

From Ajahn Brahm
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Phnom Penh Dialogue 2008 on Interfaith Cooperation for
Peace and Harmony, on 03-06 April 2008
Phnom Penh

Tuesday 8th April 2008

Dear Ajahn Kevali,

warm greetings to you from Bangkok where I have been staying since arriving from Cambodia on Saturday. Today I go to Singapore, and tomorrow to Perth. On Sunday, Ajahn Nyanadhamma handed to me your letter regarding Ajahn Lian, Ajahn Sujāto and bhikkhunis. I have tried repeatedly to phone you at Wat Pah Nanachat but without success, so I'm writing this letter instead. When it is convenient for you, would you inform Wat Pah Bodhinyana in Perth of your contact phone number and the best times to call. If we keep in contact with one another, then there is less chance of generating misunderstandings.

To get to the heart of the matter straight away: I have not ordained any sāmaneri, sikkhāmānā or bhikkhuni. Nor do I have any plans to ordain sāmaneri, sikkhāmānā or bhikkhuni in Australia or anywhere else. This is not to say that it will not happen sometime in the future, sometime, somewhere, by some disciple of Ajahn Chah. But anyone who says that Ajahn Brahm is planning to ordain bhikkhunis is misrepresenting me and inflaming a very sensitive issue needlessly.

Personally, I would like to see the ordination of bhikkhunis in the West, at the appropriate time. I am well versed in Vinaya and Pāli, and I am convinced that there are enough ^{grounds} ~~reasons~~ to legitimize a bhikkhuni ordination. The Vinaya is no obstacle. The lineage of Chinese bhikkhunis is valid, and has a direct, historically recorded link to the Theravāda. Their ordination procedure is the same as the Pāli Vinaya. In short, there is no valid legal obstacle to bhikkhuni ordination.

However, many monks have neither studied the bhikkhuni vinaya in depth, nor know Pāli, nor have they studied the latest research on the subject. To remedy this problem, I have had translated into Thai a well balanced article on the validity of bhikkhuni ordination written by Bhikkhu Bodhi. I now plan to have the translation printed in Thai and distributed to leading members of the Thai Sangha, including, of course, the senior monks of Wat Pah Pong. As soon as I return to Perth, I will send to you an English version of the article.

As a senior Buddhist monk who teaches internationally, I have to say that you cannot maintain respect for Buddhism by blocking bhikkhuni ordination without a legitimate reason. Now, I cannot find



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For your information, I did discuss bhikkhuni ordination with the Mahatheras who were at Wat Pah Nanachat in January 2008 for Ajahn Chah's memorial ceremonies. We do remain in touch. I would never do anything so insensitive as to ordain bhikkhunis without consulting my fellow Mahatheras of our tradition in the West. Indeed, I feel a little offended that anyone would suggest that I might act unilaterally.

In the June 2007 meeting at Wat Pah Pong, before you became abbot, Ajahn Dun presented an agenda item saying that "monks in Australia (meaning me) were planning to ordain bhikkhunis". I was quite dismayed by this because not only was it untrue, but more importantly no one had the decency to contact me to enquire whether it was true or not! It is so important for harmony within the Sangha that we speak with each other before bringing up misrepresenting agenda items, or before writing inflammatory letters. So please give me a call when there is any issue concerning myself, or with Buddhism in Australia, before complaining to Ajahn Liam or contacting our Sangha in England. Phone calls are much more informative than emails or letters. We are all nice guys and getting direct information from a telephone conversation can maintain the goodwill that is between us.

By the way, your account of Ajahn Sujāta's meeting with Ajahn Liam is exactly as he told it to me, and as I heard him tell to others. I have not seen his website but, in speech, Ajahn Sujāta has not misrepresented Ajahn Liam. Ajahn Sujāta is a nice guy too! Perhaps you can give him a call +61 2 4883 6331 and, in the spirit of friendship between monks and harmony in the Sangha, overcome any bad feelings between you.

Please excuse the hurried nature of this letter but I do have a plane to catch. Please give a call if there is any problem with this letter, with me or anything. I remain your friend and brother in the Dhamma, most willing to support you in whatever way I am able.

With sincere metta, and in the Dhamma


Ajahn Brahm

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