

. Myoshu Agnes Jedrzejewska M.D., Ph.D.

The female disciples of Buddha – an understanding of Shinran’s teachings for our present times.

When my daughter was a student of the Yokohama International School, we both learned that in practically all English handbooks of history of Japanese religions, Jodo Shinshu has nowadays been labeled by the Japanese intellectuals as the most misogynist and most conservative tradition in Japanese society and culture (see, for an example, “A History of Japanese Religion ed. Kazuo Kasahara, 2001). Such an opinion, however unjust, seems to be popular enough to make many Japanese families to covert into Christianity.

I do believe that openly discussing the problem is always better than to take comfort in pretending that we have no problem at all.

Sakyamuni was born among very discriminating people of India with rigid understanding of karma. Nevertheless, He successfully taught them the truly universal religion of non-substantiality, of impermanence, of the cause of human suffering and of the way of attaining true happiness.

The Buddhist truth embraced the whole physical world and the whole of human life into one fundamental conception of universal equality. With such a sense of equality, Buddhism contradicted not only Hindu, but all other religions of that time. Confusian antagonism to Buddhism was ultimately directed against the Buddhist idea of equality. Similarly, every hierarchic society must have problem with Buddhadharma with respect to social ethics.

Buddhism, which came to the Japanese archipelago from Korea and China, is based upon the Mahayana interpretation of the Sakyamuni’s teaching. So-called Hinayana (the oldest form of Buddhism) was reduced by Prince Shotoku to the observation of clerical precepts for Buddhist priests.

Prince Shotoku decided to adapt partially the Vinaya Pitaka in creating a society of monks and nuns in Japan.

Mahayana sutras, which were brought to Japan during the 6th and later during the 9th century, began to develop views, which, in time, actually varied from Sakyamuni's teaching of universal equality.

Shinran taught the Dharma to women, unlike Tendai or Shingon which banned the entry of women to their temples. There are, however, two wasans, which somehow do not concur with the rest of the Shinran's teaching (Note nr 1.)

In these wasans Shinran interpreted the intention of 35th Vow (of the Larger Sutra), which says that a woman should be born in the Pure Land as a man to be able to attain the enlightenment. This statement is nowadays considered by too many as a genuine teaching of the Buddha, because it was placed in the sutra (The Larger Sutra of the Pure Land).

Sutras, however, are neither written by any Buddha, nor they carry only the words of the Buddha. If that were the case, sutras would not have been able to become universal message for entire mankind regardless the passage of time. Universal absolute Truth is not only difficult to be expressed in words, it is even harder to understand on its absolute level. Shinran was aware about that. Buddha as the Absolute doesn't teach us directly, since we are unable to receive such way of teaching. Dharma reaches us always via a teacher, in the broad sense of the word, and this way, Dharma is always "filtered" by abilities of the deliver, and by abilities of the receiver.

Even the most enlightened person is not absolutely pure, since he/she has to support the body by eating "life" taken from plants and animals.

He/she must breath, digest and urinate, which makes numerous germs and viruses, for which human body is a quite universe they live in, killed.

To be understandable, Dharma needs to be pronounced by somebody, who is a part of society, which is going to be taught. When time passes, social and cultural environment changes, the way Dharma is expressed changes, too.

From all available sources we can say that Sakyamuni in His teaching of equality had definitely less problems with the Indian caste system than it had with the Indian discrimination against women.

He had been always remembered as the one who elevated significantly (Diana Y. Paul; I.B. Horner) the status of women in India. But the problem was so difficult that it took Him five years to create a female subdivision of His Order.

We all are interconnected. Nobody can escape the way, which his/her karma placed him in. Karmic interconnections may be somehow transformed, but not absolutely escaped.

Sakyamuni couldn't ignore the way, which the Indian society was. He was part of the society, too. To teach, He had to interact with the society as it was. He didn't worry about women. He had many enlightened female disciples (see note nr 2). Women didn't need much teaching of looking into their own imperfections, since the society trained them to regard themselves as very imperfect. They knew they had to be humble. They agreed to give up everything to undertake the utmost effort to get their spiritual liberation. Women accepted that realistically.

Sakyamuni was thinking how to make men accept the female department in the Order. Sakyamuni realized that the only way was to subordinate nuns to monks. When women were granted a chance to practice and to learn, once enlightened, they had a chance to survive guided by Buddha's wisdom.

Sakyamuni makes no misogynistic remarks anywhere in the oldest part of the Pali Canon. On the contrary, by taking into consideration psychological differences imposed on women by their social treatment, the Buddha equally encouraged both men and women on their way to enlightenment.

There is no any reliable proof that Sakyamuni labeled exclusively women by the five obstacles. On the contrary, Sakyamuni, as Pali Canon recorded (Apadana, Therigatha, Itivuttaka of 112 sutras, Dhammapada, Dhammapada Commentaries – among other sources), encouraged women to overcome their mental habits of being too trustful to others, to relying upon their families, especially husbands and children, to develop more mindfulness, independence, more energy, more circumspection, if they want to attain arahatship.

Many Sakyamuni's nuns were quicker in their achievement of enlightenment than His monks. Female lay disciples of Sakyamuni are impossible to count, as well as the number of women recognized by Sakyamuni as living in "non-retrogression" state is simply recorded as many, many.

Biographies of famous Sakyamuni female disciples from the Pali Canon are very vividly colorful and actually their spectrum embraces all kind of women (passionate ones, as well as well mannered ones, beautiful ones and not so attractive ones, debating ones as well as those learning by experience, courtesans together with faithful wives...).

No special moral, social code whatsoever. As for all Sakyamuni's disciples, only *shukuzen* (past karma with enough *butsu-en*) was important.

The biography of arahat Isidashi shows her transmigration from an evil man to finally "perfect human beings" – a woman (Therigatha 403-447).

However, when Sakyamuni passed away and later when Ananda, the protector of the Female Order, passed away, Buddhist scriptures began to assume a different attitude to women.

The Buddha, just directly before his departure from this world, indicated that the Vinaya Pitaka should be altered according to changing times and circumstances. Vinaya is that part of the Teaching, which, by definition, deals with relations among monks and nuns inside of the Order, as well as with the relationships of the Order with society.

When Sakyamuni's personal influence was weakened by the passage of time, more social values had entered the scriptures, especially Vinaya Pitaka. Buddhism entered Confucian China and India was conquered by Islamic culture. The feudal nature of these cultures was naturally opposed to the Buddhist teaching of equality.

I would like to present only one example how the teaching had been changed with time in the sutras:

Nowadays not many scholars even know that there is one authentic Sacred Book of the Pali Canon, namely **Itivuttaka**, which was not only composed when Sakyamuni was alive, but was also discussed with Him. Itivuttaka (The Buddha's Sayings) was composed of 112 sutras in mixed prose and verse by **Khujjuttara**, the female servant of **Queen Samavati** of Vamsa, the chief wife of King Udena. While Khujjutara was not conventionally beautiful, she was gifted with an outstanding memory, as well as other intellectual abilities. One day, she went to listen to the Buddha, on her way home from her shopping for the queen. Khujjutara was so impressed by the words of Dharma that by the time the Buddha concluded His talk, she had already "*attained the path and fruit of stream-entry*" (Udana 7:10). Without quite knowing what had happened to her, she had become a totally changed person. The whole world, which had always seemed so obvious and real to her, now appeared as a dream. The queen noticed how her servant had pleasantly changed and asked Khujjutara about the Buddha's teaching.

Each day, Khujjutara went to the monastery and every evening she repeated to the queen and other refined women of the palace, all the Dharma discourses which she had heard. More preciously, she was making notes and putting the teaching into writing in order to enable others to read the Dharma as often as they wished.

King Udena was absolutely unaware of the spiritual life of Samavati and her women. When the king once told his beloved Samavati that she could wish for anything and he would fulfill it, she wished that the Buddha would come to

the palace daily to have His food there and propound His doctrine. The king sent the envoy to the Buddha, but Sakyamuni declined and sent Ananda instead. Samavati was very well prepared by Khujjutara and within short time “*attained to stream-entry*” (Anguttara Nikaya, chap.14). The Dharma spread throughout all the women’s quarters and reached even the Samavati’s adopted father, the finance minister Ghosaka, who donated a monastery to the Order: Ghositarama of Kosambi.

The Buddha called Samavati “*the most skillful in loving kindness*” (Anguttara Nikaya, chap.14). Samavati demonstrated her supernatural powers while the king wanted to kill her as a consequence of malicious rumors being spread by his second wife. King Udena was almost the last person in his palace to take interest in the teaching of the Buddha (Samyutta Nikaya, chap. 35: 127). He was actually converted by a monk Pindala who tried to help the king to control his sexual desire by imagination of the desirable human body like an impure disgusting flesh.

When Samavati was killed together with her court ladies in an arson attack, the Buddha described, for the first time, the three kinds of enlightenment: “*Among these women, monks, some were stream-enterers, some were once-returners, and some were non-returners. Non of these lay disciples had died destitute of the noble fruits*” (Udana, 7:10).

Although Samavati was a lay practitioner, Sakyamuni described her as a “*being the non-returned free from all sensual desire and hate, and of all identification with her body*” (Udana, 7:10). That was the Pali Canon record.

In Mahayana version of Samavati – Udena (Udenaya) story – (The Tale of King Udayana of Vatsa from “The Collection of Jewels” (Maharatnakuta translated by Diana Paul – 29;11: 310) the king is elevated as the one who introduces Dharma to the palace and is taught personally by the Buddha. (“**King:** “*Lord, because of woman’s deception, I am perplexed and ignorant. For this reason I have intense hate. Lord, because you bring peace and benefits to living beings, I want you to explain, out of compassion, the flattery and deceit*”

of women. Do not let me have close relationships with women. Then, after a long time, I will be able to avoid all suffering....

The Buddha: *“Your majesty should first know a man’s faults. Then he’ll have insight into those of a woman...Because all men engage in four kinds of wrong and excessive actions, they are perplexed by women...*

First, they are addicted to desire, insatiably looking at women for their own self-indulgence...Such men as these turn away from faith, morality, learning, and generosity, and wisdom...they act like hungry demons...They don’t have sincere faith in me, in Dharma, nor the Sangha (which leads them into evil paths)....”

In this Mahayana version also the “human body”, which is a subject of desire, is pointed as a women’s body, which must be seen as disgusting and impure.

The phenomenon of Mahayana literature is a kind of twist of Sakyamuni’s sense of equality and His appreciation for women into the opposite. It seems like, for Mahayanists, women were guilty for whatever men chose to think about them. It was not men’s thoughts that were regarded as impure, but the subject of their thoughts – ie. women (as elaborated in Abhidharmakosa).

The beginning of such an attitude is visible in some parts of the Vinaya Pitaka, apparently written some time after Sakyamuni’s death. The Order introduced the Rite of Truth for women, which was to make the change of their sex into men, as either a condition or a consequence of enlightenment. In the Vinaya version, the change of gender was supposed to take place in the present lifetime and was rather of a psychological nature (Diana Y.Paul, I.B.Horner, The Sutra on Changing the Female Sex – Fo Shuo Chuan Nu Shen Ching, F.Max Muller)

In Mahayana scriptures it was taken further – women were expected to be born once again in male bodies (the Pure Land traditions). The five obstacles, which the Pali Canon did not associate with any gender (Kogen Mizuno), came to be considered, under Confucian influence or Hindu interpretation, as female characteristics alone.

It is notable that Prince Shotoku selected three sutras, which discuss the enlightenment of women, for his *Sangyo Gisho*. (Lotus Sutra teaches enlightenment of women – chap.10,

26, “The Naga Princess” chap.; the Vimalakirti Sutra presents the Female Bodhisattva who successfully teaches Sariputra that gender is form and form is upaya; in the Shrimala Sutra, the main teacher is the Queen Shrimala – an imminent Buddha, who first converts to the Dharma all women of her kingdom, later all men, including the king, her husband.)

Vimalakirti Sutra (quotations as translated by Diana Paul) :

Sariputra to the Goddess residing in the Vimalakirti house:

“Why don’t you change your female sex?”

Goddess: “I have been here for twelve years and have looked for the innate characteristics of the female sex and haven’t been able to find them. How can I change them? Just as magician creates an illusion of a woman, if someone asks why don’t you change your female sex, what is he asking?”

Sariputra: “But an illusion is without any determinate innate characteristics so how could it be changed?”

Goddess: “All things are also without any determinate innate characteristics, so how can you ask ‘why don’t you change your female sex?’ “

She changes Sariputra into a woman by her supernatural powers and says: ...” Sariputra, if you can change into a female form, then all women (in mental state) can also change. Just as you are not really a woman, but appear to be female in form, all women also only appear to be female in form, but are not really women. Therefore, the Buddha said that all are not really men or women.”

The Japanese Buddhism entered the path of discrimination against women by following more Hindu and Confucian views, rather than the Sakyamuni’s teaching. (see the examples in the note nr 3.) The fact that Amidakyo Sutra invites men and women equally to the Pure Land, as well as the Sutra of Contemplation of Amida’s Pure Land is a teaching delivered by Sakyamuni to a woman – Vaidehi, did not change discrimination against women. It did not serve the cause of Japanese Buddhism, that entire Pure Land teaching is about universal equality and all-embracing compassion.

Moreover, **the oldest, among the seven versions of The Longer Sutra which survived till our present time** (“Shoyaku jodo san bukkyo” by Bunyin Nanjo (Tokyo, 1912), **is the Chinese translation by Zhi Loujiachen (Shi Lou Kuzen)(167-186 C.E.) This version delivers 24 vows and neither mentions any special treatment of women, nor excludes five-grave-offenders from being grasped by Amida.** It is the most universal, all embracing message. Amida’s Light is emancipating even worms, according to Zhi Loujiachen’s version.

The next the 24-vows version of the Larger Sutra was written by Zhi Qian (Shi Ken). He introduced in the vow nr 2 a transformation of women into men. In this version, however, it sounds like a very equal treatment, since both men and women should expect any spiritual results of nembutsu in the next lifetimes. In this regard, if a woman is solely and especially promised to be born not only like a man, but specifically “as the man who will be perfectly enlightened”, it is a very favorable status.

The version of Boddhiruchi provides the vow nr 33, which may be summarized as follows: if a woman awakes the pure mind and calls the Name (of Amida), she will dislike her female form and she will be born as a man attaining the perfect enlightenment.

Until we understand the Pure Land tradition’s idea in a classic way of being born in the Pure Land (*ojo*) after our physical death, the vow about women is a statement of equality made for a society with no idea of any equality.

However as it comes to Shinran’s understanding of the meaning of *ojo* (the birth in the Pure Land), the transformation women into men in the life to come looks contradictory.

Shinran made realization called *genshoshōjoju* (the present participation in the process of becoming Amida, which is actually the enlightenment) as the condition of the final absolute liberation. In such case, if one still demands women to become men first, one logically denies the *shinjitsu shinjin* experience to women.

Shinran was the one, who perfectly realized Shan-Tao's experience of "diamond mind" (*kongo shin*) given to Nembutsu person by Amida **during this present life**.

Shinran was the one, who thoroughly understood that there are limits, which cannot be overcome while we are in human bodies. Our perception of Buddha's wisdom, our abilities to act compassionately without any consciousness of ourselves (*muga*) are always somehow limited. Buddha may be perfectly understood only by Buddhas (ToboGe and Yui Butsu yo Butsu no chi ken). We may talk about the highest spiritual achievement for human being, but it is never the absolute state of satori.

If one totally surrenders to Amida and accepts Hongan as one's private vow to carry on in any way Amida makes him so, he/she is given "diamond mind" in this present life.

Shinran had personally experienced how society could be oppressive, and how such social pressure may be impossible to challenge. He wrote two wasans, which are more Hindu than Buddhist. However, he basically taught:

"In Nembutsu non-discrimination is the essence, because it is above praise, inexplicable, and inconceivable..." (Tannisho, ch.10)

The true shinjin, for Shinran, is not just any believing. It is a personal experience of Amida's work, of absolutely non-discriminating *Tariki*. From this experience all understanding, that of life and that of scriptures, is born. From this experience of *Tariki*, Nembutsu starts to circulate in our minds like absolutely essential support of our functioning. Out of the Buddha's Wisdom, Shinran wrote:

"...Generally speaking, in the sacred scriptures, the true, real expedient, and temporary teaching are intermixed... be careful that you don't misunderstand the sacred scriptures..." (Tannisho, Ep.2)

“I know absolutely nothing about good and evil! If I were able to know good so thoroughly that the Tathagatha would recognize it in His mind as good, then I could say I know good...”
(Tannisho, Ep.3)

In our present days, unfortunately, the 35th Vow and Shinran’s wasans about women’s necessity to be transformed into men seems to be better known by lay public than the genuine teaching of Shinran. It has already influenced history handbooks and so-called “public opinion”. (Even Diana Paul classified the entire Pure Land Tradition as the one which excluded women from enlightenment.) It makes Pure Land Buddhism look discriminatory and regressive. It has changed from upaya into an obstacle.

It may, however, help if the knowledge about the upaya character of the 35th Vow, which was never the true teaching of Buddha, would be more propagated and both Shinran’s wasans (concerning the 35th Vow issue) should be always printed with a clear explanation that they provide only the teaching of the temporary value, the teaching made once out of compassion for men, who, in the past, were unable to recognize women as their Dharma-companions.

Note nr.1

” So profound is Amida's great compassion
That, manifesting inconceivable Buddha’s wisdom,
The Buddha established the Vow of transformation into men,
Thereby vowing to enable women to attain Buddhahood.

Note: This is the meaning of the Thirty-fifth Vow.

If women did not entrust themselves to Amida's Name and Vow,
They would never become free of the five obstructions,
Even though they passed through myriads of kalpas;
How, then, would their existence as women be transformed?”...
(CWS. p.341, 376)

Note nr 2.

Therigatha (102-6), Apadana (3:6), and Dhammapada (112) report, for example, the arahatship of **Sona**, known as “Sona with many children”. She entered the Order at the age of 60 after being, for a long time, an exemplary wife and mother, as well as a lay follower of the Buddha. During her lay life, she cultivated her female virtues only to finally come to the realization that what she had taken to be a life of selfless love towards her children, was, in fact, a form of self-love coupled with expectations of requital. To rid herself of her womanly limitations (imposed upon her by society), she became a nun and decided to follow instructions given to her by Sakyamuni. She had to develop some so-called masculine characteristics like energy and circumspection by practicing mindfulness and self-observation. She took pains to allow herself only a minimum period of sleep every day. In this way, her energy quickly gathered momentum and her mind became composed. She demonstrated the use of her supernatural powers by using the fire element to heat water for nuns. Sakyamuni praised her arahatship in Dhammapada (112-14)

It may be useful to mention that though the first written edition of the Pali Canon is believed to take place as earliest as ten years after Sakyamuni’s death, there is, however, one authentic Sacred Book of the Pali Canon, namely Itivuttaka, which was not only composed when Sakyamuni was alive, but was also discussed with Him. Itivuttaka (The Buddha’s Sayings) was composed of 112 sutras in mixed prose and verse by **Khujjuttara**, the female servant of **Queen Samavati** of Vamsa, the chief wife of King Udena. While Khujjuttara was not conventionally beautiful, she was gifted with an outstanding memory, as well as other intellectual abilities. One day, she went to listen to the Buddha, on her way home from her shopping for the queen. Khujjuttara was so impressed by the words of Dharma that by the time the Buddha concluded His talk, she had already “*attained the path and fruit of stream-entry*” (futaiten) (Udana 7:10). Without quite knowing what had happened to her, she had become a totally changed person. The whole world, which had always seemed so obvious and real to her, now appeared as a dream. The queen noticed how her servant had pleasantly changed and asked Khujjuttara about the Buddha’s teaching. Each day, Khujjuttara went each day to the monastery and every evening she repeated to the queen and other refined women of the palace, all the Dharma discourses which she had heard. More preciously, she was making notes and putting the teaching into writing in order to enable others to read the Dharma as often as they wished.

King Udena was absolutely unaware of the spiritual life of Samavati and her women. When the king once told his beloved Samavati that she could wish for anything and he

10

would fulfill it, she wished that the Buddha would come to the palace daily to have His food there and propound His doctrine. The king sent the envoy to the Buddha, but Sakyamuni declined and sent Ananda instead. Samavati was very well prepared by Khujjutara and within short time “*attained to stream-entry*” (Anguttara Nikaya, chap.14). The Dharma spread throughout all the women’s quarters and reached even the Samavati’s adopted father, the finance minister Ghosaka, who donated a monastery to the Order: Ghositarama of Kosambi.

The Buddha called Samavati “*the most skillful in loving kindness*” (Anguttara Nikaya, chap.14). Samavati demonstrated her supernatural powers while the king wanted to kill her as a consequence of malicious rumors being spread by his second wife. King Udena was almost the last person in his palace to take interest in the teaching of the Buddha (Samyutta Nikaya, chap. 35: 127).

When Samavati was killed together with her court ladies in an arson attack, the Buddha described, for the first time, the three kinds of enlightenment: “*Among these women, monks, some were stream-enterers, some were once-returners, and some were non-returners. Non of these lay disciples had died destitute of the noble fruits*” (Udana, 7:10). Although Samavati was a lay practitioner, Sakyamuni described her as a “*being the non-returner free from all sensual desire and hate, and of all identification with her body*” (Udana, 7:10).

There are quite many records of women’s enlightenment in the Pali Canon. Each one biography teaches us how every aspect of human (in this case, female) personality may be useful in the right circumstances. Among those recognized by Sakyamuni as enlightened women, are ideal wives, influential queens, merchant daughters, passionate housewives, nuns, debating ascetics, and courtesans – the entire spectrum of women’s society.

Visakha, known as “Mother of Migara” was an ideal wife of a wealthy householder. She was the Buddha’s Chief Patroness. She gave to the Order Migaramaru-pasada, the facility near the gate to the city of Savatthi, just like Jetavana monastery was the gift of Anathapindika. She compiled the great part of the Vinaya Pitaka by suggesting to the Buddha how monks and nuns should be conduct themselves. Among her initiatives, was the provision of special care for sick monks and nuns, swimsuits for nuns and raincoats for alms-people. She passed away loved and respected by all as a “*stream-enterer*” (Udana, 2:9; 8:8; Anguttara Nikaya chap.14; 3:70; 8:49; Vinaya 4:161). She was famous for the saying: “*The*

Dhamma is timeless, there is no time when Dhamma cannot be followed." (Vinaya 1:153).

Mallika was born to the garland maker in Savatthi. She met the Buddha at a very early age just in the street and was deeply impressed by Him so much so that she offered to the Buddha all she had – just her lunch for the day. Sakyamuni told her she was going to be the Queen of Kosala, which happened very soon. Anguttara Nikaya, Digha Nikaya, Samyutta Nikaya, Majjhima Nikaya describe her generosity, patience, gentleness and understanding of the Dharma. To her husband, King Pasenadi, the Buddha explained that "*if a woman was clever, virtuous, well behaved, and faithful, she was superior to a man*" (Samyutta Nikaya, 3:16). The Buddha also taught King Pasenadi that men who treat women badly are reborn first in hell, later as animals, and finally like ill-treated women (Jataka 77,314; Vinaya 4:158). Mallika and Pasenadi may be of special interest for Jodo Shinshu, because, for them, the Buddha unveiled their past lifetimes to make the king, especially, understand that they had transmigrated for a very long time together as a couple. Mallika had always been very supportive to the present King Pasenadi by choice.

Khema was called by Sakyamuni "*the foremost in wisdom*" – the counterpart of Sariputra, as the nun **Uppalavanna**, "*the foremost in psychic power*", was the counterpart of Moggallana (Anguttara Nikaya 1, chap.14). Khema was the beautiful wife of King Bimbisara. The traditional education of women did not lead her to the Dharma. King Bimbisara initiated her visit to the Bamboo Grove monastery, during which "*she attained arahatship together with the analytical knowledges*" (Dhammpada 347). The king then allowed her to stay in the monastery and become the nun. She was a famous Dharma teacher in India, and was especially renowned for using the exact the same words as the Buddha, without even being previously familiar with them. Her teaching is reported in almost all the Pali sources. She was also famous for her understanding of the nature of Tathagata and non-substantiality.

Bhaddha Kundalakesa was known as the Debating Ascetic. After tragic events at an early age, she found herself betrayed by her own feelings. She became disgusted with the world and entered the Jain sect, at first. Traveling through India, she visited many spiritual teachers and obtained a high degree of knowledge. She became especially skilled in the art of debate and once even challenged Sariputra himself. The Buddha invited her to become His nun after their first meeting, during which Bhaddha attained arahatship very quickly and was titled "*the foremost with respect to quickness of understanding*" (Therigatha;107-9, Dhammapada, 101; Apadana 3:1, 38-46).

Kisa-gotami, owing to her poverty and unattractiveness, was not well treated by her parents in-law. Her situation improved when she gave birth to a baby boy. Soon, however, her happiness ended, because her lit-

the son passed away. She desperately wanted him back alive. The Buddha asked her to bring him a mustard seed from a household which had never experienced death. At the end of her journey from one house to another, Kisa-gotami realized impermanence. She buried her child by herself and went to the Anathapindika's monastery as a "*stream-enterer*" (Dhammapada 287). She took an ordination and very shortly she attained arahatship (Dhammapada 114; Therigatha 213-23; Samyutta Nikaya 5:3). The Buddha pointed out her ability to quickly learning from her personal experience (Petavatthu 8; 12; Jataka 352; 354).

Patacara was the beautiful daughter of a very wealthy merchant. She fell in-love with a servant and ran away from home to live with him in a village far from her hometown Savatthi. One day she lost her husband, both her sons, and received the message that both her parents were killed while their house was demolished by a fearful storm. She was driven mad with grief. Consumed with the madness, she entered the Jetavana monastery and saw the Buddha with a multitude of His disciples. The Buddha recognized her state of mind and simply said :"*Sister, regain your mindfulness!*" . Instantly she regained her mindfulness. By the time the Buddha finished His discourse Patacara was "*a stream enterer, a knower of the Dhamma, one assured of final liberation*" (Dhammapada Com. 2:268; BL 2:255, Dhammapada 288-89). She very soon became an arahat, and an expert on the Vinaya (Therigata 112-177).

Ambapali was found as a newly born baby in the garden of Licchavi, ruler of Vesali. She was beautiful and charming and several of the Licchavi princes wanted to marry her, which led to much fighting. They finally decided that Ambapali should belong to no one exclusively, but to all in common. Thus she was forced to become a courtesan and thanks to the goodness of her character she had a very good influence on the Licchavi princes. She spent large sums on charity and actually became an uncrowned queen. Among many who loved her was the King Bimbisara of Magadha who became the father of her son. Ambapali was attracted by the Dharma at the first meeting with the Buddha. She hosted the Buddha and His disciples many times at her house and finally entered the Order of nuns. Therigata (252-270) and Apadana (4:9) report her arahatship.

Sirima was the second courtesan appreciated by the King Bimbisara. She was encouraged to follow the Dharma by **Uttara**, a good lay female follower of the Buddha, who was unfortunately married to a weak-minded man with no interest in religion at all. Uttara, inspired by her father, hired Sirima to entertain her husband, so she would have time to go to the monastery to listen to the Buddha, to prepare food for monks and to undertake other deeds of merit.

With regard to Uttara the Buddha said that she managed to: *“Overcome anger by non-anger, Conquer evil by goodness, Conquer the niggardly with a gift, And the liar with*

11

truth.” (Dhammapada 223). The good character of Uttara finally helped Sirima, as well as Uttara’s husband and his equally skeptical parents to attain *“the fruit of stream-entry”*. The story of Sirima’s realization is presented in Therigatha, Dhammapada and Vimanavatthu.

Isidashi’s story is widely described in Therigatha (403-447). Isidashi was, in a remote previous lifetime, a man who mistreated women, who after his abusive life, fell in hell for a quite considerable time. He emerged from his hellish suffering through the life of an animal, a hermaphrodite, and a slave woman up to the *“perfect human being”* – the Sakyamuni’s nun Isidashi (Therigatha 447).

Note nr 3.

From *Nyonin ojo kikigaki* – “Notes on Women’s Rebirth in the Pure Land” by Zonkaku (1290-1337) translated by K. Kasahara:

1) *Nehan-Gyo* - Nirvana Sutra of Mahayana:

“The passions of but a single woman and the obstacles to her attainment of buddhahood are so vast that they can be compared with all the passions and bonds of all the men in three thousand worlds.”

2) *Shinjikan-Gyo* - Meditation on the Origin of the Mind Sutra:

“Should the all-seeing eyes of the buddhas of the three worlds fall to the ground and putrefy, still no buddha whatsoever would vow to save the females of the phenomenal realms.”

3) *Joynishiki Ron* – Treatise on the Establishment of the Doctrine of Consciousness Only:

“Women are messengers from hell. They have destroyed forever the seeds of the buddha-nature within them. Outwardly they are as gentle as bodhisattvas, but inwardly they are like demons.”

LITERATURE:

1. The Collected Works of Shinran. Jodo Shinshu Honganji-ha. Shin Buddhism Translation Series, 1997, Kyoto

2. **Essentials of Buddhism.** Kogen Mizuno. Kosei. 1996, Tokyo
3. **Tannisho.** Ryukoku Translation Series. Ryotesu Fujiwara translation. 1962, Kyoto
4. **The Central Philosophy of Buddhism.** T.R.V. Murti. George Allen and Unwin Ltd. 1960, London
5. **A History of Japanese Religion.** Kazuo Kasahara. Kosei. 2001, Tokyo
6. **The Land of Bliss.** Luis O. Gomez. University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu and Higashi Honganji Shinshu Otaniha Kyoto, 1996
7. **The Teaching of Buddha.** Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai. Kosaido. 1988, Tokyo
8. **Studies in Buddhism.** F.Max Muller et al. Susil Gupta (India) Ltd. 1953, Calcuta
9. **Women under Primitive Buddhism.** I.B. Horner. Motilal Banarsidass. 1975, Delhi
10. **Japanese Buddhism – A Cultural History.** Yoshiro Tamura. Kosei. 2000, Tokyo
11. **Great Disciples of the Buddha.** Nyanaponika Thera and Helmuth Hecker. Wisdom. 1997, Somerville
12. **Great Women Disciples of the Buddha.** Hellmuth Hecker. Buddhist Publication Society of Kandy. 1997, Sri Lanka
1. **Nagarjuniana.** Chr. Lindtner. Motilal Banarsidass. 1987, Dehli
2. **Women in Buddhism.** Diana Y. Paul. Asian Humanities Press. 1979, Berkley
3. **The Life of Eshinni.** Yoshiko Ohtani.
4. **Religious Life of the Japanese People.** Masaharu Ane-saki. Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai. 1961, Tokyo (pp.55 – 58)
17. **Shoyaku jodo san bukyo.** Bunyiku Nanjo. Genei Fujii Publ. 1912, Tokyo