

## Ven. Dhammananda

Ven. Dhammananda was born Chatsumarn Shatsena during WWII in 1944 at Siriraj hospital in Bangkok, Thailand. She grew up in Trang, a southern province, her paternal home town. Both her parents were Buddhists but not regular in their Buddhist practice.

Her mother was the major influence for her education, when she was 3 years old she enjoyed listening to fairy tales in English her mother used to read to her. Her mother was concerned that Chatsumarn receive the best education, so they moved back to Bangkok where young Chatsumarn joined Rajini, one of the best schools available to girls at that time. She received not only education but also was groomed for the manner befitted good society.

She received B.A. in Philosophy from Santiniketan College, a center of education founded by Indian poet, philosopher and Nobel laureate, Rabindranath Tagore from Calcutta. Through the connection from Santiniketan, she went to McMaster University to continue M.A. but with the shift from Dept. of Philosophy to Religion, in order to continue a year in B.A.. The shift proved fruitful for young Chatsumarn as it exposed her to Christianity and Jewish religions. She received M.A. in religion with her thesis on "A comparative Study of Bhikkhuni Patimokkhas." She continued the full version of the same topic for her Ph.D.dissertation where she submitted it at Magadh University in India in 1980.

Chatsumarn was married and had 3 sons. She taught in the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Thammasat University in Bangkok for 27 years. During the same time she also started a Dhamma TV program for Channel 3, one of the most popular TV channels at that time. She was the first woman to hold a Ph.D.in Buddhism and also the first woman to host a Dhamma talk show for television.

Her mother had a great influence on her as she became a monastic when Chatsumarn was only 11 years old, thus familiarises her with female monastics. She herself spent 47 days as a female monastic when she was only 13 years old (1957). Her preceptor was the Most Venerable Pra Prommuni of Wat Bavornnives. The same Venerable was the teacher to King Rama IX during his ordination in 1956. Growing up in a monastic setting allowed Chatsumarn to understand and appreciate female participation and responsibility in Buddhism.

Her mother led monastic lifestyle for 15 years before her actual full ordination in 1971. It is not a surprise that Chatsumarn herself started

to be more committed in 2000 when she took her first step in taking bodhisattva's vows from Most Ven. Hsing Yun (FGS) and took early retirement from the government and university towards the end of the same year.

All the time as an academic she was waiting for the proper ordination for women to take place in Theravada Buddhism which happened in 1998. When she was confirmed of this lineage, she went to Sri Lanka and received lower ordination to become a samaneri in 2001 and was given the name Dhammananda. She came back to serve her mother who was an elderly bhikkhuni and went back to receive full ordination in 2003 to become the first Theravada bhikkhuni in Thailand.

One of her main concerns was that the Theravada bhikkhunis receive proper Vinaya training and education. She set an example herself, receiving Vinaya training in the first two vassas from her bhikkhuni teacher, Ven. R.Saddha Sumana together with the international bhikkhuni sangha who also sought Vinaya training. That was how she completed her Vinaya training under her bhikkhuni teacher.

Ven. Dhammananda soon realized that women who seek for full ordination should first be Sikkhamana (2-year female novice trainee). She started to train her own samaneris and prepared them as sikkhamanas to comply with the Vinaya, this was confirmed by her conversation with the previous acting Sangharaja in Thailand. Thus, Ven. Dhammananda is the first one in modern times to introduce Sikkhamana prior to the ordination of bhikkhuni in Theravada tradition.

Full Thai bhikkhuni ordination is still performed In Sri Lanka after the two year training.

Ven Dhammananda is the abbess of the Songdhammakalyani Monastery, which was founded in 1960 by her mother, the bhikkhuni Ven. Ta Tai Fa Tzu.