN ARE DOING FOR BUDDHISM: THEIR ROLES IN THE BUDDHIST COMMUNITY	65
1. Administrative and Organizational Roles	
2. Religious Roles	
3. What Women Think About Their Roles	

4. Is There a 'Gender Problem'?

VII	THOUGHTS ON THE FUTURE OF BUDDHISM IN NEW ZEALAND	80
	1. Buddhism and New Zealand Culture	
	2. Changes That New Zealand Women Advocate	
	CONCLUSION	86
	APPENDIX I	89
	1. Interview Questions	
	2. Questionnaire	
	APPENDIX II	94
	1. Buddhist Traditions Surveyed	
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	99

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INTRODUCTION

The teachings and the practice of Buddhism have been spreading in New Zealand since the 1950s and especially during the last decade. Census figures show an 87.8.% increase between 1981 and 1986 in the numbers of people who designate themselves as Buddhists. Many of these have joined forces and a growing number of Buddhist communities, some quite large and others comprised of only a few people, have resulted. Whenever possible they bring teachers to New Zealand, some as visitors, a few to live here.

To date little has been published about Buddhism in New Zealand, and no published academic works have been devoted specifically to Buddhist women.

This thesis is concerned with women living in New Zealand who have come to Buddhism from other religions, other spiritual paths, or from no religion at all. The research excluded those who were born into a Buddhist family background. Ethnic origin was immaterial, as was place of birth, provided that the women were New Zealand residents. The lower age limit was set at fifteen years and there was no upper limit.

These criteria were important to the study. The latter requirements refined the term 'New Zealand women' by excluding both visitors and children. Children or young adolescents were excluded because it would have been difficult to ascertain how much family or peer influence had been involved. Ethnic Buddhists were excluded because the choice to be a Buddhist had generally been made for them, not by them.

It was evident at the outset that not all women who fitted the criteria could be surveyed. There were problems with distance, time and financial cost. Because of these difficulties the major part of the survey, the interviews, was limited to women living in Christchurch and Dunedin. However, women from other areas, especially Auckland, Wellington and Nelson took part in the survey by filling out questionnaires. Making contact with Buddhist women was unsystematic because there is no central administrative body, and as a

non-Buddhist I had no direct contact with group members or mailing lists. All I could rely on was the goodwill of the women, and a succession of 'word of mouth' introductions. Some women were, inevitably, overlooked. Others chose not to take part. Although the resulting sample was neither large nor random, the sixty-two staunch supporters have supplied enough information for the successful completion of this study. But the limited size and range, and the non-standard method of selection of the sample limits the validity of its statistical conclusions.

This dissertation has, unashamedly, a female bias. It needs it to counter what a feminist writer calls "the ubiquitous male bias in sociology,"¹ which is apparent in almost any standard literature relating to Buddhist practice. The approach through feminist methods of research² included quite simple practices such as having a short discussion with the interviewee to put her at ease before the interview started, and answering any questions that she put to the interviewer, instead of the standard practice of avoiding a direct answer. Most important was the open-ended form of many of the questions, which encouraged each woman to express her opinions as she chose, to explain what she wanted and believed. A tape recorder was used, with the interviewee's permission, and it provided accurate recall as well as material for quotations in the text. It was more important to obtain 'pictures' from the women than merely their objective responses set into a preconceived structure.

The aim of this study is to use these glimpses of diversity, commonality, feelings, convictions and achievements to construct a picture of New Zealand women who have undertaken Buddhist practice, giving it sociological, religious and psychological dimensions. From the material for this picture come some answers to a series of questions:

¹ Hilary Graham, "Do Her Answers Fit His Questions? Women and the Survey Method" in *The Public and the Private*, edited by Eva Gamarnikow *et al.*, p.132.

² Undertaken with reference to Hilary Graham, *ibid.*; Ann Oakley, "Interviewing Women: a Contradiction in Terms" in *Doing Feminist Research*, pp. 30-59; Liz Stanley & Sue Wise, "'Back into the Personal' or: our attempt to construct 'feminist research'" in *Theories of Women's Studies*, edited by Gloria Bowles & Renate Klein, pp. 192-206.

1. What kinds of women choose to become Buddhists?
2. Why did they choose Buddhism? What attracts them?
3. What changes has it made to their lives?
4. Can one say that they have converted to Buddhism in any sense similar to that of conversion to Christianity?
5. What benefits do they obtain from Buddhism?
6. What are they doing for Buddhism through their roles in its community or in any other way?
7. Do they envisage or desire changes to Buddhism in New Zealand now or in the foreseeable future?

At first sight the women in the survey did not appear very different from other New Zealand women: they looked, dressed and sounded like women whom one might meet in a variety of circumstances. It was only with time that certain distinguishing qualities could be discerned. They tended to be calmer, more accepting of unchangeable situations, and to express a more positive attitude towards life than one normally encounters. If they criticized, their expression was candid. They gave a sense of honesty and wholeness. And, finally, they showed a caring interest in the people to whom they spoke. This included the interviewer, to whom they gave generous and cooperative assistance towards this project.

CHAPTER ONE

THE SURVEY

To obtain material for this study I surveyed 62 women in many parts of the country. Two methods were used, interview (19) and questionnaire (43). It would have been most rewarding to have interviewed more of the women but financial constraints obliged me to restrict the interviewing to Christchurch and Dunedin. Elsewhere I used questionnaires.

Methods of Survey

<u>Interviews</u>	<u>Questionnaires</u>	Total
19	43	62

I ORGANIZING THE SURVEY

In Christchurch I initially made contact with interviewees through the help of a colleague who is a member of the Canterbury Buddhist Trust. In addition a local Zen practitioner, recommended by my supervisor, was able to put me in touch with some female practitioners of Zen Buddhism in Christchurch and other parts of the country. In Dunedin the Director of the Dhargyey Buddhist Centre gave me a list of women to telephone, having already mentioned my work to some of them. The remainder of the respondents were recommended by women already surveyed or were contacted through the groups to which they belonged.

Questionnaires were, in the main, posted directly to individuals or were distributed through groups. They were accompanied by a stamped return envelope addressed to me at the University of Canterbury and, where necessary, accompanied by a covering letter.¹

¹ The covering letter explained the purpose and nature of the survey. It also told the prospective respondent how I had obtained her name and asked if she could suggest other

Questionnaires to Individuals

<u>Questionnaires Distributed</u>	<u>Questionnaires Returned</u>
29	17

Questionnaires to Groups

<u>Number Contacted</u>	<u>No Reply</u>	<u>Refusal</u>	<u>Quest. Sent</u>	<u>Quest. Returned</u>
11	2	1	46*	26

*This figure represents all the questionnaires which I know to have been distributed. Since four groups photocopied the sample questionnaire and gave copies to women who practised with the group, there could have been more.

The women who responded to the questionnaire were given three choices regarding the use of their names: full name, first name, or leave a blank, thereby remaining anonymous. The women who were interviewed could not be given the third option but were offered the use of a code name if desired.

All of the women surveyed were promised confidentiality. Interviewees were advised that they might be referred to directly in the thesis but that copies of any information attributed to them in this manner would be referred to them for amendment and/or approval. This promise was not made directly to those who filled out questionnaires but I felt that they were covered by the guarantee of confidentiality and the option of anonymity. I have, in fact, followed a similar procedure when dealing with their information.

II THE BUDDHIST TRADITIONS SURVEYED

I tried to contact women who came from different parts of the country and who represented the main traditions that are practised by

people to whom I could send a questionnaire.

Western women in New Zealand. This survey has questioned women from the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (8), Vipassana Meditation (2) and from the Theravada (11), Tibetan (25), and Zen (7) traditions.² Nine respondents followed more than one tradition. Their replies have been recorded in the 'Mixed' group.

I would like to have surveyed some women who practise Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism³ but members were unwilling to take part. I am most grateful to my Christchurch contact who, I felt, was placed in a difficult position but was nonetheless as helpful as her loyalty to the chapter permitted. I do, however, regret the need to exclude Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism from my survey. I believe that its female members have lost a chance to express their views in a non-threatening environment.

III STRUCTURE OF THE SURVEY

The survey was divided into four parts: demographic, roles, practice, and personal involvement. Both the interviews and the questionnaire covered these areas but interviewees were asked additional open-ended questions dealing with personal involvement and psychological aspects. I found that the interviewees often needed assistance when replying to these open-ended questions, so in the interests of clarity and space I excluded them from the questionnaire. The questionnaire was constructed after a number of interviews had been completed, when I discovered that the total number of women available for interview would be inadequate on its own. Initially I had intended the questionnaire to supply only demographic material and some information on roles and practice.

The wording was modified for the questionnaire and the order of the questions changed. Whereas the interviews began with open-ended questions

² See Appendix 2 for notes about these traditions.

³ See Appendix 2.

concerning personal involvement, designed to get the interviewee talking and dispel any initial nervousness, the questionnaire opened with the demographic section, which is the more conventional form for this type of document.

V RECORDING THE RESULTS

The names used are the women's own first names except in the case of 'Marie.' This is a code name, which the interviewee asked to be used.

CHAPTER TWO

ANALYSIS OF REPLIES (PART1)

The questions that were asked in the survey will be examined over two chapters. In the next chapter personal involvement will be considered. In this chapter replies to the questions dealing with demographics, practice, and roles are presented.

I. DEMOGRAPHIC SECTION

This section deals with the questions relating to age, ethnic origin, occupation, marital status, children, and qualifications. The purpose of this section is twofold. Firstly it is an external picture of the respondents and secondly it will serve as a reference for some parts of the discussion in later chapters.

(1) Age

Present Age

<u>Under 20</u>	<u>20-29</u>	<u>30-39</u>	<u>40-49</u>	<u>50-59</u>	<u>60-69</u>	<u>70 and over</u>	<u>Not Spec.</u>
0	3	22	24	3	6	2	2

Age At Commencement of Buddhist Practice

<u>Under 20</u>	<u>20-29</u>	<u>30-39</u>	<u>40-49</u>	<u>50-59</u>	<u>60-69</u>	<u>70 and over</u>	<u>Not * Known</u>
7	20	19	6	5	3	0	2

* Age could not be calculated because the present age was not given.

The age of commencement of Buddhist practice has been calculated from the practitioner's present age and the length of practice.

(2) Ethnic Origin

The majority of the women surveyed (90%) were European. Only two

were Maori and one other was part Maori. The remaining two women were Anglo Burmese and Malaysian Chinese.

Ethnic Origins

<u>European</u>	<u>Maori</u>	<u>Polynesian</u>	<u>Asian</u>	<u>Not Spec.</u>
56 (90.32%)	3 (4.84%)	0	2 (3.23%)	1 (1.61%)

The figures suggest that European women are more likely to undertake Buddhist practice or convert to Buddhism than Maori or Polynesian women are but the sample is too small to be statistically significant in this way.

(3) Occupation

Only limited categorization of the occupations has been attempted. Occupations are listed below in alphabetical order and where numbers follow in brackets they refer to the number of people who listed that particular occupation. Where people listed more than one occupation the first or whichever seemed likely to constitute paid employment has been recorded. This is not intended to down-grade motherhood and household duties but to demonstrate the diversity of the respondents' capabilities and their ability to compete successfully for work.

The occupations are:

Addiction Therapist	Nun (3)
Administrator/Manager (4)	Nurse
Army Officer	Physiotherapist
Auditor	Psychologist/Counsellor (3)
Clerical Worker	Receptionist
Craftsperson (2)	Retired (6)
Draughtsperson	Scientist
Gardener (3)	Sculptor
Homemaker/Housewife (5)	Shiatsu Therapist (2)
Homeopath (2)	Social Worker (3)
Journalist	Tertiary Student (5)
Lecturer/Tutor (4)	Teacher (4)
Medical Practitioner	TV Producer/Director
Meditation/Dharma Teacher	Unemployed
Music Teacher	

It is interesting to note that the majority of these occupations are so-called 'white collar' jobs. This is consistent with the high level of education attained by most of the respondents (see below). In addition two of the gardeners and one craftsperson have tertiary qualifications. The humanitarian nature of many of the occupations is worth noting, too. This supports the expressed ambition of many of the respondents: to help others.

(4) Marital Status

The answers are here compared with those for the total female population aged 15 years and over as provided by the 1986 New Zealand Census,¹

Marital Status

<u>Never Married</u>	<u>Married</u>	<u>De Facto</u>	<u>Separat- ed</u>	<u>Divorc- ed</u>	<u>Widow- ed</u>	<u>Not Spec.</u>
16 (25.81%)	20 (32.26%)	9 (14.52%)	2 (3.23%)	10 (16.13%)	5 (8.06%)	0

Census Figures

<u>Never Married</u>	<u>Married</u>	<u>De Facto</u>	<u>Separat- ed</u>	<u>Divorc- ed</u>	<u>Widow- ed</u>	<u>Not Spec.</u>
24.69%	51.68%	4.37%	3.66%	4.16%	10.07%	1.37%

* Includes 'Remarried'

The 'Married' category of the survey is well below the census figures, while 'De Facto' and 'Divorced' rates have more than tripled. It is beyond the scope of this research to find reasons behind this but it seems reasonable to suggest that some people who adopt the more unconventional lifestyles are attracted by the non-judgmental teachings of Buddhism. Whereas Christianity and some other religions teach that sexual relationships, even committed ones, outside of marriage are sinful, Buddhism allows the individuals to accept responsibility for their actions. Class and education may also be relevant. Although no question was asked about it, one person offered the information

¹

These figures were the latest that were available at the time of writing.

that she had chosen to remain celibate because of her involvement with Buddhism.

(5) Number of Children

Thirty-five of the sixty-two women surveyed have given birth to one or more children. Twenty-six of them have children under the age of twenty. Since more than 42% of the sample have children who live with or have close contact with them, some attention must be given to the question of how children fit into the Buddhist community. This is discussed in Chapter Six.

Number of Children

<u>None</u>	<u>One</u>	<u>Two</u>	<u>Three</u>	<u>Four</u>	<u>Five</u>	<u>Not Spec.</u>
26 (41.94%)	6 (9.68%)	18 (29.03%)	6 (9.68%)	4 (6.45%)	1 (1.61%)	1 (1.61%)

(6) Educational Qualifications

The women were asked two questions concerning their educational qualifications. The first was in relation to High School qualifications. Where more than one qualification was listed the highest was recorded. One person wrote "6th form" and another "7th form", which was recorded as Sixth Form Certificate and Higher School Certificate respectively.

High School Qualifications

Survey Figures

<u>None</u>	<u>S.C.--1 or2 Passes</u>	<u>S.C.--3 or more Passes</u>	<u>Sixth Form Cert.</u>	<u>U.E.</u>
3 4.8%	-	7 11.3%	3 4.8%	16 25.8%

1986 Census Figures

<u>None</u>	<u>S.C.--1-2 Passes</u>	<u>S.C.--3 or more Passes</u>	<u>Sixth Form Cert.</u>	<u>U.E.</u>
47.9%	9.2%	12.6%	6.3%	11.2%

Survey Figures (cont)

<u>Higher S.C./ Leaving</u>	<u>Uni. Burs./ Schol.</u>	<u>Overseas</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>Not. Spec.</u>
6	10	13	1	3
9.7%	16.1%	21.0%	1.6%	4.8%

1986 Census Figures (cont)

<u>Higher S.C./ Leaving</u>	<u>Uni. Burs./ Schol.</u>	<u>Overseas</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>Not. Spec.</u>
4.0%	3.1%	-	1.3%	4.5%

* It was not possible to convert some overseas qualifications into New Zealand equivalents because insufficient details were given. Therefore all of them were left unconverted unless the respondent had given a conversion such as 'German equivalent of U.E'. Overseas qualifications had been converted for the census figures.

This is an impressive list. The census figures divide School Certificate according to the number of passes whereas all respondents who passed School Certificate indicated a full pass. If the category for only one or two passes is disallowed then the figure for 'no qualification' in the general female population aged 15 years and over becomes 57.1%. Compare this with the 'no qualification' figure for this survey--only 3.3%.

The second question concerned qualifications, either academic or work related, that had been obtained since the person left high school. Thirty-six respondents had obtained one or more tertiary qualification. These are tabulated below.

Tertiary Qualifications

<u>None</u>	<u>Bachelor Degree*</u>	<u>Master's Degree*</u>	<u>PhD*</u>	<u>Teacher Cert/Dip</u>	<u>Other Cert/Dip</u>	<u>Other</u>
26	22	4	2	13	12	3

* Where a respondent has obtained more than one university degree only the highest is recorded. Those with a Master's and /or PhD will normally have been awarded a Bachelor's degree prior to working for these. Some women have certificates and/or diplomas in addition to a university degree so the table total is greater than 62.

Other tertiary study which is not listed above includes six women with partial degrees and three others who are undertaking degree studies at

university at the time of writing.

Work related qualifications include some in the areas of:

social work	playgroup leadership (2)
video/film production	counselling
word processing (2)	massage
homeopathic medicine	draughting
secretarial (4)	Tai Chi
nursing	shiatsu (2)
hairdressing	yoga (2)
addiction studies	music
medical laboratory	

II PRACTICE

(1) Buddhist or Not?

Two questions were asked: the first asked whether respondents considered themselves to be Buddhists and the second whether they had designated themselves as Buddhists on the 1991 Census. The first question allowed respondents to express any doubts or difficulties with this type of categorization. The second virtually asked the same question but in an objective form and was useful since the survey was conducted only a few months after the 1991 census was taken. Most of the women replied that they were Buddhists (77.42%), seven (11.29%) said that they were not Buddhists, and five (8.06%) gave an indeterminate answer or did not specify. These replies will be discussed in Chapter Four which deals with conversion to Buddhism.

Below, in table form, is a summary of the replies, divided according to the tradition that the respondents followed.

Buddhist or Non-Buddhist?

<u>Tradition</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Indetermin- ate</u>	<u>Not Spec.</u>
FWBO	8	-	-	-
Theravadin	7	3	1	-
Tibetan	19	2	2	2
Vipassana	-	1	1	-
Zen	7	-	-	-
Mixed	7	1	1	-
TOTAL	48 (77.42%)	7 (11.29%)	5 (8.06%)	2 (3.23%)

(2) Length of Time as a Practitioner

The length of time during which the women in the survey had been involved in Buddhist practice varied from one to twenty-five years. The table below shows the length of practice according to the tradition followed.

Years of Practice

	<u>Under 3 yrs</u>	<u>3-5 years</u>	<u>6-8 years</u>	<u>9-11 years</u>	<u>12-14 years</u>	<u>15-17 years</u>	<u>18-20 years</u>	<u>21 or more</u>
FWBO	1	2	-	2	1	2	-	-
Thera.	2	3	3	1	1	1	-	-
Tibet.	1	6	1	5	4	4	4	-
Vip.	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-
Zen	-	3	1	1	-	2	-	-
Mixed	2	2	-	3	-	-	1	1
TOT.	6	16	5	13	6	10	5	1

(3) Forms of Buddhist Practice

The question concerning the forms of practice undertaken did not specify possible practices but left it to the individual to record what she considered was appropriate. I considered that this method would encourage each respondent to list the practices that were of value to her rather than

checking every practice that she had attempted.

In the table below the most commonly mentioned Buddhist practices have been listed separately. Less frequently mentioned practices or non-specific ones, such as 'tantric' or 'practices after empowerment,' are included as 'Other Practices.' In their replies some of the women have recorded chanting, the use of visualization, and the reciting of mantras as part of their meditative practice. Others treat them as separate practices. The classification of these activities is a moot point, especially in the instance of chanting and visualization where the borderline between meditation and liturgy may be difficult to define. I have decided, somewhat arbitrarily, to list the use of mantras as 'Meditation,' visualization techniques as 'Other Practices' (because of the few times that it was mentioned), and to record chanting as a separate practice. Moreover, because 'Meditation' here classifies a range of meditative practices, I have recorded zazen in this way, although some Zen Buddhists insisted that it differs from meditation.

Types and Frequency of Practice

	<u>Meditation</u>	<u>Chanting</u>	<u>Prostrations</u>	<u>Prayer/Puja</u>	<u>Study etc.</u>	<u>Other</u>
Daily*	42	2	3	8	4	19
4-6 per week	3	-	-	-	-	2
2-3 per week	2	-	2	2	4	1
Weekly	1	1	-	4	2	1
Fortnightly	-	-	-	-	-	2
Monthly	1	-	1	-	-	1
Irregularly	2	-	2	2	2	4
Not spec.	6	3	-	1	1	2

* At least once a day.

Twenty-one of the women commented that they try to incorporate aspects of Buddhist practice into their daily lives. Still more implied this. Many spoke of being 'mindful' of what they were doing and one practitioner interpreted this as "making sure that I am choosing my life not just reacting to what life dishes out."

A practitioner of mostly Tibetan Buddhism explained her practice: "I actually think of my Buddhist practice as not being something that's separate from my life. It's not like 'now I'm engaged in Buddhist practice' and 'now I'm not.' It's a twenty-four-hours-a-day practice. My aspiration is to be all the time aware of the way I am and to be improving that."

(4) Vows

The results of the survey indicate that the taking of lay persons' vows is most common amongst practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism. Within this tradition 76% of the respondents had taken vows or precepts for a duration of two years or more and many of them took short-term vows on special occasions such as retreats. Practitioners of Theravada Buddhism and Vipassana Meditation tended to take short term vows, while most F.W.B.O. and Zen practitioners had taken none at all. Five Tibetan practitioners had taken nuns' vows but two of them had relinquished their vows when they gave back their robes.

Some of the Theravadin practitioners were uncertain about the meaning of the term 'vows'. Others replied that they had taken 'precepts.' One of the nuns explained the cause of the confusion:

I think it's something to do with translation. The Theravadins will talk about 'precepts': they call them 'training precepts' rather than 'vows.' Usually in the Tibetan tradition these are translated as 'vows' when people are talking about monks and nuns. They are generally translated as 'precepts' when talking about lay people. But the lay people's precepts are the root vows for monks and nuns.

Respondents from all groups mentioned taking temporary vows or precepts on special occasions and many said that they tried to keep the Five

Precepts, whether or not they had made formal commitments concerning them. Tibetan practitioners also mentioned a variety of tantric vows and a good number had also taken Bodhisattva vows. A long-term practitioner advised me that there are twelve Bodhisattva vows. She continued:

These are designed to develop Bodhicitta, cultivating an altruistic mind and the wish for enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings. (The essence of Mahayana Buddhism). They remind you of all the ways you need to be honest, respectful and unselfish and develop compassion for others' suffering.

These vows, she added, are taken and retaken regularly at special ceremonies. To take them one does not need to be a Bodhisattva² but should aspire to become one.

(5) Other Religious Traditions

This question was a late addition so was not included in the interviews. It arose out of reading which suggested that it is not uncommon for Christians to undertake Buddhist practice.³ The questions looked, therefore, for instances of multiple religious affiliation .

Seven women said that they practised other religions. Two of them attended Quaker services and one other went to several Christian churches with friends. The others practised the Radha Soami Faith, Advaita, Celtic Rastafarianism, Hinduism, and Shamanism. One other person said that she did not actually practise another religion but "I embrace all religions with [the] basis of [a] loving heart."

None of these religious practices goes back to childhood years: they all appear to have been tried as part of a spiritual search. The women have not indicated whether they started these other religious practices before or after they commenced Buddhist practice.

² A Bodhisattva is one who aspires to become fully enlightened.

³ A noteworthy example is Thomas Merton, a Roman Catholic priest and Trappist monk who has studied and written about Zen Buddhism.

Practice of Other Religions

	<u>FWBO</u>	<u>Therava -din</u>	<u>Tibetan</u>	<u>Zen</u>	<u>Mixed</u>	<u>Total</u>
YES	-	3	4	-	2	9
NO	8	8	8	5	5	34
						43

(6) Teachings and Study

The questions in this section asked where practitioners had studied Buddhism and what teacher(s) each now has or has had in the past. These questions were designed to obtain information concerning the instruction available in New Zealand, the number of women who had received instruction overseas as well as or instead of in New Zealand, and how much Buddhist practice in New Zealand is being shaped by direct influence from overseas teachers.

Four of the women surveyed appear not to have taken teachings or done any other form of study of Buddhism in New Zealand while fifty-seven have received instruction in this country. Twenty-eight of these have received instruction in New Zealand only. This means that just over half of the women in the survey have received some instruction overseas. Two women were actually attending training courses at (different) Zen monasteries in America when they replied to the questionnaire.

Where They Studied or Received Instruction

	<u>Asia</u>	<u>Austra- lia</u>	<u>Canada</u>	<u>Europe</u>	<u>N.Z.</u>	<u>U.K.</u>	<u>U.S.A.</u>
FWBO	-	-	-	-	6	4	-
Thera- vadin	-	3	-	-	10	2	-
Tibetan	3	4	-	2	23	3	-
Vipass- ana	1	1	-	-	2	-	-
Zen	1	-	1	-	7	-	4
Mixed	3	-	2	-	9	-	2
Total	8	8	3	2	57	9	7

(7) Teachers

All respondents who are members of the FWBO name the Venerable Sangharakshita as their teacher⁴. Some also referred to ordained members of the Order as subsidiary teachers. Those who have practised Vipassana regard S.N. Goenka as their teacher, though assistant teachers usually administer Goenka's teachings at retreats. All but one of the Zen respondents claimed John Daido Looi Roshi, who visits New Zealand annually, as their teacher, although women who had studied overseas named other teachers as well. Amongst practitioners of Theravadin Buddhism the Venerable Ajahn Viradhammo, Abbot of the Bodhinyanarama Monastery at Stokes Valley, Wellington, is generally regarded as their teacher.

Women who practise Tibetan Buddhism have listed a great number of teachers. Many are Tibetan Lamas who have instructed New Zealand women overseas, though some have visited this country to give teachings and retreats. At present Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey, Lama Zopa and Kensur Rinpoche are resident in New Zealand at the Dhargyey Buddhist Centre in Dunedin, the Karma Kagyu Trust at Kaukapakapa, and the Dorje Chang Institute for Advanced Buddhist Studies in Auckland, respectively.

It is evident that Buddhist practitioners in New Zealand at present depend for guidance on adepts who have been trained overseas. Zen, Tibetan and Theravadin practitioners commented that there are no teacher-training facilities in New Zealand for these traditions.

III ROLES

This section will provide material for a discussion in Chapter Six of women's roles in Buddhism in New Zealand and how they relate to men's roles.

⁴ In Buddhism 'teacher' is a term which usually refers to an adept who is a recognized authority in lore and practice. Sometimes, though, it refers to a member who is permitted to teach and direct the simpler practices.

(1) Teaching Roles

The women in the survey were asked whether they fulfilled any teaching roles in Buddhism. Ten respondents (16.13%) held minor positions; none of the accredited Buddhist teachers in New Zealand is a woman.

Replies to Question Concerning Teaching Roles

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Not Spec.</u>
FWBO	5	3	-
Theravadin	-	11	-
Tibetan	4	20	1
Vipassana	-	2	-
Zen	1	6	-
Mixed	-	9	-
Total	10 (16.13%)	51 (82.26%)	1 (1.61%)

(2) Women and Positions of Authority

This question asked whether women hold similar positions of authority to those held by men. The question was open-ended in order to elicit any comments that the women thought appropriate. The comments will be discussed in Chapter Six but the table below summarizes the replies.

Replies Concerning Equality of Positions of Authority

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Don't Know/ Mixed Feel- ings</u>	<u>Not Spec.</u>
FWBO	8	-	-	-
Theravadin	4	6	1	-
Tibetan	19	3	2	1
Vipassana	2	-	-	-
Zen	7	1	-	-
Mixed	5	2	1	-
Total	45 (72.58%)	12 (19.35%)	4 (6.45%)	1 (1.61%)

CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS OF REPLIES (PART 2): PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT

The final set of questions is directed towards what I have called 'personal involvement'. It has two basic purposes: firstly, to find out how and why the women in the survey have turned to Buddhist practice, and secondly, to discover some of the changes that have taken place in both their outer and inner lives. The questions are analyzed in these two broad categories.

I HOW AND WHY

This section deals with questions 4 - 7 on the questionnaire and questions 1 - 5 from the interview sheet. These questions are concerned with the circumstances surrounding the women's conversion and/or adoption of Buddhist practice.¹

(1) Previous Religion

Before becoming involved in Buddhist practice thirty-nine of the women had had some involvement with Christianity, mostly during childhood and /or adolescence. Of these 24% said that they had been 'Christian', 24% had been Roman Catholic, 22% Presbyterian, 17% Anglican, 5% Quaker and 8% had belonged to other sects.

¹ As noted in Chapter 2, 77.42% of the women thought of themselves as Buddhists. The rest did not.

Previous Religion

	<u>Christian</u>	<u>Non-Christian</u>	<u>No Religion</u>
FWBO	2	-	6
Theravadin	6	1	5
Tibetan	19	2	6
Vipassana	2	-	-
Zen	5	-	2
Mixed	5	1	3
Total*	39	4	22

*Some respondents indicated that they had practised both a Christian and a non-Christian religion. Hence the total of recorded replies is greater than 62.

(2) Reasons For Adopting Buddhist Practice

Although this was an open-ended question most of the answers fell into one of five categories. A sixth category caters for the remainder.

(a) Searching For Meaning Answers which fit into this category suggest that the person was questioning her day-to-day life and was searching for a deeper meaning, such as: "I was looking for something higher than myself and couldn't believe in God," and "the teachings answered basic questions."

(b) Personal Crisis Two of the women surveyed turned to Buddhism as a result of personal needs. One of them said that she had been undergoing psychotherapy in her middle years and "I started looking at things in a different light. I seemed to be having a religious crisis [as well]." She explored a number of Christian sects before trying Buddhism. The other person described herself as having a "desperately needy personality." Buddhist practice helped her.

(c) Disillusionment with a Previous Religion or Way of Life Many of the replies that fit into this category expressed disillusionment with Christianity in general, or dissatisfaction with some of the answers, or lack of answers, provided by the different Christian sects. Some found Christian teachings "rigid" and disliked the attitude which made them feel that it was

wrong to question things. "Questions were always brushed aside, never answered," one person observed. Several mentioned feelings of sin, guilt and worthlessness that arose as a result of Christian teachings. Buddhist practice and the non-judgmental teachings that they received from Buddhist teachers helped to dispel these feelings.

(d) Self-improvement and Spiritual Growth A number of women turned to Buddhist practice after discovering certain positive aspects about Buddhism that appealed to them. This was expressed in three types of responses. Firstly, some people appreciated the opportunities that Buddhism gave them for self-improvement and psychological development.²

Secondly, it provided for some women new ways of spiritual growth. The most frequently mentioned method was meditation.

Finally, it gave clear directions that enabled growth to take place:

"I needed a down-to-earth life programme."

"Looking for something which offered guidance without pressure."

(e) Gradual Acceptance For some women the adoption of Buddhist practice was a slow, gradual process. One woman told me, "I couldn't say that at any particular point in time I 'took up' Buddhist practice." She had learnt about Buddhism informally and had tried over the years to incorporate its philosophy into her life. Another person told me, "It was involuntary, I think, becoming a Buddhist. It was just the natural thing to do once I'd come across the Buddhist teachings. It wasn't a great choice or a conversion or anything, simply a process of going along to something I felt comfortable with."

(f) Other Reasons This category covers a range of reasons, including:

"It seemed a sensible, rational thing to do."

"Was drawn by the personal example of my teacher."

"My new partner started to attend the local group and I went along with

² Some psychological benefits that practitioners had gained from Buddhist practice will be discussed in Chapter 5.

him."

Reasons For Adopting Buddhist Practice

A	B	C	D	E	F	Not Spec.
16 (25.80%)	2 (3.23%)	14 (22.58%)	12 (19.35%)	6 (9.68%)	11 (17.74%)	1 (1.23%)

(3) What They Like About Buddhism

Replies to this question (O.7. questionnaire, O.3. interviews) varied from one-word answers to a list of teachings and/or practices to paragraphs explaining how or why the practitioner found certain aspects of Buddhism beneficial. Little mention was made of social issues such as racism, drug addiction, mental illness or an increasing crime rate, which Buddhist teachings also address.³

Some ex-Christians were aware of a greater sense of freedom because they were no longer bound by the concept of sin or threatened with eternal damnation as a punishment for sin. One person wrote: "Watching my children grow up I know that people are not 'bad', they just take time to work out how to live skilfully with their fellow man in a way that will benefit themselves and others. What good is eternal punishment anyway? When do you get the chance to learn from your mistakes?" Others were grateful that they were not obliged to believe certain tenets. As one person said, "You aren't asked to make huge leaps of faith and to suspend your intellect: you are asked to *use* your intellect and develop faith in the idea of enlightenment as you go." Another respondent was impressed by the "non-rigid dogma" and by "being constantly told that we could check the philosophy out *ourselves*."

The responses of the other respondents covered a fair range of teachings and practices that they found attractive. The most frequently mentioned ones are listed below (in no particular order):

³ See Charles S. Prebish, *American Buddhism*, pp. 21-22 for a brief discussion of these social issues in relation to Buddhism.

No God--the Buddha is human;
 Buddhism is a practical, logical and coherent path with clear-cut methods;
 The Bodhisattva ideal;⁴
 The ideal of enlightenment as something achievable;
 The example and characters of the teachers;
 Mindfulness and compassion;
 The use of meditation.

The most frequently mentioned attribute of Buddhism, however, was its practicality and logic:

"It clearly sets out a lot of methods for developing love and compassion."

"It's all kind of commonsense. It's obvious. It feels like the truth."

"The Buddhist path is very logical, very reasonable, very well explained, step by step and you don't need to have faith to be able to comprehend it."

(4) How They became Involved

Only the nineteen interviewees were asked because the issue was often not clear cut and some of the replies were long and complicated. It therefore did not seem to be an appropriate question to include in the questionnaire.

Eleven of the interviewees first came in contact with Buddhism in New Zealand. The other eight had encountered it overseas, either because they lived there or because they were travelling.

The initial contact for fourteen of them came about through their reading. Four of them were still at school when they started reading about Buddhism. For most the next step came, sometimes years later, when they listened to the words of a Buddhist teacher.

Three women first learned about Buddhism through friends and they

⁴ The Bodhisattva ideal refers to the vow of the Bodhisattva "to continue being reborn (rather than entering *nirvāṇa*) in order to deliver others from their suffering by assisting them to attain enlightenment." (Robinson, Richard H. and Johnson, Willard L., *The Buddhist Religion*, p. 237.)

later took teachings⁵. One other was studying in Japan and absorbed information about Buddhism along with other aspects of Japanese culture. She did not take it seriously until her second visit to Japan some years later, when she became involved with Zen practice.

II CHANGES

This section covers Questions 6, 7, and 9 on the interview sheet and Questions 8-11 of the Questionnaire. When a person changes her religious affiliation one would expect this to be accompanied by changes in other areas of her life. The women who took part in the survey were asked questions concerning changes in certain aspects of both their outward demeanour or lifestyle and their thinking or attitudes.

(1) 'Outer' Changes--Changes in Individual Lifestyle

All participants were asked about meat eating, the taking of alcoholic drinks, and aspects of their friendships. Only the interviewees were given additional questions about the changes in their patterns of socializing their daily lives, and in the language that they use.

(a) Meat-eating The issue of whether or not meat may be included in a Buddhist's diet is not clear cut and it is made more complex by disagreement in the scriptures. The Five Precepts, which contain the minimum moral obligations of both lay people and monks or nuns⁶ require an adherent to "abstain from taking life."⁷ According to the scriptures of the Theravada School, however, the Buddha allowed his followers to eat flesh if they were

⁵ 'Teachings' is the term that most of the women used when referring to instruction given by a Buddhist teacher.

⁶ The Five Precepts are: "to abstain from taking life; to abstain from taking what is not given; to abstain from sensuous misconduct; to abstain from false speech; to abstain from intoxicants as tending to cloud the mind." Conze, E. *Buddhist Scriptures*, p. 69.

⁷ Ibid. p. 70.

not responsible for killing the animal providing the meat, and if it was not specially killed to feed them.⁸ But some Buddhists feel that meat-eating is not in keeping with the spirit of the Dharma and follow a vegetarian diet. Vegetarianism is, however, advocated in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*.⁹

Whether one should eat meat or not seems to be left to the individual who follows her or his own conscience and decides what is appropriate, with, perhaps, some guidance from a teacher. This is borne out by the replies to the questions in the survey, which asked whether the respondent was a vegetarian and whether any change had been brought about by her adoption of Buddhist practice. Twenty-six of the respondents (41.94%) said that they were vegetarians but twelve of them had been vegetarians before becoming involved in Buddhist practice. Twelve others said that they were not vegetarians but that their thinking about meat-eating had been changed by their contact with Buddhism: they said variously that they ate meat with greater awareness of what they were doing, had reduced their consumption of meat, ate meat if offered it but did not cook it for themselves, or were working towards excluding meat from their diet. Several meat-eaters said that they would prefer not to eat it but did so for health reasons.

One practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism, however, had once been a vegetarian but began to eat meat. She explains her change: "When I met His Holiness Karmapa I began to eat meat and there wasn't any planned decision: it was just based on a change in my methods and needs. That relates with taking a responsibility for ourselves."

Respondents who practised Tibetan Buddhism were more inclined than

⁸ *The Buddhist Tradition in India, China and Japan*, William de Bary (ed), p.91

⁹ From the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*
Therefore, wherever living things evolve, men should feel toward them as to their own kin, and. . . should refrain from eating meat. . . It is not true. . . that meat is right and proper for the disciple when the animal is not killed by himself or by his orders, and when it is not killed specially for him. . . All meat-eating in any form or manner and in any circumstances is prohibited, unconditionally and once and for all. [Quoted in de Bary, *op. cit.*, p. 92.]

others to be non-vegetarian. In Tibet the harsh climate and the nomadic lifestyle of a large number of the populace make meat-eating necessary for survival and the practice of meat-eating has accompanied Tibetan teachers to the West.¹⁰ Some of the Tibetan Buddhists claimed that under certain circumstances meat-eating can be a powerful source of good and one person maintained that "if a person brings enough compassion to the act of eating meat then one can benefit the animal that has died. They say great lamas can actually liberate beings by eating them."

For respondents belonging to Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, however, this complexity does not seem to exist. Two women were vegetarians before they became Buddhists but said that their Buddhist practice affirmed their vegetarianism. The others became vegetarians because of their Buddhist practice.

Replies to the question "Are you a vegetarian?"

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Semi*</u>
FWBO	8	-	-
Theravadin	2	3	6
Tibetan	7	14	4
Vipassana	2	-	-
Zen	5	2	-
Mixed	2	5	2
Total	26 (41.94%)	24 (38.71%)	12 (19.35)

* 'Semi-vegetarian' is a term which was used, without further amplification, by some of the respondents. In addition I included in this category those who replied that they normally ate no meat but did so if the failure to eat it would cause offense and those who indicated that they were in the process of removing from their diet.

(b) Alcohol The taking of alcoholic drinks seems to be a less

¹⁰ See Robert B. Ekvall, *Religious Observances in Tibet*, pp. 75-76, and Toni Huber in *The Tibet Journal*, Vol. xvi, No.3, pp. 66-68, concerning killing for food and the tensions that result from its conflict with Buddhist ideology.

complex issue than meat-eating. One of the Five Precepts recommends that adherents "abstain from intoxicants as tending to cloud the mind,"¹¹ but, as one of the respondents commented, "Precepts are not like commandments, they are guidelines." Monks and nuns take a vow to abstain from the taking of alcohol and lay people may do so if they choose.¹²

Forty women (64.52%) said that they took alcoholic drinks occasionally. Only eight (12.90%) had stopped taking alcohol because of their Buddhist practice but more than half of those who do drink it said that Buddhist practice had changed the way they think about it: they drink less and /or are more aware of its effect on them. Ten of the twenty-eight who said that Buddhist practice had not influenced their taking of alcoholic drinks are non-drinkers so were already conforming to the precept.

The table below summarizes the replies.

Replies to the question "Do you take alcoholic drinks?"

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
FWBO	5	3
Theravadin	9	2
Tibetan	14	11
Vipassana	1	1
Zen	4	3
Mixed	7	2
Total	40 (64.52%)	22 (35.48%)

¹¹ Conze, *op. cit.*, p. 70. The precept also covers the use of other drugs but I did not pursue this line of enquiry. One person, however, commented that Buddhism had influenced her taking of other drugs more than it had her use of alcohol: "I used to think that cannabis was less harmful than alcohol but the lamas feel that it is very detrimental to the 'psychic body' and as a result of this I have stopped smoking dope or dropping acid altogether."

¹² See the section on vows in Chapter 2.

One interviewee who takes alcohol at times told me that abstaining from alcohol is a *hīnayāna* teaching. She said that the *vajrayāna* system, which she follows,

is not so much about renouncing or denying things but how to discover ourselves and how to work with every situation. In this practice it's considered that anything can help us grow. So in the situation of alcohol, rather than renouncing it we find a way through it to transform ourselves. One of the commitments of a tantric practitioner is the commitment of drinking alcohol.

Whether a practitioner takes alcoholic drinks or not, then, seems to depend on a personal choice or possibly the influence of her teacher or the system that she follows. There seems to be little variation across the traditions surveyed. The main change, which many of them mentioned, is in the practitioner's attitude to alcohol and in the attainment of awareness which allegedly enables her to use it responsibly.

(c) Friendships Respondents were asked whether their friends were mainly Buddhist, a mixture of Buddhist and non-Buddhist, or mainly non-Buddhist. From the replies it seems that the category of friendships has little to do with the length of time that the respondent has been practising. It also has little to do with the tradition that she follows. FWBO respondents, however, with one exception, tended to have mainly Buddhist friends and the Zen respondents generally had a mixture of Buddhist and non-Buddhist friends. In Christchurch this must in part be related to the size of the Zen group, which has fewer than ten members.

In Dunedin, where there is a strong Buddhist community, practitioners tended to spend a good deal of their time in Buddhist-related activities. It is understandable, therefore, that most of them had formed close friendships within the group. In Christchurch, where at the time of writing there are no resident teachers, the surveyed groups meet once a week and replies showed that practitioners tended to have a mixture of Buddhist and non-Buddhist friends.

The figures for the sample are summarized in the table below.

Friends

<u>Mainly Buddhist</u>	<u>Buddhist and non-Buddhist</u>	<u>Mainly non-Buddhist</u>	<u>Not Spec.</u>
16 (25.81%)	34 (54.84%)	11 (17.74%)	1 (1.61%)

Some people found that as time went by they had less in common with former, non-Buddhist friends. One person told me, "I don't feel superior to them: we just talk on a different level." Others found that Buddhist practice improved their friendships. Two women felt that this was because they were not as irritable as they used to be.

(d) Patterns of Socializing (This and the next two questions concerning behavioural changes were asked at interviews only). Three people felt that Buddhist practice had not changed their patterns of socializing but the other sixteen were aware of changes. Most had limited the extent of their socializing in some way. Socializing for some now consisted of Buddhist activities. Others had replaced parties and visits to hotels with dinner with friends or coffee and a discussion. The trend seemed to be towards quieter activities which were in keeping with the inner quietude that the women were finding through their practice.

The changes came about for a variety of reasons, two of which were made apparent in the interviews. Firstly, those who were involved in a number of activities within the Buddhist community had less time to spend on more frivolous pastimes. One person summed it up, saying, "It's a time factor, really, and a 'waste of time' factor." Secondly, three of the interviewees are nuns and their religious vocation placed restrictions on some forms of socializing, such as going to parties. As one of the nuns told me, "There's no question of going to such things any more, which is thoroughly nice."

(e) Pattern of Daily Life The majority of the interviewees commented that arranging time for meditation and other practices was the major change

that Buddhist practice had brought to their daily lives. Most of them had to fit in their practice around family or work obligations. In addition many of the women try to incorporate their practice into their daily lives, to live their Buddhism. This would require a constant awareness of the aspects of Buddhism which the person was trying to integrate. Some women, especially the three nuns, spend a large part of their day in activity related to Buddhism and for them other activities have to fit around that.

(f) Language. Language forms an important link between a person's 'inner' or mental/spiritual world and the 'outer' world of her actions and environment.¹³ Changes that were taking place within a woman's mind would therefore possibly cause changes in her speech and the language that she used. When asking the question I did not specify any particular meaning for 'language', thereby expecting and, presumably, getting the interpretations that seemed most appropriate to the individual.

Seven of the interviewees spoke of increased awareness of the language that they used, or of some aspect of it. One person said that she was "much more aware of the symbolism of language" because "Buddhism is so heavily symbolic." Several women mentioned a change in vocabulary and the need to avoid using 'Buddhist' language when speaking to non-Buddhists to avoid confusion, while others said that they now spoke more kindly and moderated expressions of anger.

Two people felt that the most important language changes had taken place at a deeper level. The first of them observed, "I think the Buddhist practice, especially the Tibetan Buddhist practice, has somehow increased my intelligence, made me more alert, more aware, more clear-minded." This, she felt, had a direct effect on her use of language, making her more careful about the words she used. The second person had become aware of powers of language beyond those of rhetoric. "Zen Buddhism," she claimed, "has probably made me more aware of the power of language, the energetic power

¹³ This duality is, of course, a Western concept, not a Buddhist one.

it carries. And not just words, but thoughts. To even think something has power. It's made me more responsible for how I use language."

(g) Changes in Family Life.

(i) Other Family Members Unfortunately this question concerning the involvement of other family members in Buddhism was omitted in error from one batch (five copies) of the questionnaire. One of these copies was sent to a group which very kindly photocopied and distributed it. Altogether eleven questionnaires which did not include this question have been returned. The remaining questionnaires and the interviews, fifty-one in number, comprise the sample for this section.

Twenty-five women said that members of their family engaged in Buddhist practice but only one said that all the members of her family were involved. Fifteen women had husbands or partners who practised and thirteen said that some other members of the family (children, parents, siblings, etc.) were practitioners. The figures are summarized in the table below.

Other Family Members

	<u>Some Family Practising</u>	<u>No Family Practising</u>	<u>Not Spec.</u>
FWBO	-	-	7
Theravadin	2	7	2
Tibetan	12	12	2
Vipassana	2	-	-
Zen	3	4	-
Mixed	6	3	-
Total	25	26	11

(ii) Effects on Family Life Replies to this question needed some prompting during interviews so I did not include it in the questionnaire.

Two areas were covered: family life that involved their parents and siblings, and that which related to their present families or to people with whom they shared accommodation.

The parents of the two young practitioners were supportive when their daughters decided to become Buddhists. One said about her parents: "They want me to do what makes me happy." The other person believes that her Buddhist involvement has improved her own behaviour and through it her relationship with her family.

Having a daughter break with convention, however, distressed some parents. One interviewee told me that her parents wanted her to marry and have children and were upset when she became a Buddhist nun; they were relieved when she gave back her robes. Three other respondents also encountered parental opposition. This ranged from initial doubts which were later allayed to an estrangement between parents and daughter. Mostly, however, practitioners found their parents accepting or supportive.

Nine of the interviewees lived with partners¹⁴ only four of whom were Buddhists. Those with practising partners felt that their shared practice brought a special harmony to the relationship. One woman who has been with her husband for twenty-five years felt that their twice-daily practice together had contributed to their happiness.

But Buddhism does not hold together all the marriages of its practitioners and it may possibly, in some instances, contribute to their failure. One woman, now divorced, told me that initially her husband had read books about Buddhism and encouraged her to take teachings though he never sought a teacher himself. Later, though, tension developed between them. "It seemed to me," she said, "that the more I became interested in Buddhism the less interested he became [in Buddhism]." Undoubtedly there were a number of factors in the marriage breakup but it was apparent from her conversation that her growing involvement with Buddhism was a major one. Another person is separated from her Buddhist husband and has become a nun. The separation is an amicable one and the woman believes that her

14

This term refers to husbands and de facto husbands.

husband is quite happy for her to be ordained. They do not see each other now.

Some practitioners have put their practice ahead of a family life. One of the women delayed having children so that she could concentrate wholeheartedly on her practice. "I felt it was very useful and important to develop myself so that when I do have children I'm actually able to pass on something of what I have learned rather than just passing on a bunch of assumptions or my own projections or ideas." Now she would like to have a child but expresses some doubts about her doing so. Her attitude to this, however, demonstrates one effect of her years of Buddhist practice, an acceptance of the situation and her responsibility for the choice she made, instead of clinging to what might have been. "You make certain choices in your life and then you work with that," she added. Another woman is living in a de facto relationship and has decided not to have children because of her intense involvement with Buddhism. A third person, although she has no plans to take ordination, has chosen the path of celibacy to augment her practice. "This," she remarked, perhaps a trifle wistfully, "has effectively put an end to my own family life."

(2) 'Inner' Changes--Changes in Attitudes

To sample changes of attitude I questioned all respondents on five issues which relate to the first precept: whether their thinking about animal rights, conservation and the environment, peace, abortion, and antinuclear issues had changed as a result of their contact with Buddhism. These issues also currently have some political emphasis so respondents were more likely to have some opinions concerning them.

Nearly half (44.19%) the women said that their thinking concerning one or more of these issues had changed as a result of their involvement with Buddhist practice. In some instances these were major changes, especially in relation to abortion, but more often practitioners commented that Buddhism had made them more aware of these and other issues or had confirmed and strengthened previously-held views. One person wrote: "Committing myself

to practice (sic) the Buddhadharma¹⁵ has deepened already held attitudes towards non-violence in all aspects of my life" while another explained that Buddhism "has given me more awareness of the interconnectedness of life, so my thinking about these issues remains the same, but for less idealistic reasons." Others expressed similar thoughts.

Almost an equal number (45.16%) of respondents said that their thinking had not changed as a result of their contact with Buddhism. It is important to note, however, that half of these indicated that their thinking on these issues was in accord with Buddhist principles before they became involved with the practice.

The remaining 10.65% of replies either did not answer the question or were uncertain whether changes had taken place before or after their commencement of Buddhist practice or whether any changes that had taken place could be attributed to Buddhism. The pattern of the replies suggests that the particular style or tradition of Buddhism that the women practised has little or no bearing on their thinking about these issues. The table below summarizes the replies.

Whether Thinking Was Changed by Buddhism

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Indeterminate/ Not Spec.</u>
Animal Rights	31 (50.00%)	27 (43.55%)	4 (6.45%)
Conservation/ Environment	20 (32.26%)	34 (54.84%)	8 (12.90%)
Peace	29 (46.77%)	27 (43.55%)	6 (9.68%)
Abortion	36 (58.06%)	17 (27.42%)	9 (14.52%)
Nuclear	21 (33.87%)	35 (56.45%)	6 (9.68%)
Overall Change	44.19%	45.16%	10.65%

¹⁵ The teachings of the Buddha.

(a) Animal Rights This seemed to be a relatively uncomplicated issue. Many of the women indicated that their thinking had not changed radically but had been strengthened and sometimes extended to include a respect for all animals. One person wrote: "I don't kill any creatures, not even sandflies," and others commented along similar lines. A few respondents thought that their attitudes to animal rights had changed radically, but nearly 25% said that their thinking had not changed because it had already been in accord with Buddhist principles.

(b) Conservation and the Environment Although nearly a third of the respondents said that their thinking about conservation and the environment had changed as a result of their Buddhist practice very few of their comments were related to Buddhism. It is possible that some of them saw these issues as primarily political and failed to associate them directly with Buddhism. One, however, thought that "everything that happens to us is not something outside of us but actually a mirror of our own real mind. Our environment is our key for developing ourselves as human beings." This is similar to the way that John Daido Looi, an American Zen Buddhist teacher appears to consider the relationship between Buddhism and the environment. On a recent visit to New Zealand he discussed at a public meeting in Christchurch his method of teaching which uses outdoor skills and an appreciation of the environment. He is reported to have said that it was a fundamental aspect of Zen Buddhism teaching that what happened to the environment affected the individual.¹⁶

(c) Peace and Nuclear Issues. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents said either that Buddhist practice had changed their thinking about peace or that their previous thinking had been in accord with Buddhist principles. Amongst these a number of practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism spoke of the need for world peace to begin with the individual. One person said:

I feel now, as a result of being involved in Buddhism, that it's inner peace that's more important. I really feel that each individual has to find their

¹⁶ "The Press", 9 January 1992.

own inner peace and that there'll always be conflicts between people but that they don't need to get to war and fights.

Others spoke in a similar vein.¹⁷

The theme is also apparent in remarks concerning nuclear weapons. One person thought that nuclear arms were "like an anti-love of the universe," a particularly evocative expression. Another said:

I remember reading something His Holiness said - where he said that really atomic bombs are not something outside each individual. They're an expression of our aggression And until we take responsibility for our hostility, every one of us, there will be bombs and wars.

A Zen Buddhist felt that her earlier concern for conservation, peace and nuclear issues helped to bring her to Buddhist practice. She wrote:

I have done work in the peace movement both before and after becoming Buddhist. As for practice changing my thinking, it has in many subtle ways, perhaps above all in making me aware of how far I have to go with changing my life so it's more in tune with the world's needs.

(d) Abortion The issue of abortion placed a number of the women in a dilemma. Many, it seems, found it difficult to distinguish between the ethical and the political aspects of this issue. On the one hand they felt that aborting a fetus meant taking a life but on the other hand prohibiting abortion was tantamount to denying a woman control over her body and that this effectively limits her ability to assume responsibility for her actions. Some women said that they were now firmly against abortion, a few believed wholeheartedly in a woman's right to choose, but the majority of comments indicated that respondents took a medial position. As one person expressed it: "I wouldn't

¹⁷ The present Dalai Lama is particularly concerned with the problem of world peace and how it might be attained. In 1989 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. His words have undoubtedly influenced the thinking of followers of Tibetan Buddhism. In the following extract from *Opening the Eye of Awareness* (pp. 15-16) he provides a formula for world peace which places responsibility on the individual:

We need mutual trust, mutual respect, frank and friendly discussion with sincere motivation, and joint effort to solve world problems. All these are possible.

First we must change within ourselves. Making this sort of attempt at world peace through internal transformation is difficult but is the only way to achieve lasting world peace.

The idea of achieving world peace through attaining individual peace has also been expressed by Buddhists who follow other traditions. Sandy Boucher records, for example, a similar idea from Ruth Klein who, at the time of Boucher's writing, was president of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, a group founded by Zen master Robert Aitkin. See Boucher, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

have an abortion now--although I still support the rights of women to make their own choices."¹⁸ Included in this swing towards a middle line of thought are several respondents who originally were opposed to abortion but now are less so. One person wrote:

I used to be more strongly opposed to abortion than I am now. I've come to see that there are no absolute rules in this life, and that sometimes the most compassionate thing may be to abort a pregnancy, though it will always be a heavy decision for the mother and father.

This puts into words the Buddhist tenet that underlies many of the women's comments relating to all of the issues but especially abortion: that there are no absolute rules. Some practitioners mentioned 'skilful means'¹⁹ as an alternative to the absolutes of 'right' and 'wrong'.

Two points concerning the thinking and attitudes of women in the survey are highlighted in their comments. Firstly, the majority of them either held beliefs about these issues prior to their initial encounter with Buddhism

¹⁸ This dilemma is not restricted to New Zealand women. Margot Wallach Milliken tells, in *Not Mixing Up Buddhism*, of her own experience from a Buddhist point of view. At the age of 21 she had not felt any qualms about having an abortion but three years later, after choosing Buddhist meditation as her spiritual path, she experienced different feelings when faced with another pregnancy. She writes (pp. 74-75):

Now I saw abortion as killing. I was full of guilt, terrified of making a conscious decision to end life

A wise friend encouraged me to love this new being, accept it for what it was, send it loving thoughts, and if I decided to have the abortion, to also wish the being a peaceful journey. . .

I had the abortion, and now, four years later, I still have questions.

Several years later Milliken gave birth to a child, a happy occasion which stood in sharp contrast to the pain of her abortion. She makes the same point as many of the women in the survey when she writes (p. 76): "While I do not believe abortion is something that should be legislated against, I do feel it is an option that should not be taken lightly. Even if it seems that the best choice is to terminate a pregnancy, we must acknowledge we are ending a potential life."

Milliken notes that Robert Aitken, Zen Buddhist teacher at the Diamond Sangha in Hawaii, has established "The Diamond Sangha Ceremony on the Death of an Unborn Child." According to Aitken Roshi: "With this ceremony, the woman is in touch with life and death as they pass through her existence, and she finds that such basic changes are relative waves on the great ocean of true nature, which is not born and does not pass away." (Quoted Milliken, p.76).

I found no indication of such a ceremony being performed in New Zealand.

¹⁹ 'Skilful means' (Sk. *upāya-kauśalya*) refers to the use of various creative stratagems to bring other sentient beings to enlightenment. In this context it refers to a course of action in terms of its appropriateness to particular circumstances.

that reflected Buddhist principles or their thinking has moved towards an awareness of the importance of all life since they became involved in Buddhist practice. Secondly, the pattern of some of the replies shows that these women have accepted Buddhist nondualist philosophy in place of the dualism that predominates in Western thought.

(3) These Issues as Sources of Political Action

While some respondents acknowledged that they donated money to such organizations as Greenpeace, and several said that they sometimes write to Members of Parliament concerning these issues, no replies admitted or implied that women are presently actively involved with political pressure groups relating to them. A few had been members of such groups while they were students but they now seem unconcerned with politically-motivated activities. One woman dissociated her practice of Buddhism from politics saying, "Buddhism has not touched my political attitudes." There is no evidence of the existence of Buddhist political activist groups such as are to be found in parts of the United States.²⁰

One possible reason for this political unconcern lies in the relatively short time that Buddhism has been practised by non-Asians in New Zealand. It is still in the process of being established and centres and groups have a small membership. All willing helpers are needed and women are engaged in group organization in addition to their individual practice. There is little time or energy left for outside issues. One participant in the survey even gave up the chance of a career in local politics so that she could devote herself to her

²⁰ Sandy Boucher, *op. cit.*, devotes a chapter to female Buddhist political activists. She gives accounts of Buddhist peace and antinuclear groups, animal rights activists and those working on 'green' projects amongst other political and social issues. She writes, (p. 260):

Buddhism, based as it is upon an experience of the interconnectedness of all life, can complement or even awaken the desire to engage in social and political action. Despite the popular stereotype of Buddhists as socially unconcerned, it is important to recognize that Buddhism and nonviolent social action are not mutually exclusive or inimical to one another; the quality of compassion evoked by Buddhist practice can engender an active caring and involvement. The famed "detachment", so often misunderstood to mean indifference, can in fact clear the way for an intensely committed participation in life."

practice and her group.

In some parts of the United States where Buddhist women are more politically active Buddhism is more strongly established and activities are becoming more diversified.²¹ This kind of climate is more conducive to political activity than is the case in New Zealand at present.²²

²¹ For one example of this see Boucher, *op. cit.*, p. 250. She writes: The San Francisco Zen Center includes the practice and residence center in San Francisco, located in a beautiful old residence club on Page Street; Tassajara, a monastery and summer retreat center in the Los Padres National Forest down the coast; Green Gulch Farm, a community farm in Marin; and various businesses such as the elegant Greens restaurant, Tassajara Bakery, and Green Gulch Greengrocers. Millions of dollars in property and business are involved; many people live, work, and study under the Zen Center aegis.

²² While the practice of Buddhism by Westerners in New Zealand is scarcely 40 years old (see Introduction) it is almost a century since Shoyen Shaku became the first Zen master to visit the U.S.A. in 1893. See Friedman, *op. cit.*, p. 23 for a brief history.

CHAPTER 4

CONVERSION TO BUDDHISM

All of the women in the survey had from choice undertaken a commitment to Buddhist practice and most of them, but not all, regarded themselves as Buddhists. They could therefore be categorized as converts to Buddhism. But this hypothesis needs to be examined and validated if it is to make a meaningful contribution to this discussion.

I ARE THEY BUDDHISTS?

(1) What Being a Buddhist Entails

Since Buddhism has no special initiation ceremony, like Christian baptism, to mark a person's admission to the religious body, the adoption of the term 'Buddhist' by a practitioner becomes more a matter of personal choice. The decision to call oneself a Buddhist must depend at least in part on one's perception of what constitutes a Buddhist and although people may have different ideas about this there must exist some fundamental themes which distinguish it from other world views. In the survey it was left to the individual to make her own interpretation of the term but one can assume that essential requirements would be for her to have taken refuge in the Three Jewels¹ and be trying to observe the Five Precepts.

(2) Difficulties in Deciding

Some of the respondents mentioned taking refuge and many stated or intimated that they tried to observe the Precepts. Some had even taken vows or made special commitments concerning the Precepts. Yet some did not

¹ The Three Jewels are the Buddha, the Dharma (the Law or doctrine) and the Sangha (the religious community). Taking refuge involves reciting the following three times (often in Sanskrit or the parent language of the tradition):

I go for refuge to the Buddha;
I go for refuge to the Dharma;
I go for refuge to the Sangha.

think that they were Buddhists, though the reasons that they gave did not convey doubts about their faith or their practice. Two merely objected to the label: "For years I've refused to pin a label on my chest," and "I don't regard myself as 'a anything'." Some others thought of their practice as being something that extended beyond the term 'Buddhist': to give it a label was to restrict it and make it conform to preconceived and sometimes erroneous notions. A Vipassana practitioner remarked that she considered Vipassana "more of a universal thing, nothing to do with my religion." A Tibetan Buddhism practitioner likewise felt that "these ideas are too vast to be stuck into a pigeonhole."

For others the reasons were largely based on feeling. One person, who had spent more than a year in a monastery, felt that the acceptance of the term 'Buddhist' was something more than her present involvement entailed. "It's perhaps splitting straws to say that I am not a Buddhist but I've decided that's the most honest answer. On relative reality [considering my strong involvement] I am a Buddhist, but my heart says 'No!'"

Even for some of those who gave an affirmative reply the answer was not straightforward. One person, for example, replied, "Yes, with some reservations," while another answered, "Yes, but not to the exclusion of any other spiritual paths."

Nevertheless, some women were quite sure of their positions as Buddhists, three responding to the question emphatically with: "Certainly!", "Oh yes," and "Yes, definitely."

But whether or not they considered themselves to be Buddhists all the women in the survey had chosen to undertake Buddhist practice. They were not raised in Buddhist families. Can they rightly be said to have converted to Buddhism?

II WHAT IS MEANT BY 'CONVERSION'

The term 'conversion' denotes a form of personal change and I put

forward two definitions which offer two different approaches to this change. The first definition comes from William James, who is regarded by many writers as the classic authority on the subject.²

To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities. This at least is what conversion signifies in general terms, whether or not we believe that a direct divine operation is needed to bring a moral change about.

The second definition comes, more recently, from James W. Fowler.³

Conversion is a significant recentering of one's previous conscious or unconscious images of value and power, and the conscious adoption of a new set of master stories in the commitment to reshape one's life in a new community of interpretation.

Although these definitions were originally given for conversion to Christianity both of them nonetheless shed light on this discussion.

III. CONVERTING TO BUDDHISM

(1). Are the Women Converts?

In terms of Fowler's definition one can say at the outset that most, if not all, of the participants in this survey have converted to Buddhist practice and for the majority this means conversion to Buddhism. Fowler makes three points: (1) the recentering of one's images of value and power and (2) the adoption of a new set of master stories are entailed in (3) the commitment to

² William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: a Study in Human Nature*, p. 186. This is taken from the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion which were delivered at Edinburgh in 1901-1902 and are still recognized as authoritative by modern psychologists. William Houston Clark writes about *Varieties*: "certainly the most notable of all books in the field of the psychology of religion and probably the most influential book written on religion in the twentieth century." ["The Psychology of Religious Experience", *Current Perspectives in the Psychology of Religious Experience*, pp. 227-228]

³ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: the Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, p. 281-282

reshape one's life. Many of the women have left another religion, usually Christianity, at some stage in their lives, mainly because they found that, in one way or another, it did not fill their requirements. Others had had no religious association and felt the need for some sort of spiritual path. For their various reasons they had all reached a state of readiness for the change. When they encountered Buddhism, sometimes after trying a number of other religions or philosophies, and became involved in Buddhist practice a process of change began which gave their 'images of value and power' a new orientation. This recentring took place, or is in the process of taking place, rapidly in some women, slowly in others. They adopted a new set of master stories such as the goal of enlightenment and the teachings of the Buddha, as part of the change.

Marie's story illustrates this pattern of change. As a child she was quite firmly involved with Christianity. Although her family were not churchgoers she attended the Baptist Church with some of her friends. In her mid-teens, however, she started to disagree with many of the teachings. "There were too many contradictions," she said, "and too many things I couldn't see the logic behind. So I abandoned it altogether and became an atheist for a while." In their early twenties Marie and her sister began to read books on Zen Buddhism and, as questions arose in their minds, they approached the local Zen group for answers. These they were given. "They were very articulate," Marie said, "and had some very good reasons for becoming involved in it [Zen Buddhism]." This so impressed the young women that they started sitting regularly.⁴ Marie maintains that she was attracted most of all by the "absence of dogma"⁵ and the fact that Buddhism presented a clear set of instructions.

⁴ 'Sitting' is a term commonly used for sitting meditation. In the case of Zen Buddhists it refers to zazen.

⁵ This is a claim that is frequently made for Buddhism and a point that was made by several other respondents. Buddhism does, in fact, have its own 'dogma,' ideas that are accepted uncritically by others. What Marie refers to is the absence of any obligation to conform to dogma, to believe all or even any of the teachings.

"They said that if you follow 'this particular path' and 'these particular practices' then eventually 'this' will happen." Marie tried it and has been practising now for about seventeen years.

Marie's story is simple yet the circumstances fit Fowler's requirements for conversion. She recentered her ideas of what was important on what Buddhism had to offer, and she adopted its teachings and practices because they answered her questions and filled an existential gap that arose when she abandoned Christianity. These changes supported and directed growth changes that were already taking place in her spiritual life, changes which had prompted her to leave the Baptist Church, changes which eventually brought her to a new contentment based on her new Buddhist lifestyle.

This last point concerning contentment returns us to James's definition. Marie maintains that Buddhism affects her whole life. "It's a matter of being more centred, much calmer, much more able to deal with whatever arises in my life." It is evident from Marie's next comment that the effect that she has described can be attributed to her Buddhist practice and not to some other factor: "I certainly notice a difference if I don't sit for a while. I lose a lot of my calm and I feel myself being tossed about by circumstances." Further, Marie's disillusionment with Christianity, her reading, and then her encounter with Zen Buddhists, leading to her regular practice exemplify James's claim that religious conversion is largely due to the "subconscious incubation and maturing of motives deposited by the experiences of life. When ripe, the results hatch out or burst into flower." The experiences of some other respondents followed a similar pattern.

2) 'Gradual' or 'Sudden' Conversion?

William James in his definition of religious conversion includes both these possible types. A 'gradual' conversion takes place over a period of time, sometimes a number of years, whereas 'sudden' conversion seems to occur without warning and is often accompanied by dramatic effects. The convert may have visions, hear voices, experience strange physical effects or intense

emotions, or simply have an overwhelming feeling of the presence of an 'other' being. With Christians this other being is usually Jesus Christ. Often such a conversion will occur after a period of depression or severe strain and will be followed by feelings of relief, peace and joy.⁶

One participant in the survey described an experience which is remarkably close to the pattern of the conversion stories. For ten years after leaving the Catholic Church Marjorie had not been associated with any religion and for a person who had been "completely involved" in religion from the age of three this must have left a significant void in her life. Then she was greatly upset by a disturbing incident which involved a close member of her family - "I almost made myself sick about it." While she was in this depressed state of mind a profound experience occurred. She told me, "I just woke up in the middle of the night with an utter experience of emptiness, *śūnyatā*,⁷ which I knew nothing about, and an understanding at that level of what had happened." Apart from the earlier casual reading this was her first contact with Buddhism.

No other women, however, made any mention of dramatic effects accompanying their acceptance of Buddhism. For many, especially those who became involved during middle age or later years, the process of change has been long and slow, their conversion gradual rather than sudden. Their connection with Buddhism, nevertheless, appears to be strong and permanent.

(3) Volitional or Unconscious Factors

Is conversion the result of conscious striving and self-discipline or does it happen without a person willing it? Scroggs and Douglas observe that an

⁶ James, in his two chapters on conversion, discusses these and other experiences fully. For specific examples see *Varieties*, pp. 187-190, 213-216, and 216-219.

⁷ 'Emptiness' (Sk. *śūnyatā*) refers to a state of existence which is not self-originating and which is therefore empty of inherent existence. Objects which are empty depend on something else for their existence. The concept of *śūnyatā* was taught by Mainstream Buddhists but it became a fundamental concern in the doctrine of the Mahāyānists and the philosophy of the Mādhyamikas. According to the latter everything is empty of inherent existence, including emptiness itself.

overwhelming majority of converts report that conversion comes from forces beyond their conscious control.⁸ While this may be so for conversion to Christianity, this research shows otherwise for conversion to Buddhism.

Marjorie's experience certainly falls into the 'unconscious' category and another experience that she described illustrates further the involuntary nature of the circumstances surrounding her conversion. Marjorie wrote: "Before I knew about the maroon and yellow colours worn by the Tibetan lamas, I dreamed of various Buddhist symbols in these colours." Referring to both experiences she added: "The various happenings and events were all outside any past experience and seemed quite beyond my conscious control."

Nonetheless, no other respondents indicated that their conversion was startling or unconscious, although the incidents that triggered their determination to take the first steps along the path of gradual conversion were often involuntary. For instance some of the respondents found that a series of coincidences led to the initial step. One person described how she "kept bumping into" Buddhists, whom she recognized as "like-minded people." Another ended up at a monastery for a ten-day retreat "through a series of coincidences."

The pattern that emerges from this discussion is different from the standard pattern of conversion to Christianity. Within the frame of reference of the definitions above one can say that the women in the survey are converts. But their conversion tends to be gradual and volitional in contrast with the frequently sudden and involuntary conversions of Christians.⁹ Since most of

⁸ J.R. Scroggs and W.G.T. Douglas, "Issues in the Psychology of Religious Conversion", in *Current Perspectives in the Psychology of Religious Experience*, p. 260. In this article the authors review literature on the psychology of conversion.

⁹ Other writers have also recorded a predominance of gradual and voluntary conversions to Buddhism (as described in their case studies or biographic details: they generally do not refer to 'conversion'.) See, for example, *Religions of New Zealand*, p.35; the case studies in Susan Jones's extended essay, *Buddhism in Wellington*; and the biographical details of most of the women in Lenore Friedman's *Meetings With Remarkable Women*. The story of Gesshin Prabhasa Dharma Roshi, however, describes a *śūnyatā* experience not unlike Marjorie's, which occurred a few years before Gesshin Prabhasa Dharma began to study Buddhism (Friedman, p. 229).

the women in the survey have approached Buddhist practice through disillusionment with their lifestyle or after years of searching other spiritual paths, a gradual acceptance of it is to be expected. A gradual acceptance is also in accordance with the supposedly logical nature of Buddhist teachings which are usually taken in steps.

CHAPTER 5

WHAT BUDDHISM IS DOING FOR WOMEN

It became increasingly evident during the research that the women in the sample were sincerely and deeply involved in their Buddhist practice. It constituted a very important, and in some cases the most important, part of their lives. It was equally obvious that Buddhist practice was producing changes and benefits that to all appearances enhanced the lives and well-being of its adherents.

I PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS

Many of the women indicated that the greatest changes that Buddhism has brought to their lives are psychological, covering a range of psychoneurotic and personality problems as well as various areas of personal growth. Concerning these changes one person wrote:

For me Buddhism has transformed my thinking patterns, shifted my emotional assumptions from those of separateness and fear and healed them into acceptance and wholeness. Hence the real magic and depth of this teaching has been fundamental to my psychological (sic) development and to a lesser extent interpersonal factors.

The most frequently mentioned psychological changes were concerned with the movement towards psychic wholeness, a process of spiritual growth which brings all parts of the mind, both conscious and unconscious, into harmony.¹

¹ The search for psychic wholeness features prominently in the writings of Carl Jung. Jung found that many of his patients who had been cured in the ordinary sense of the word were still unconsciously seeking a goal. He eventually recognized this as the quest for wholeness which, in Jungian terms, necessitated the linking of the conscious and unconscious components of the psyche. This linking is similar to the unification of the 'divided self' to which William James referred and for which Jung coined the word 'individuation'. Jung claimed that the attainment of psychic wholeness is strongly linked to religion. See Frieda Fordham, *An Introduction to Jung's Psychology*, pp. 76-79, for a discussion of individuation.

(1) Buddhist Women and Psychic Wholeness

More than a third of the women taking part in the survey maintained that their Buddhist practice was in at least some respects related to their pursuit of psychic wholeness. One expressed it this way: "Zen Buddhism gave me the opportunity of a practice and training to *realise* for myself the deep and inner teachings." It is able to do this because it "changes the way we use our minds. . . We are not caught up in the world of separation and duality." It has taken her more than sixty years to discover this but now her practice has become the most important thing in her life. A younger person, in her early thirties, wrote: "Buddhism has transformed my thinking patterns, shifted my emotional assumptions from those of separateness and fear and healed them into acceptance and wholeness." A third woman believed that "Buddhism is about discovering one's own real condition and one's real state of being" and others variously saw this as a "process of continuing breakdown" which "gets rid of impurities layer after layer" enabling one to "realize the self." These examples indicate that Buddhist practice is leading practitioners towards psychic wholeness, whether one envisages that as individuation or enlightenment.² Furthermore, it shows practitioners ways of doing this. One woman expressed this idea as: "Buddhism offered me the tools and means through which I could achieve my potential--particularly meditation."

2. Other Psychological Benefits.

Some women claimed that their Buddhist practice conferred certain other benefits. While these benefits might well be part of an overall progress towards psychic wholeness, the context in which they were mentioned was inadequate for one to make that assumption. Some found a new form of security through their practice: "It makes me feel secure as a woman, as a mother, as a human being. I don't get knocked around by things." More than

² Enlightenment: "In Buddhist usage, [this] refers to the experiencing of one's own essential or true nature and therefore awakening to the nature of all existence," [Nancy Ross, *Buddhism: A Way of Life and Thought*, p. 188]

one practitioner found that it gave a feeling of self- confidence. These practitioners could, for example, now avoid social activities which peer pressure or a sense of duty had previously caused them to undertake. Supporting this view one young practitioner observed, "I think it [Buddhism] encourages me to go for what I'm interested in."

II SPIRITUAL FULFILMENT

Many of the women indicated that they had been searching for something to fill an existential void in their lives and that when they encountered Buddhist practice they found the spiritual dimension that had been missing. One practitioner said of Buddhism: "It provides a method for leading a complete spiritual life. In every minute of every day in some way there is some relevant aspect of Buddhism to apply."

Ani³ Kunsang's story is an example of such a search. Anila began seeking spiritual fulfilment when she was in her twenties. After a busy life as a university student and then pursuing a career in professional theatre she married a farmer and had three children in quick succession. The sudden intellectual and social isolation followed by the demands of motherhood must have exhausted her psychologically as well as physically but she spoke of it merely as being "totally different." At this stage she began to look more deeply into the meanings of life and death and began reading some books on Buddhism. As a result of this reading she began to meditate regularly. One weekend she was in Christchurch and saw by chance a picture of Joshu Sasaki Roshi on a poster. She attended one lecture that he gave "and", she told me, "his presence was so inspiring. He gave me a *koan*⁴ to meditate on and told me how to sit properly." That was the beginning of her involvement with Zen

³ 'Ani' or 'Anila' is a title for Buddhist nuns.

⁴ Koan: "Teaching formulation, baffling to the logical mind, pointing to a truth beyond intellect." Friedman, op. cit., p. 284.

Buddhism, an involvement that stayed with her through the birth of twins and her day-to-day work on the farm. She tried to attend at least part of a *sesshin*⁵ each time Sasaki Roshi visited New Zealand. He was pleased with her progress and made her the mother of the *zendo*.⁶ "I still have enormous devotion for that teacher," she said. "He showed me the essence, I suppose, of mind and also made me realise that Buddhism was my 'thing', the way I wanted to live." The more she went to *sesshins* with Sasaki Roshi the more fulfilled she felt. "I didn't want to go home." She explained that she loved her children but somehow felt extremely 'right' with him. The conflict between the inner and outer worlds became stronger. "He wanted to get me into robes and I wanted really to be in a monastery but I had this other life, which was my family. He always made me feel that my relationship with my husband and children and my work on the farm were all Buddhist practice."⁷

Eventually Sasaki Roshi was not able, for health reasons, to come to New Zealand but Ani Kunsang's husband drew her attention to an advertisement concerning a visiting Tibetan Buddhist teacher, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, and said, "You should go and see this man." Lama Zopa "taught that we must love everybody, everything--insects, sheep, the lot. That was really inspiring for me. I felt very balanced," she said. She took two initiations with him and returned to the farm. Some time later her marriage

⁵ *Sesshin*: "Period of intensive prolonged meditation practised in Zen, in total silence, designed to concentrate and unify the mind; usual *sesshin* period lasts three to seven days." Nancy Wilson Ross, *Buddhism: A Way of Life and Thought*, p.192.

⁶ *Zendo*: a room in which Zen meditation is practised.

⁷ Ani Kunsang's problem is not an isolated one. American women have written about this conflict between domestic and spiritual life and ways of dealing with it. One of these women is Fran Tribe in "Practicing Intimacy" in *Not Mixing Up Buddhism*, p. 85. She writes:

Because our days are so busy, we don't have a lot of time for bowing, chanting and zazen. But our days are filled with many naturally occurring practice forms such as washing dishes, making love and going to work.

Formal practice helps us still the mind and see into our true nature. We should make good use of the traditional forms. But we should also remember that the naturally occurring forms have the same teaching value. What we call 'Zen practice' is not different from raising our children or learning to get along with partners.

broke up and she moved to Nelson where she held meditation practice at her house, arranged for visiting teachers, and intensified her own practice.

The latest stage in her progress towards spiritual fulfilment occurred through a meeting with Geshe Dhargyey. He visited Nelson, at her request, to give teachings to the group. "That was an amazing experience," she said. "I felt a very strong connection with him." A year later she decided to move her family to Dunedin where she studied with Geshe Dhargyey and, after about a year, decided to ordain. Her life as a nun is giving her the type of spiritual orientation that she had wanted for so many years. "I am completely tired of all worldly existence," she told me, "and have absolutely no interest in returning to lay life."⁸

III NEW MEANING TO LIFE

Buddhist practice has enabled some practitioners to see their lives from a new perspective. One person took up meditation to assist her with stress management and found that Buddhist practice was also "expanding and enriching." Another person explained how Buddhism gave her a new sense of freedom:

In Christianity there are all these doctrines--if you question, there is the insinuation that your faith is lacking somehow. Now I understand that life just is as it is and there is no need to *cling* to views and opinions about anything. There is no longer the need to defend my position.

The story of a Vipassana practitioner, Bon, demonstrates some of the changes and support that can result from Buddhist practice. Bon, aged 43, is a gentle, caring person who has endured a great deal of suffering in her life.

⁸ Ani Kunzang lives with her children in a private house in a Dunedin suburb. Since she does not live as a monastic she is permitted to keep her children. I.B. Horner, in *Women Under Primitive Buddhism*, p. 215, writes of women who became nuns:

It would be known by any women who wished to join the Order that she must sever the customary conjugal and parental relationships, and go in free from the enslaving bonds of the worldly life. It is recorded that several women before they joined the Order they made provision for the guardianship of their children, since they could not take them with them.

The suffering began in her childhood: she was raped when she was three years old. The pain followed her into adulthood. Her marriage ended in divorce and she found herself in an unhappy de facto relationship. Both mental and physical health suffered and she had to undergo years of psychotherapy. She also found out that she had cancer of the uterus.

Bon started Vipassana practice when she was in her early thirties. She heard about it from a friend and felt an inner compulsion to attend a course. "It was almost like an inner force," she said. "I *had* to do the course even though my intellect said it was ridiculous." The course was being held in Australia so the cost was high. She saved the necessary money.

Vipassana practice came at the end of years of searching. "I'd studied astrology and I was working as a reflexologist and I was searching everything," Bon said. She had not come from a religious family although she had attended Sunday School as a child and had spent her secondary school years at a Presbyterian boarding school. Christianity and the other areas in which she had searched were not able to supply the spiritual healing that she sought. Vipassana, however, has clarified her whole belief system. "When I sat on the first course," she said, "it was like light bulbs going off in my head all the time. To go there was reaffirming the way I felt anyway but I hadn't known that I felt that way."

The first Vipassana course in Australia brought a new awareness to Bon's life. "After the first course," she said, "I was in a space I had not known was possible. It was an altered state of awareness. There was such awareness of the world's misery and there was such a joy inside of me that it was impossible for me not to keep wooing that." Bon continued attending courses in Australia and New Zealand⁹ and found a way of coping with her problems. She has learnt at difficult times to focus on what is happening to her body. "If I'm depressed or frightened," she told me, "I can meditate and I can observe

⁹ No Vipassana courses were available in New Zealand when Bon started practising. They are now held in Christchurch and Auckland.

the effects from their roots. Whenever stress builds up inside me this is where it goes." She pointed to the position once occupied by her cancerous womb. "I can observe that part of my body and I can feel it as tight as a knot and in observing it, it helps it to loosen up."

Vipassana practice has also helped Bon to "put a lot more energy into the children." It helped, too, to make her life more bearable during the period of the unhappy relationship. Bon spoke of that relationship as being "so bad that there was nothing I could do about it." Her partner did a Vipassana course with her but it did not help. "But," she said, "it was better just because I was better."

Bon now lives with her three children and concentrates much of her energy on their welfare.

IV AN INTEGRAL PART OF LIFE

Buddhist practice has assumed a very important position in the lives of many women. Busy mothers get up early to find a quiet time for meditation. Some women spend much of their time in administrative activities related to Buddhism. But regardless of what other forms of practice they undertook most respondents said that they also tried to incorporate Buddhism into their daily lives.

One of these people is Sarah. Sarah, aged 39, became interested in Buddhist practice while she was studying Shiatsu in Japan.¹⁰ She was attracted by Zen Buddhism because she found that its spirituality is "grounded in daily life. It doesn't disassociate a spiritual life and a religious life."

Sarah lives with her partner in a quiet street near the sea. Her home reflects the simplicity and tranquility that she admires in Zen. She told me, "I have created my home as a sort of support mechanism for my practice." Buddhist practice has become an integral part of her life. "Whatever I do,"

¹⁰ Shiatsu is a Japanese form of healing which uses acupressure.

she explained, "whether it's washing the dishes or cleaning the house, going down to the beach, if I'm centred in what I'm doing I find a lightness and a joy. I try to practise every minute of my day."¹¹ She begins the day with moving meditation--stretching exercises first and then Tai Chi¹² and a long walk on the beach. "I actually find my meditation in action," she said, "because I'm more comfortable with movement." She admits that she finds sitting hard. "I do not do formal zazen every day but I do other things that bring me in touch with myself."

Sarah also regards her relationship with her partner as a form of spiritual practice and this point of view is shared by her partner even though he does not practise Buddhism. "It doesn't mean it's less difficult," she said, "but if you are both focussed on the same thing [the spiritual practice] it is possible to go through quite a few stressful situations and not fall apart."

Sarah's work as a Shiatsu teacher and therapist is closely related to Buddhist practice. Her brochure describes Shiatsu as "a most comprehensive manual therapy, gentle and relaxing in nature, and based on a deep sense of nurturing and supporting the recipient in order to integrate the body, mind, and spirit, and activate the healing process." She justifiably considers this to be a form of meditation and a part of her Zen practice.

Sarah's story illustrates how Buddhist practice can be all-embracing for the lay person and yet allow her to fulfil her commitments to the material world. She has taken to heart the words of one of her teachers, Shunryu Suzuki, who taught: "To have some deep feeling about Buddhism is not the point; we just do what we should do, like eating supper and going to bed. This is Buddhism."¹³

¹¹ Boucher, *op. cit.*, p. 74, describes a similar integration of practice in the everyday life of Tsultrim Allione, an American practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism. See also FN 7 above.

¹² A Chinese form of meditation through movement.

¹³ *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, p. 76.

V. A POSITIVE PATH

Before they came to Buddhism many of the women had been troubled by doubts and uncertainties about their spiritual lives. Other religions or philosophies had told them that they ought to achieve certain goals but were vague about how this might be done. Buddhism, they found, not only set desirable goals but also gave its followers methods to attain them. One person wrote about Buddhism: "It has a clearly delineated path, i.e. it doesn't just ask you to love your neighbour--it shows you how to bring this about."

Other women who had experienced difficulty in getting their questions answered in their previous churches found that the coherent Buddhist teachings "answered basic questions." Women were, furthermore, gratified that they were encouraged to question the teachings and take responsibility for their own spiritual growth. They found this a relief after the paternalism of Christian churches.

CHAPTER 6

WHAT WOMEN ARE DOING FOR BUDDHISM: THEIR ROLES IN THE BUDDHIST COMMUNITY

Women's roles in Buddhism in New Zealand are predominantly administrative or organizational. Women are involved in the day-to-day running of Buddhist community affairs and, as mothers, they are likely to be responsible for the religious, moral and ethical education of their children. On the religious side their roles are restricted: teaching roles are very limited and at the time of writing a monastic lifestyle is not available in New Zealand for women. Nonetheless, women are very involved in the Buddhist community. As one woman commented, "There's a lot of very well-educated, powerful, committed women in Buddhism in New Zealand."

I ADMINISTRATIVE AND ORGANIZATIONAL ROLES

Buddhist women in New Zealand have organized committees and chaired them, raised money, run groups for children, and arranged for visits from teachers. Since only a few groups in New Zealand have resident teachers all activities are run by lay people who, when they can, invite visiting teachers to give teachings in the forms of retreats, seminars, or public addresses.

The Canterbury Buddhist Trust is one such group. Until recently Barbara Dolamore was president of the Trust and, in addition to carrying out the work which that position entailed, she and her husband provided accommodation in their home for visiting teachers, monks and nuns.

Even where a teacher is in residence administrative and organizational matters tend to be placed in the hands of his students. A practitioner explained that the role of the lamas is to teach and that consequently they leave the day-to day running of the group to the trusts and committees. There is a tendency for women to play prominent roles in these groups.

(1) "A Bit of a Pipe Dream"

One outstanding example of women's organizational skills was the foundation of the Dhargyey Buddhist Centre.¹ This was largely through the work of Jane Johnson and Cathi Graham. Jane and Cathi first met in 1981 after Cathi's return from India where she had been a student of Geshe Dhargyey at Dharamsala. When Geshe Dhargyey visited New Zealand in 1982 Jane offered the use of her car to facilitate his travel and during the three-month tour Cathi and Jane decided, "even though it seemed to be a bit of a pipe dream," to invite him to live in New Zealand and to set up a centre for him in Dunedin. About the same time a Dutch couple, Yope and Lieke, also offered to set up a centre in a small town north of Dunedin. Jane wrote: "Gen Rinpoche² didn't commit himself one way or another but he did bless the church³ by doing a few prayers in it before he left."

Bringing a Tibetan lama to New Zealand was fraught with difficulties which took time and patience to resolve. The Dalai Lama agreed that Geshe Dhargyey should come to New Zealand for a limited time (about two years) and once this was known Cathi and Jane applied for visas for him, Khedrup (his attendant) and Losang (his translator). They set up a Charitable Trust of the Buddhist Centre in Dunedin which had as its first Board Cathi, Jane, Yope, Lieke, and Malcolm. Malcolm was a law lecturer who was an expert in Buddhist law. The Trust was finally made legal in November, 1984.

It took two and a half years to get the visas arranged because of the Tibetans' refugee status. The Trust also had to prove to the New Zealand Government that its members could support the Tibetan party. "Even when Gen Rinpoche finally arrived on 19th June 1985," Jane wrote, "the party only had temporary visas, and that only thanks to Stan Rodger who was Minister of

¹ I am indebted to Jane Johnson and Cathi Graham for the information on which this section is based.

² The name by which Dunedin practitioners refer to Geshe Dhargyey.

³ One of the three buildings that Yope and Lieke had bought.

Immigration at the time."

When the Tibetans arrived in Dunedin Yope and Lieke offered the top storey of their house in Easter Crescent to accommodate them. This soon proved to be too small to hold the numbers attending, so in August 1985 the Trust rented an office block in Princes Street. This was large enough but there were difficulties with access.

During the summer of 1985-86 Jane and Cathi found the property at 22 Royal Terrace and offered to finance it for the Centre. This was "a ten-roomed, two-storied rather grand abode of historical importance." Jane sold her house and moved into Royal Terrace in May 1986. The house was consecrated as the Dhargyey Buddhist Centre a few weeks later.

Since then Gen Rinpoche, Khedrup and Losang have become New Zealand citizens and membership of the Centre has increased to over a hundred members, though not all of them live in Dunedin. Thirty to forty students attend Monday and Thursday classes and fifty to sixty are present on a Sunday morning for the meditation class. Ordained members have risen to nine, with one new monk and five new nuns.

In 1989 Jane sold her share of the Centre to the Trust because she was getting married and would no longer live there. At the time of writing Cathi lives at the Centre and holds the position of its Director.

These two women have contributed substantially to the presence of authoritative Buddhism in the South Island.

(2) Passing on "The broad philosophy of the Buddha"

(a) Some Buddhist Mothers Children who live with at least one practising Buddhist parent must inevitably come in contact with Buddhism in a special way, though only a few of the mothers in the survey mentioned their children when asked about other practising members of the family. Probably they did not regard this influence, which in many instances must infiltrate the children's lives in a strong if not direct way, as practice. One mother, however, noted that she "passes on the broad philosophy of the Buddha" to her

children, who are aged between seven and ten years.

Two mothers spoke of the effect that a Buddhist environment had on their children. The first commented that her small son has a shrine in his bedroom. He "loves pointing to the Buddha" and he also enjoys visiting Geshe Dhargyey. Her elder son shows no overt interest in Buddhism but he "respects values like peace and non-aggression in his personal behaviour." His mother refrains from trying to impose Buddhist practice on him. The second mother said that two of her five children, now in their teens, are practising Buddhists. "The other three," she added, "practise the law of cause and effect, which is probably very good. I suppose it's helped them to be kind to others because they recognize that then others will be kind to them and they'll have happiness." The children do not aspire to worldly success and that, she thinks, could be the effect of a Buddhist background.

Another mother discussed her ideas about religious instruction for her child. The child, aged eight and still too young to do *zazen*, is given no particular Buddhist instruction. Nevertheless, her mother thinks that the child is learning the ethics automatically from being with the family. "The way we think and our particular kind of morality is in keeping with the Buddhist philosophy so she's picking that up by osmosis. I don't see any need to indoctrinate her." When the child is old enough the decision whether she practises or not will have to be hers, her mother feels, since meditation is not something that one can impose upon people.

These children, and probably many others like them, are receiving religious instruction in a truly Buddhist fashion: they learn about it and are allowed to question it and choose for themselves, thereby taking a more thoughtful responsibility for their own spirituality than is usual in our society where many Christian adolescents face the awesome commitment of Confirmation.

(b) Sunday Morning at the Dhargyey Centre⁴ Quite a number of children are brought to various functions at the Dhargyey Centre, especially to the Sunday meditation and talk. Jane, a teacher, used to run a creche at the Centre on Sunday mornings but shortly before my visit at the end of July 1991 Geshe Dhargyey suggested that she try telling Buddhist stories to the children. The experiment was judged to be an outstanding success and Geshe Dhargyey asked Jane to continue with the 'Sunday School'.

By January 1992, when I received Jane's letter, the Sunday activities for children had been going successfully for a term. The children, usually 10-12 in number, stay with their parents for the chanted prayers and then before meditation Jane takes them to the Centre's dining room with the help of a rostered parent and up to three teenage helpers who get paid \$5 for an hour's childcare. The children have the use of toys, books, crayons, games, and other materials and on fine days they are taken out for a walk. While the children are having morning tea Jane reads them a Buddhist story, usually a simplified tale of a Buddha or Bodhisattva. Sometimes they colour line drawings of Buddhas or religious symbols, which they like to take home. "Sometimes we discuss Buddhist and Tibetan topics--what they know about the printing of prayer flags or if they have met the Dalai Lama etc.," Jane wrote. "Some of the children are quite well-informed because they have lived in Dharamsala with their parents in a Tibetan community."

This is in keeping with the warm and natural atmosphere which pleasantly surprised me during the prayers and chanting on the morning of my visit: little children were allowed to wander around, to seek occasional cuddles and their parents' attention without rebuke, and were not hushed if they spoke softly. The "sit still and be quiet" order with which most church-going Christian children are familiar was entirely absent.

Jane's skills as both a teacher and a mother have created a nurturing

⁴ Once again I am indebted to Jane Johnson who supplied the information contained in this section.

environment for these children where they can learn about Buddhism without pressure or indoctrination. She has developed the creche into something new and positive where children are not merely filling in time.

II RELIGIOUS ROLES

The main religious roles in a Buddhist community involve the teacher and monastics. Lay people often fulfil minor religious roles.

(1) Teaching Roles

A Buddhist teacher holds a key position in the Buddhist community. He or she has usually undergone many years of practice and study and has been appointed to a teaching position by his or her own teacher. No women in New Zealand have attained this position but some, after undergoing study and training, have been given minor teaching roles.

In the F.W.B.O. five women claimed to have teaching roles. Two taught meditation, one taught meditation and Buddhist teachings, and two did not specify. They had been trained either here or overseas by Members of the Order.⁵

In Tibetan Buddhism four practitioners had been or were currently fulfilling teaching roles. One person said that she had undergone specific training in the United States. Another did some teaching at the Dorje Chang Institute when asked and said that at the Institute practitioners wanted to devise "a more graduated [training] programme so that people feel like they go through steps and achieve a goal and then feel competent to teach." A third said that there is no formal training at her centre but that in the Karma Kagyu Tradition⁶ to which she belongs, "a person is considered eligible to teach once they have completed the 3 year 3 month retreat." She looks forward to doing

⁵ 'Members' are ordained practitioners. Unordained practitioners are known as 'Friends'. See *Beliefs and Practices in New Zealand*, p. 92.

⁶ See Appendix 2.

this. The fourth person had had no training but had once been a nun.

In Zen only one practitioner said that she fulfilled a teaching role. She takes Beginner instruction and was trained by her teacher, John Daido Looi, and his senior students.

No Theravadin women claimed to have teaching roles.

The survey showed no difference in these minor teaching roles between women and men. The recognized teachers, whether they are residents or visitors here, are mostly men, although occasionally notable women have visited New Zealand. The most recent was Hannah Nydahl who visited Christchurch in March 1992 with her husband, the Danish Buddhist master, Ole Nydahl.⁷

(2) Monastic Roles

At the time of writing there are few ordained women in New Zealand and the ordination of women in this country is available only at F.W.B.O. and Tibetan Buddhist centres. The Theravadin Bodhinyanarama Monastery in Wellington does not at present ordain women⁸.

Some respondents, especially Theravadins, would like to live in a monastic situation. By doing this they would be fulfilling a religious role that has been open to women since the early days of Indian Buddhism. To date Buddhist women are denied this option in New Zealand since there is no monastery for women in this country. Ordained women are therefore obliged to live in the lay community.

⁷ The Canterbury Buddhist Trust Newsletter, February 1992, notes: "Ole and Hannah were close students of His Holiness the 16th Kamapa, and received teachings and transmissions from many great Kagyu masters. Hannah spends much time travelling with and translating for high lamas."

⁸ Susan Jones in *Buddhism in Wellington* writes: "Because there are no senior Buddhist nuns at the monastery at the time of writing, it becomes difficult for the senior monk to initiate nuns into the monastic lifestyle. The senior monk is quite willing to encourage women but he would prefer to wait until suitable circumstances arise and some senior nuns take over the responsibility." p. 8.

(3) A Laywoman Working for Buddhism: The Tārā Group⁹

Marjorie Baker's work for Buddhism is neither teaching nor monastic but it has performed a special service both for women and for the Buddhist community as a whole. In 1981 the Wellington home of Marjorie and her husband Bernie became the Tibetan Buddhist Centre, open to all lineages and teachers. Up to forty people would attend some of the teachings, given mainly by Tibetan lamas from Auckland. Marjorie organized these visits and other activities that took place at the Centre. She also became involved with various Asian groups in the Wellington area through taking the lamas to visit them.

The idea of starting a group for women arose from the people attending the teachings at Marjorie's house. Some women had found their practice cold and masculine. The function of the Tārā group was to help dispel this feeling by focussing, in their practice, on the female role model, the Bodhisattva Tara.¹⁰ Marjorie explained her devotion to Tārā:

I feel that Tārā, whether you believe in her as an 'outer' person or an 'inner' person, is a lovely role model for Western women because the Virgin Mary is always sort of 'out there'. You can't really relate to her and she's been put on a pedestal as a virgin being. But Tārā is such a powerful sort of person. She's shown as foot-stomping and not utterly sweet. She has a lot of aspects that women can relate to.

Marjorie invited only six women to the first meeting of the Tārā group but the word spread and fifteen women arrived for the shared meal followed by prayers and a talk. The first two talks were on dreams and keeping a dream book.

The group broke with the traditional form of meetings in a special way.

⁹ I am indebted to Marjorie Baker who supplied details for this section.

¹⁰ Tārā is a feminine aspect of compassion. According to the Tibetan legend the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara despaired of the task of saving so many sentient beings, even though he had a thousand arms and eleven heads. He wept, and from a teardrop of compassion Tārā was born to help him. When it was suggested that she should change her sex in order to develop further along the path to enlightenment Tārā made her great vow: There are many who desire Enlightenment in a man's body, but none who work for the benefit of sentient beings in the body of a woman. Therefore, until samsara is empty.(sic) I shall work for the benefit of sentient beings in a woman's body. Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The doctrinal foundations*, p .236.

Marjorie explained:

I found in meetings with women, it is more beneficial, gives a better feeling, to sit in a circle with no one sitting at the 'head' or in front. The experience is then shared with each person's input having the same value.

This created a less formal and more flexible gathering than sitting in rows would permit. It also eliminated any sort of hierarchical structure.

The group was flexible, too, in another way. Not all of the women who attended were Buddhists. Some were practising Christians who were interested in other forms of women's spirituality. "In fact we had one talk given by a Catholic nun which everyone found excellent," Marjorie wrote. Marjorie insisted, however, that the group stay basically Buddhist.

When Marjorie and Bernie moved to Dunedin Marjorie was determined to avoid organizational work but, prompted by a dream, she eventually started a Tārā group there. This group, however, is open to men as well as women. The Wellington group still meets.

III WHAT WOMEN THINK ABOUT THEIR ROLES

The majority of respondents (72.58%) thought that women held positions of authority that were equal to those held by men. Only 19.35% thought that there was no such equality.

(1) Friends of the Western Buddhist Order

All eight respondents thought that women and men had equal opportunities. One added, "it's a question of personal choice and qualities not one of hierarchy or sexism." Another person wrote:

Women and men alike have the same potential for spiritual growth and Enlightenment. The ordination ceremony is the same for men and women into the Western Buddhist Order--they take the same precepts and have the same say in the running of Centres. Both men and women teach meditation and Buddhism classes and organize retreats.

These opinions differ from those of two women who were associated with the FWBO some years ago. One spoke of it being "male-dominated. The women were of no account." The above comments from present members

suggest a change of attitude which must make the Order more attractive to New Zealand women.

(2) Theravadin Buddhism.

Four of the eleven Theravadin participants thought that women and men held equal positions of authority within their groups, six thought that they did not, and one person had mixed feelings. One respondent emphasized the administrative nature of women's roles: "Most of the time women seem to be the organisers of retreats etc." Two others distinguished between the tradition and the practice, one of them writing:

There is a hierarchy at the monastery which goes on the length of time that one has been ordained (i.e. not age or attainment). No women have been ordained as yet in New Zealand. Some lay women find this a problem. To me there is no difference in the practice [whether it is] being [done by] male or female.

Finally, the precedence of men within the hierarchy was a contentious issue for some: "The monks have the main authority," and "Nuns are sometimes not considered as important as the monks. This is part of the tradition that annoys many people."

(3) Tibetan Buddhism.

The majority of respondents from this tradition thought that women's roles were equal with men's. Because some of the women are or have been nuns it was possible to obtain representative replies from both lay and ordained practitioners of this tradition.

The three women in the sample who are at present ordained felt that there was equal opportunity for anyone who genuinely wanted and worked for it, regardless of gender. One of the nuns said:

In terms of our group I would think that amongst the Western monks and nuns there's probably not a great deal of difference in terms of authority. The Western monk has authority in some areas which is greater than the rest but that is probably based on his particular qualities--he's the best at speaking Tibetan and he's a good student. I don't think it's because he's male.

A lay person, distinguishing between administrative and spiritual

authority, wrote:

Women and men hold equal roles in the group in respect of administration and organisation. It is basically who has the time and energy and commitment rather than sex. However in terms of spiritual authority that is held mainly by men with only a few women teachers. I think that this is because Tibetan culture was a feudal one and it was more difficult for women to study--and we are still going through the transition. And also our culture is one which doesn't encourage women to strive for the ultimate goals--like Enlightenment. However there is no prejudice in the lamas and they are extremely happy to have women disciples who can study with commitment, practise wholeheartedly and teach effectively.

(4) Vipassana.

Both Vipassana practitioners felt that there was no difference between men's and women's roles. People of both genders could become assistant teachers.

(5) Zen Buddhism

Seven of the eight Zen respondents thought that men's and women's roles were equivalent. One practitioner considered her group to be "a fairly democratic thing." However, several people commented on the greater numbers of men in some groups. "Zen seems to appeal more to men than it does to women."¹¹

(6) Mixed Group

Amongst those who practise more than one form of Buddhism five answered "yes" to the question about equality of roles, two answered "no", and one was uncertain. Most of the respondents in this category added no comments to their replies but one wrote, "I feel in Buddhism women are very dominant in practice and organisation but their roles are put down by men."

¹¹ Perhaps it is not women's roles in Zen but a lingering machismo spirit which deters female would-be practitioners. Some people hold the view that any excessive masculinity is not only undesirable but is also opposed to the essence of Buddhism. Robert Aitken a respected Zen teacher in America, writes of Zen's samurai inheritance, "an accretion on the Buddha Dharma that should be wiped away. For 'samurai' read, 'male.' In Far Eastern culture, the female virtues in women and in men tend to be covered over. In wiping the samurai from Zen practice, we expose gentle human nature that nurtures our own aspirations and those of all beings." Quoted Friedman, *op. cit.* p. 32.

(7) Summation

From the foregoing comments by respondents it seems clear that in most groups women are equal with and sometimes more prominent than men in administrative and organizational roles. There seem to be no gender-based restrictions in these activities.

There are two significant reasons for this. Firstly, there are in Buddhism in New Zealand a number of women with strong personalities. Such women are assertive by nature and this enables them to work admirably as administrators or organizers, and to compete well with men, should competition be necessary, for the role. Secondly many of the women are well-educated and some of them hold or have held positions of authority in a secular sphere. They are less likely to have been conditioned by the patriarchal style of thinking that "men know best" which still binds some women with less education or a lower social standing. They therefore have the experience and the confidence to assume similar positions in the Buddhist community.

In the religious area the issue is more complex. Some women would like to be ordained and to live as monastics but only limited ordination is possible for them in New Zealand: Theravadin and Zen Buddhist women at present have to go overseas for ordination¹² although Theravadin men can be

¹² Students of Zen and Theravada Buddhism can be ordained in the U.S.A. Sandy Boucher discusses the question of ordination in America in *Turning The Wheel*:

The conditions for Buddhist nuns today are difficult within Theravada Buddhism. Because the nuns' orders disappeared from the Theravadin countries, and because a nun must be ordained by another nun, technically there can be no full ordination within these traditions, and the male establishment is resistant to change or innovation. Without full ordination there can be no nunneries or real provision made for the support of nuns. Western women wishing to pursue a monastic life are allowed to take robes as novice nuns and live under eight or ten precepts. The only places where it is possible to receive the other three hundred or more precepts of the fully ordained nun exist in Hong Kong or Taiwan, in Korea and Vietnam. Some Theravada and Tibetan Buddhist women go there to receive the ordination, even though it is within the combined Chan (Zen) and Pure Land traditions, a different tradition from their own.

The situation for nuns in the Tibetan tradition is much superior in that their monastic commitment is supported by Tibetan Buddhist lamas and monks who encourage them to go to Taiwan or Hong Kong to ordain, and who are in favor of the establishment of a viable nuns' order in the West. p. 90.

Also:

Zen women do not face the same obstacles as Theravadin and Tibetan women. Throughout its history in the United States Zen Buddhism has offered ordination for

ordained as monks at the Bodhinyanarama Monastery in Wellington. Tibetan Buddhist women can be ordained as novices in New Zealand but no monastery or nunnery has yet been established for them. This being so, women who want to live as nuns in New Zealand encounter difficulties which hinder their following of their vocation. This raises the following question.

IV IS THERE A 'GENDER PROBLEM'?

The above discussion and quoted replies indicate that the traditional form of Buddhism is like other major world religions. It discriminates the main religious function, which is teaching and the observance of liturgical duties and practices, from the non-religious support functions. This results in a double standard.

On the one hand the main religious function centres around the figure of the religious leader, such as a priest, monk, or lama. In Buddhism in New Zealand this area is still the preserve of the male.¹³ The traditional hierarchies persist, largely untouched by late twentieth century Western attempts to promote gender equality.¹⁴ These traditional hierarchies place monks ahead of nuns, male ahead of female.¹⁵ So in the sacred sphere there is an inequality between male and female which has been transferred to New Zealand with the religion. This is causing discontent in some women; others do not see it as a problem.

women, making no distinction from men, usually referring to both women and men as monks or priests. But Zen monastic settings have been predominantly male dominated and male defined. p. 92.

13 This part of the discussion may not apply to the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order. I have not sufficient information concerning this style of Buddhism in New Zealand to make observations concerning it. Information was obtained predominantly through the interviews and no F.W.B.O. practitioners could be found in Christchurch or Dunedin where the interviews were conducted.

14 Buddhism is definitely not alone in this. Sexist hierarchies still predominate in the other major world religions. See Diana Paul, *Women in Buddhism*, p. xix-xx.

15 James Hughes in *Women in Buddhism* lists the extra eight rules that nuns were required to keep. These demonstrate the hierarchical structure. For example, one of them states that "All nuns, no matter how senior, must bow to all monks, no matter how junior."

On the other hand the secular area of administration and organization is outside the realm of the religious leader. There trusteeships and other secular positions of authority can be filled, without prejudice, by either women or men. In this area women stand on an equal footing with men. In some instances they occupy the senior position. Many respondents who spoke of equality were referring to this sphere: this was evident from their comments.

In communities where there is no resident religious leader the double system has not formed: only the secular level exists. The Canterbury Buddhist Trust and the Dhargyey Buddhist Centre are examples of these two types of community in the South Island. The former exemplifies the single standard community. The women interviewed from this group were unanimous in denying any gender inequality in the group and supported their opinions by mentioning Barbara's position, and other women in Dunedin, or by speaking in general terms of "the sutras" which avowed enlightenment for both sexes.

The community which is attached to the Dhargyey Centre operates on two levels. The religious sphere revolves around the Centre's teacher, Geshe Dhargyey, while the lesser secular level is administered by a Board of Trustees. Interviewees claimed that within the religious area Westerners, whether ordained or lay, male or female, are treated the same: they have equal opportunities to study or to take teachings and they are given minor religious roles according to merit. But within the religious hierarchy the traditional order is maintained. One interviewee explained the hierarchy as "the nuns sitting behind the monks and getting [their meals] served after the monks." Some women from the group objected to this situation, while others accepted it as part of the tradition which they had chosen to embrace.

If one accepts the traditional hierarchical structure of Buddhism then it is safe to say from the results of this research that there is no 'gender problem.' But if one questions the relevance of adhering to the mores of traditional Buddhism, as a few of the respondents did, then the inherent gender inequality can become disturbing. In New Zealand at present there are

no female teachers who have equal standing with, for example, the renowned lamas who have taken up residence here, so it is important to note that certain women have gained recognition in other parts of the world.¹⁶ Neither are there teachers here, like America's Joko Beck¹⁷ to question the continued use of traditional forms. Some time in the future these or other changes may occur but until then it appears that the dual system will remain. Whether this constitutes a gender problem will continue to depend on the opinion of the individual.

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¹⁶ Lenore Friedman's *Meetings With Remarkable Women* is full of examples. Also Alexandra David-Neel, a Western woman with determination, became a Tibetan lama. See her book, *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*.

¹⁷ See, for example, Friedman, *op. cit.* p.113, concerning Joko Beck.

CHAPTER 7

THOUGHTS ON THE FUTURE OF BUDDHISM IN NEW ZEALAND

I BUDDHISM AND THE NEW ZEALAND CULTURE

In the early 1990s Buddhism in New Zealand has not yet developed into 'New Zealand Buddhism'. Its cultural focus is still largely Tibetan, Japanese or South East Asian, depending on the origin of the tradition, although Zen and the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order have encountered Western influence as well. The presence of Eastern cultural influence is not unexpected, given Buddhism's relatively recent introduction to New Zealanders.¹ Furthermore, the Buddhist traditions which are represented in the survey do not proselytize, a point which was made by several practitioners. This being so, new members would be few and more likely to be changed by the group rather than cause it to change.

1. Three Opinions

Three women who had had extensive training overseas were asked whether they thought that Buddhism in New Zealand was changing to accommodate our culture.² They each saw the situation differently.

Marie, who practices Zen Buddhism, thought that Zen was changing in New Zealand because it "takes on the culture that it finds itself planted in." She used as an example changes that have been made to it since its introduction to the United States, such as the use of English instead of Japanese in chants. She also felt that it was becoming more egalitarian there. "Buddhism is only the sum total of its practitioners," she added. "We are what we are and

¹ Prebish notes a similar phenomenon in the history of Buddhism in America. See *op. cit.*, p.18-19.

² The question was put to interviewees only. Unfortunately this means that F.W.B.O. and most of the Theravadin practitioners could not be included. A fourth interviewee was also asked but the recording failed.

Buddhism doesn't change that. It doesn't change your cultural roots. Buddhism changes, the people don't." She felt accordingly that further cultural changes will occur in New Zealand.

The other two women practice Tibetan Buddhism. One of them, Cathi, could not see the Buddhism that she was studying changing to any extent, although she conceded that that could happen "in generations to come." She explained her point of view: "Our teacher is Tibetan and he teaches Tibetan Buddhism. That is the tradition he is passing on. We're [even] learning the language. So in many ways we're culturing to the Tibetan rather than it picking up our culture."

The opinion of the third person, Liza, fits somewhere between Marie's and Cathi's. Partly she agreed with Marie: "Buddhism can change according to the people practising its traditions," she said. If they kept to a more traditional approach then change might not occur. But if they "really take the teachings of the Buddha into their lives" Buddhism in New Zealand could become New Zealand Buddhism. But she also felt, like Cathi, that people are changed by Buddhism, "which is beyond culture."

These two aspects of Buddhism have different potentials for change. Cultural features can be changed if practitioners so desire. For instance, certain formal practices, such as bowing to a teacher, are culturally based marks of respect. The few remarks concerning bowing in the survey replies showed an acceptance of this practice but there are indications that some American Buddhist teachers are discarding it.³ Charles S. Prebish⁴ makes a point relating to cultural change Buddhism in America that could apply equally well to the New Zealand situation :

if Buddhism is to acculture fully to its American setting, it must allow its adherents to incorporate their American cultural heritage into their religious life rather than requesting (or demanding) that they reject it

³ See Friedman, *op.cit.*, p. 113.

⁴ Prebish, *op. cit.* p.44.

summarily Further, they will be repeating, in the process, the archetypal methodology by which Buddhism accultured in each new country it entered on the Asian scene.

The same cannot be said, however, about the essence of Buddhism, dharma practice, which, as Liza rightly claimed, is "beyond culture," even though it has adapted to the cultural styles of different countries. To this there can be no real change: otherwise Buddhism would cease to be Buddhism.

2. Do New Zealand Women Want to see Cultural Changes?

Results of the survey showed a division of opinion, some respondents wanting change and others wanting to hold on to traditional ways.⁵ The Dunedin interviewees seemed content with the 'Tibetanness' of their practice and appeared to take a pride in it. Some of the women were learning the Tibetan language and studying Tibetan texts. One practitioner spoke of attending a Tibetan dance class once a week at the Centre.

Some respondents from other areas, however, indicated that they would like to see Buddhism lose some of its cultural flavour. The question, "How would you like to see Buddhism develop in New Zealand?" brought, amongst its wide variety, the following responses:

"I would like to see the essence of Buddhism to be apparent, stripped from its Eastern cultural garb which can confuse people who are practising."

"..like to see Zen become an established form of practice, taking on its own New Zealand flavour."

" Buddhism become more accessible to the Western mind."

" I am sure it will come to an amalgam of the best of what Eastern culture, Celtic culture and Polynesian culture has to offer."

Some other respondents said that they would like to see changes occur but they

⁵ This division of opinion is similar to an instance mentioned by Lenore Friedman in *Meetings With Remarkable Women..* Joko (Charlotte) Beck, a Zen Buddhist teacher, attempted in the USA in 1984 to conduct meetings which invited people to take a "broad look at our practice--examining and questioning everything from what we wear to the format of sittings." Friedman notes (p.123) that the meetings were spirited and lively at first but "soon it became apparent that about half the people wanted to keep everything absolutely traditional and the other half wanted to be innovative."

wanted them to develop slowly. One practitioner expressed a similar idea to others when she wrote:

I don't want to see a homogeneous New Zealand Buddhism develop too quickly--if at all. There is a wide range of ways of practising Buddhism in NZ at present and these cater for a wide range of people and styles. I think it would be a real pity if these were synthesised into one form of NZ Buddhism too soon. I'm sure lots would be lost.

II CHANGES THAT NEW ZEALAND WOMEN ADVOCATE

Only a few respondents were completely satisfied with Buddhism as it is at present in New Zealand. The remainder suggested a variety of possible changes. From these I have chosen the most representative and placed them into four categories.

1. Become More Widespread.

It is in keeping with the Bodhisattva ideal that women who have received spiritual help from Buddhism should want to share its benefits with others. Respondents suggested that this could be done through the mass media by way of radio and television programmes and more locally "through contact with the schools, youth groups, prisons etc." Some thought that the forthcoming visit of the Dalai Lama, in 1992, would be very helpful in bringing Buddhism to the attention of the public. One person felt that both the therapeutic and the spiritual advantages of Buddhism could be promoted through a more widespread teaching of meditation. Such a programme could be accomplished if another respondent's suggestion were to be utilized: "[the] encouragement of practitioners with 5 or more years of in-depth practice to teach local people--simple meditations [and] Buddhist philosophy."

(2) Changes Concerning Religious Communities.

Two kinds of change were suggested. Firstly, some of the respondents would like to see more community living available in New Zealand, especially that which caters for women. The South Island has no monastery and many

people would like to see one here. One practitioner suggested a special type of community living: "I would like to see whole 'villages' forming--where there was a place for monastic and contemplative lifestyles but not where being a monk or nun was considered to be the only kind of lifestyle open to committed Buddhists."

The other form of change related to the accessibility of monks to lay people. Although some practitioners remarked that their teachers and monks were readily accessible others seemed to find theirs more remote. This was expressed in particular by one respondent who said that she would like to see "easy access to practising monks for those who want advice, etc."

(3) Less Form.

Some women would like to see less form and ritual at their meetings and retreats. One person wanted to see, as a result of the movement away from ritual, the use of Buddhism "actively in everyday life and relationships." The story of Sarah, in Chapter Five, was an example of how this could be achieved and Marjorie's Tara Group represents a movement away from the adherence to form. It was suggested that "men are more particular and focussed on the form. Women don't seem to have such a need for external form." It follows that in the minds of some women a formal, traditional format indicates excessive male input. Less form would therefore cater more for women.⁶

4. Changes For Women.

Some women would like to have more female teachers. One woman said, "The women I've talked to are very keen to have women as models. Most of the teachers we get are men." She pointed out the need for women

⁶ There is a thought-provoking incident described in Boucher, *op. cit.*, p.153-154, however, which reminds one that the removal of some kinds of traditional form may be contrary to some women's needs. Yvonne Rand, an American Zen teacher, tried a more informal seating arrangement for some of her talks: she sat in a circle with her students. At one session a young woman objected, saying, "I want you to sit *up there!*" She pointed to the couch at the front of the room, where the lecturers usually sat. "I want you to sit *there* so I can have someone to look up to."

practitioners to have women teachers to answer questions about female problems. "Monks are celibate and they're a bit shy" when confronted with women's personal problems. The same practitioner had found that taking teaching from a woman was also subtly different: "It gelled more for me. Maybe the way she said things--little things clicked into place. I could take advice from her more readily."

CONCLUSION

This study of some of the New Zealand women who have chosen to undertake Buddhist practice was based on a sample of sixty-two women of differing ages and lengths of practice and who follow one or more of five styles of Buddhism. It has shown why they became involved and some of the benefits that they gained. Through the use of open-ended questions and feminist methods in the interviews it has been possible to adopt a more personal approach and obtain not only objective data but also information that reflects the women's thoughts and feelings. It has examined issues relating to Buddhism from the points of view of the women, sometimes comparing them with similar situations in other Western countries, especially the United States of America.

The survey indicates that the women who have adopted Buddhism and who are seriously involved in Buddhist practice are typically well-educated, intelligent women with enquiring minds. The majority of them are over thirty years of age and most are employed in skilled or professional work which leans towards occupations that entail helping others, such as teaching, healing and social work. They came mainly from Christianity and agnosticism, and a high proportion have a non-conformist marital status: divorced or de facto.

In general they turned to Buddhist practice because they sought a rational and non-judgmental spiritual path, which other systems had not provided. Buddhism brought some voluntary changes to both their exterior and interior lives as they tried to keep the Five Precepts and devoted more time and energy to their practice.

Even though some preferred not to be called 'Buddhist' their replies indicated that they were strongly committed to Buddhist practice. Chapter Four explored further and showed that 'conversion' was a proper term for their experience even though its gradual nature contradicted familiar

Christian forms of sudden, vivid impact.

The benefits that they recounted were both psychological and spiritual. Psychological benefits included self-confidence, healing, understanding, and psychic wholeness. Amongst the spiritual benefits were a sense of fulfilment, new perspectives, taking control of and responsibility for their lives, and spiritual growth.

Their contributions include their administrative talent and the filling of some lesser teaching roles. Additionally, there is the responsibility of providing religious and moral training for their children.

The chief drawbacks are the lack of a monastic lifestyle for women in New Zealand; difficulty of ordination; the unavailability of female teachers as role models; and the patriarchal power structure, which Buddhism has in common with other major world religions and which results in a tradition of sexist hierarchies.

Will women find equality in these religious areas? In the short term this seems unlikely. There is a division of opinion amongst women over the patriarchal aspect. And even if all Buddhist women in this country wanted women teachers and monasteries for women, fulfilling this wish would be hampered because the Buddhist population, though growing, is still small and monasteries and their inhabitants must be supported financially. More importantly, any changes within the patriarchal system may be slow: cries of frustration, similar to some that appeared in the survey, echo through American women's recent writings¹.

However, these are fast changing times. The public interest and progress on sexist issues is on a par with the 'ground swells' of environmental and anti-nuclear convictions. The increase in Buddhist membership during the 1980s may auger well for its growth and adaptation. One of the chief tools of Buddhism, meditation, is practised in its own right outside the religious setting, perhaps a stepping-stone to Buddhist practice for more people, as it

¹ Especially Boucher, *op. cit.*, passim, but they are also there in a more muted form in parts of Friedman, *op. cit.* See also Diana Paul, *op. cit.*, especially the Introduction.

proved to be for some of the women in the survey.

In the emphasis on objective data for this thesis it would be a pity if one outstanding element were not mentioned: the 'it's great' factor. Repeatedly, and in a multitude of ways, women expressed this idea about Buddhist practice. They said that the teachings both appealed to their intellect and welcomed cross-examination. They are given free choice, not an unrelenting 'believe or be damned' command. They practise because they want to. Nothing is compulsory, the limiting judgement of 'right' or 'wrong' is absent, and guilt serves no purpose.

To a person coming, as I did, from Catholic origins this is refreshing and encouraging.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

SECTION A PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT

1. How did you become involved in Buddhist practice? What was your first contact with Buddhism?
2. Did you practise any religion before you turned to Buddhism? Which? How committed were you to this religion?
3. What is there about Buddhism that attracts you?
4. What prompted you to change your religious practice?
5. What personal or inner satisfaction, or sense of fulfilment have you obtained/do you hope to obtain from Buddhism?
6. What effects has your Buddhist practice had on your family life? Have any other members of your family turned to Buddhism?
7. What changes has your Buddhist practice made to your life? For instance, have there been any changes in any of the following areas?
 - the language you use/way you speak
 - use of alcohol
 - diet (Are you a vegetarian? If so, why?)
 - the pattern of your daily life
 - friendships
 - patterns of socializingAny other areas?
8. Have you given up any former activity because of your Buddhist practice? For example, something that you may consider to be incompatible with Buddhist teaching or practice, or something that has ceased to be important.
9. Has your practice of Buddhism changed your thinking about any of these issues?
 - animal rights
 - conservation/environmental issues
 - peace groups
 - abortion issues
 - antinuclear campaignsAny others? Are you actively involved e.g. do you donate money, take part in demonstrations, attend meetings, write to M.P.s etc.

SECTION B PRACTICE

1. Do you consider yourself to be a Buddhist?
Did you list yourself as a Buddhist in this year's census?
2. How long have you been engaged in Buddhist practice?
3. What Buddhist tradition or lineage do you follow?
4. Who were/are your teachers?
5. Where have you studied Buddhism or taken teachings?
6. What forms of Buddhist practice do you undertake? How often?
7. Have you taken any vows? If so, which? For what period of time?
Have you relinquished any? Why?
8. Would you like to be ordained?
(If unable to be ordained) Why not?
- 9 (For interviewees who have studied overseas)
Is Buddhism in New Zealand changing to accommodate our culture?

SECTION C ROLES

1. Do you fulfil any teaching roles in your group?
How did you achieve this position?
Where were you trained? By whom?
2. Do women hold similar positions of authority to men in your group?
3. Do you class yourself as a feminist? Do you think that there is any connection between Buddhism and feminism in New Zealand?
4. What influence are women having on Buddhism in New Zealand?
5. How would you like to see Buddhism develop in New Zealand?

SECTION D DEMOGRAPHIC SECTION

1. What country were you born in?
2. What is your ethnic origin?
3. What is your age?
4. What is your occupation?
5. What is your marital status: never married? married? de facto?
separated? divorced? widowed?
6. Do you have any children? How many? What ages?
7. At what age did you leave school? Do you have any high school
qualifications? Have you gained any qualifications, either academic
or work related, since you left school?

QUESTIONNAIRE

NOTE: Beside NAME you may write either your full name or your first name
If you wish to remain anonymous leave the space blank.

NAME

AGE

ETHNIC GROUP

OCCUPATION

MARITAL STATUS (circle the appropriate response)

never married

married

de facto

separated

divorced

widowed

NUMBER AND AGE OF CHILDREN (if any)

HIGH SCHOOL QUALIFICATIONS

QUALIFICATIONS GAINED SINCE LEAVING SCHOOL (either academic
or work related)

1. Do you regard yourself as a Buddhist?
2. Did you class yourself as a Buddhist in this year's census?
3. Are any other members of your family involved in Buddhist practice?
Please list.
4. Did you belong to any religion before turning to Buddhist practice?
Which?
5. How often were you involved in practice of that religion?
daily weekly monthly occasionally
6. Why did you take up Buddhist practice?
7. What aspects of Buddhism especially attract you?
8. Are you a vegetarian?
Has your Buddhist practice changed this?
9. Do you take alcoholic drinks?
Has your Buddhist practice changed this?

10. Has your involvement with Buddhism changed your thinking about any of the following? If so, how?
 - animal rights
 - conservation or the environment
 - the peace movement
 - abortion
 - nuclear weapons
11. Are your friends
 - mainly Buddhist practitioners?
 - a mixture of Buddhist and non-Buddhist?
 - mostly non-Buddhist?
12. How long have you been engaged in Buddhist practice?
13. What forms of practice do you undertake and how often?
14. Have you taken any vows? Which, and for how long?
15. Have you relinquished any vows? Why?
16. Which Buddhist tradition(s) or lineage(s) do you follow?
17. Do you practise any other religious tradition? Which?
18. Where have you studied Buddhism/taken teachings?
19. Who was/were your teacher(s)?
20. Do you fulfil any teaching roles? Where and by whom were you trained to teach?
21. Do women hold similar positions of authority to men in your group?
22. How would you like to see Buddhism develop in New Zealand?

APPENDIX 2

BUDDHIST TRADITIONS SURVEYED

Friends of the Western Buddhist Order

The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order was founded in 1967 by the Venerable Maha Sthavira Sangharakshita, who had spent 20 years in India as a Buddhist monk. The F.W.B.O. follows the teachings of Hinyana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana Buddhism and caters especially for the needs of Westerners.

Source: *Beliefs and Practices in New Zealand*, pp. 91-92.

Nichiren Shoshu

Nichiren Shoshu Buddhists follow the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, a thirteenth century Japanese Buddhist who preached salvation through faith in the seven-character phrase "Nam-myoho Renge-kyo." Literally this means "Devotion to the wonderful Law Lotus Sutra."

According to Nichiren's teaching the present era is the period of *mappo* which was predicted in certain Buddhist sutras. *Mappo* literally means 'the extinction of the right law' and in Nichiren Shoshu terms this means 'extinction of the teaching of the historical Buddha': the Buddha's teachings would cease to be effective and all hope of salvation would be lost. Nichiren Shoshu adherents believe that Nichiren Daishonin is the buddha for the *mappo* era, whose teachings would replace those of Gautama.

Sokka Gakkai is a lay order of Nichiren Shoshu which originated in Tokyo in 1930. After the war it became the most powerful of the 'New Religions' in Japan. At the time of writing the New Zealand Nichiren Soshu chapter was applying for affiliation to Sokka Gakkai.

Source: Murata, Kiyooki, *Japan's New Buddhism: an objective account of Sokka Gakkai*, pp. 16-19.

Theravāda Buddhism

The term 'Theravada' (Skt. *Sthaviravāda*, Pali, *Theravāda*) means 'the way of the Elders.' This tradition uses the Pali language and has preserved in this language what it holds to be the authentic teachings of the Buddha.

Theravada is the sole surviving member of the so-called Eighteen Schools, the eighteen (by traditional reckoning) *nikāyas* that together made up what came to be known as Hīnayāna Buddhism, the 'lesser vehicle' to salvation, or what is now sometimes called 'Mainstream' Buddhism. Theravāda Buddhism's soteriology centres around the figure of the *arahant* (Sk. *arhat*). Its forms of community life are strictly regulated by the Vināya, or code of monastic conduct, and its canon, the Pali Canon, rejects the authenticity of the Mahāyāna *sūtras*.

Theravāda Buddhism is the dominant Buddhist tradition in Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, and Laos.

Source: Eliade, Mircea, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol.14.

Tibetan Buddhism

Buddhism reached Tibet in the seventh century CE. The Tibetan form of Buddhism is largely a tantric path (Vajrayāna) which is concerned with ritual and meditative practices, but it also incorporates the other two principal paths, Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna. Tantric practices can have psychological risks for the student so great reliance is placed on the supervisory role of the teacher or lama. A number of schools of Buddhism have been formed in Tibet over the centuries but there are four major ones.

The Nyingma (Tib. rNying-ma) School, a school of the 'old order,' was founded by Padmasambhava in the ninth century. Padmasambhava was supposedly the author of the *Bardo Thodol* (Tib. *Bar-do thos-sgrol*), the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

The later or 'reformed' schools appeared during the eleventh century or later, after the reappearance of Buddhism in Tibet following the

persecution of the Dharma by the anti-Buddhist king, gLang-dar-ma. Three main schools arose.

The Saksyapa School (Sa-skyapa) was founded by Khon Konchog Gyalpo ('Khon dKonmchog rgyal po) who lived 1034-1102. It was named after the Sa skya monastery. A basic text of the school is the *Hevajra Tantra*, which explains the experiential character of spiritual growth, expressed in symbols of femininity.

The Kagyu School (bKa'-rgyud-pa), known for its oral transmissions, was founded by Marpa (Mar-pa) who lived 1012-1099, and was passed on through Marpa's disciple, Milarepa (Mi-la Ras-pa). Special Kargyu teachings are the Six Yogas of Naropa (Na-ro-chos drug), and the Mahamudra teachings.

The Gelug School (dGe-lugs-pa) was founded by Tsong Khapa (Tsong-kha-pa) who lived 1357-1419. He built the Gaden (dGa' ldan) monastery in 1410. Tsong Khapa followed the Prasangika Mādhyamaka teachings and the New Translation Tantras (gSang sNgags gSar Ma). He emphasized strict monastic discipline and demanded that monks be celibate. The Dalai Lama belongs to this school.

Sources: Thondrup, Tulku, *Buddhist Civilization in Tibet*. pp. 45-65.

Williams, Paul, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: the Doctrinal Foundation*, pp. 189-192.

Eliade, Mircea, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol.14.

Vipassana Meditation

Vipassana is a meditation technique in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin as taught by S.N. Goenka, his student. Although *vipassanā* (Sk. *vipāśyanā*) is a form of insight meditation taught in the Theravada tradition, practitioners of Vipassana Meditation do not consider themselves to be part of that or any other tradition. In fact, according to *Beliefs and Practices in New Zealand*,

[p.249] " it can be practised freely by all without conflict with race, caste or religion," and although it was developed by the Buddha "its practice is not limited to Buddhists."

Vipassana practitioners see the meditation as a process of self-purification by self-observation. The process starts with a conscious awareness of one's own breathing and proceeds to an observation of "the changing nature of body and mind and experiences of the universal truths of impermanence, suffering and egolessness." [Ibid.] Practitioners try to keep the Five Precepts (to abstain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, intoxicants, and telling lies).

Courses are held in New Zealand in Christchurch and Auckland. They consist of ten-day meditation retreats under the guidance of assistant teachers who have been authorized by S.N. Goenka.

Source: *Beliefs and Practices in New Zealand* pp. 249-250.

Zen Buddhism

Zen (Ch. *Ch'an* from Sk. *dhyāna*, 'meditation') is a system of meditation or school of thought which reached Japan in the twelfth century. It is primarily an attempt to experience the nondual nature of reality: 'I' and 'not I' are both aspects of Buddha-reality.

The two main Zen schools are the Rinzai and the Soto. The Rinzai (Ch. *Lin-chi*) School was brought to Japan by Eisai. It uses the 'sudden' approach to enlightenment, aiming to drive the student to awakening through training that employs the *koan*, the *mondo*, and beatings which supposedly shock the student into *satori*. The Soto (Ch. *Ts'ao-tung*) School, formed by Dogen in the thirteenth century, uses a more gradual approach and teaches that practice itself is the awakening.

Both schools place emphasis on *zazen*, which is a sitting meditation designed to evoke quiet awareness, without comment, of whatever happens to be here and now.

Sources: Friedman, Lenore, *Meetings With Remarkable Women*,
(Glossary).

Wood, Ernest, *Zen Dictionary*.

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