

Buddhist Precepts and Lay Dhamma Teaching in the West

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The name of Jacquetta Gomes has been included in *Burkes Landed Gentry Volume III, England's North West including Contemporary People of Distinction*, in Burke's Peerage and Gentry, 'as a Contemporary Person of Distinction'. In this connection, Burke's Peerage and Gentry had written, stating that "... this book focuses primarily on successful Northwest [of England] people... to truly represent the Northwest today... in recognition of your place in Northwest life you have been chosen as one of over 3000 Northwest entrants whose names will appear alphabetically in the new reference work". Jacquetta's name has been included in recognition of her work in spreading the teachings of the Buddha in this country, by establishing [BGKT] the Buddhist Group of Kendal (Theravada) which serves a vehicle for propagating Buddhist teachings and Buddhist meditation. Many people were pleased that the inclusion of her name in this prestigious publication illustrated that the importance of the *Buddha Dhamma* in the west was being recognised. Councillor Gwen Murfin, Mayor of Kendal (2007-2008), requested that a celebration Pali Blessing Ceremony be conducted in the Mayor's Parlour in Kendal Town Hall.

Jacquetta Gomes, in conjunction with two colleagues, set up the Buddhist Group of Kendal (Theravada) in 1991. She was authorised to teach by two eminent Buddhist scholar-monks: in 1983, by Venerable Balangoda Ananda Maitreya Mahanayaka Thera Agga Maha Pandita (1896-1998); and in 1984 by Venerable Hammalawa Saddhatissa Maha Thera (1914-1990) who at the time was Chief Sangha Nayaka of the UK and the Abbot of the London Buddhist Vihara. Venerable Medagama Vajiragnana Maha Thera, Chief Sangha Nayaka of the UK (1928-2006) authorised her, in conjunction with the resident monks of the Vihara, to conduct weekly meditation classes and meditation retreats at the London Buddhist Vihara.

While she was in Sri Lanka in 1975 she was officially given the Buddhist name Jayasili by the late Venerable Narada *Maha Thera* (1898-1983), well-known author of many books on Buddhism. She also received the *Bodhicari* Precepts from Venerable Ananda Maitreya in 1994 at the London Buddhist Vihara. The *Bodhicari* Precepts are an expansion of the better known *Ajivatthamaka Sila* (Eight Precepts with Right Livelihood as the Eighth). *Bodhicaris* can be defined as practitioners of the *Buddha Dhamma* who have enlightenment as their goal. In Pali the feminine form is *Bodhicarini*.

The *Bodhicari* Precepts were explained in the Summer 1993 issue of *Sakyadhita Newsletter* (<https://sakyadhita.org/>) as follows:

"Just two years ago, on Vesak in 1991, a new ministerial ordination was developed by Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara in Los Angeles... the ministerial ordination of "*Bodhicari*"...as a paradigm to be used by other temple congregations in America and abroad. So far monks, nuns, laypeople, and scholars around the world have expressed great interest in this new ordination. The general response has been overwhelmingly positive."

Further explanations of these Precepts were given by Paul David Numrich, who had attended a Vesak ceremony in 1991 when the first *Bodhicaris* took their twelve *Bodhicari* Precepts:

“The twelve *Bodhicari* Precepts include the nine *Dhammacari* Precepts, plus two borrowed Pali phrases and one Precept composed by Venerable Piyananda himself. The borrowed Pali, with translation and sources according to Venerable Piyananda, are (1) *Sabba sattesu metta sahagatena cetasa viharana sikkhapadam samadiyami* ‘I undertake the Precept to live every moment with loving-kindness to all living beings’ (from *Nava Uposatha Sila* [the Nine *Uposatha Sila* with loving-kindness as the ninth]); and (2) *Karunopaya kosalla pariggahitanam dasaparaminam paripurana sikkhapadam samadayami*, ‘I undertake the Precept to practise the Ten Perfections with compassion and skill’ (from Buddhagosa’s commentary on the *Jataka*). Venerable Piyananda’s original Precept was; *Yavajivam aham ratanattayam na niggahissami tatheva tam samadarena garukaram karissamiti sikkhapadam samadiyami*, I undertake the Precept not to revile the Three Treasures [the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha] but to cherish and uphold them’.

(Numrich, 1996, page 130)

Numrich further comments:

“With the institution of the...*Bodhicari*, Dharma Vijaya has sought to fill the “gap” in the Western transmission of Theravada Buddhism created by the dearth of monks. “A *Bodhicari* is a Buddhist lay minister, neither a lay person nor ordained Sangha,” whose responsibilities and authorities... include... holding chaplainships, conducting weddings and funerals, [and] initiating *Upasaka*...The temple has ordained a total of four *Bodhicaris*...”

(Prebish, 1998, page 160)

Jacquetta Gomes taught the Introducing Buddhism course at the Buddhist Society in London; and co-authored with Venerable Ananda Maitreya, the booklet *Introducing Buddhism* which accompanied the course. This booklet was later published in Sri Lanka by the BCC Buddhist Cultural Centre and in Taiwan by the Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation. In Malaysia it was published by Inward Path Publishers) under the title *Buddhism: A Quick Introduction*.

Her other publications include:

“The development and use of the Eight Precepts for lay practitioners, *Upasakas* and *Upasikas* in Theravada Buddhism in the West”, *Contemporary Buddhism*, Volume 5(1) (May, 2004) 47-63 (ISSN 1463-9947) (available online at <https://www.tandfonline.com/>)

“*Navanga Uposatha - The Nine Uposatha Precepts*”, *Lotus: the Lay Review and Newsletter of the Birmingham Buddhist Vihara*, Issue 24 (Autumn, 2007) 6.

At the 2006 Vesak celebrations at Ketumati Buddhist Vihara Manchester, the Abbot, Venerable Piyatissa presented ‘Sangha Authorized Dhamma Teacher’ badges to four lay teachers, including Jacquetta Gomes. Cream sashes were presented to *Upasakas* Sumedha, Mahinda and Punna who undertook the *Ajivatthamaka Sila* for Life with the Abbot himself as Preceptor, and to *Bodhicarini Upasika* Jayasili. These sashes are to be worn when they administer the *Panca Sila* (Five Precepts) should a *Bhikkhu* (Monk) or *Ayya* (Nun) not be available. (In June 2007 *Upasika* Panna received the Eight Lifetime Precepts (an expansion of the *Ajivatthamaka Sila*) from Bhante Henepola Gunaratana *Maha Thera* at Gaia House Devon, and a cream sash from Venerable Piyatissa.)

The 2006 Vesak celebrations included distribution of the booklet: *Requirements and Ceremonies for the Five Precepts (Panca Sila)*, *The Eight Precepts with Right Livelihood as*

the Eighth (Ajivatthamaka Sila), Dhamma Teachers Certificate, written by Jacquetta in association with Ketumati Buddhist Vihara and BGKT was also distributed at the Vesak celebrations. This was subsequently published for world-wide distribution, by the Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, Taiwan, as part of the 2007 edition of *Introducing Buddhism*.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Balangoda Ananda Maitreya, Venerable and Jayasili (Jacquetta Gomes), *Introducing Buddhism*. (Taipei, Taiwan, The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational foundation, 2007) (Book code EN074) (<http://budaedu.org/en/>)

Henepola Gunaratana, Bhante. 2001. *Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness: Walking the Path of the Buddha*. (Boston, Wisdom Publications) (0-86171-176-9)

Hammalawa Saddhatissa, Venerable. 1977. (3rd edition) *Buddhist Ethics*. (Boston, Wisdom Publications) (0-86171-124-6)

Hammalawa Saddhatissa, Venerable, and Pesala, Venerable. 1990. (2nd edition) *A Buddhist's Manual*. (London, British Mahabodhi Society)

Ledi Sayadaw, Venerable. 1971. *The Requisites of Enlightenment: Bodhipakkiya Dipani, Wheel Publication 171-4*. (Kandy Sri Lanka, BPS Buddhist Publication Society)

Numrich, Paul David. 1996. *Old Wisdom in the New World: Americanization in Two Immigrant Theravada Buddhist Temples*. (Knoxville Tennessee, The University of Tennessee Press) (0-87049-905-X)

Prebish, Charles S, and Tanaka Kenneth, K. 1998. *The Faces of Buddhism in America*. (Berkeley, University of California Press) (0-520-20460-3)

Rewata Dhamma, Maha Thera. 1996. *Maha Paritta: The Discourses of the Great Protection (With the Threefold Refuges, Precepts, Salutations to the Triple Gem, Dependent Origination and Metta Bhavana)*. (Birmingham, Dhamma-Talaka Publications)