

Australian Sangha Association Statement Regarding Protests at the Teachings of H.H. the Dalai Lama

This is the official ASA statement about the demonstrations in Sydney and an excerpt from a letter about NKT ordination sent to the Australian Buddhist Councils and the World Buddhist Sangha Council.

»Australian Sangha Association statement regarding protests at the teachings of HH the Dalai Lama

The ASA wishes to express its dismay at the conduct of robed members of the New Kadampa Tradition, Western Shugden Society and associated organizations during the teachings given by HH the Dalai Lama on 11-15 June 2008 at Olympic Stadium, Sydney, Australia.

The Dalai Lama's teachings were attended by over 6000 people who came to be inspired by the peaceful and harmonious message of Buddhism. Instead they were met by a large, organized group of protesters dressed in monastic robes shouting slogans. Noisy public demonstrations such as these are not appropriate behaviour for monks or nuns and have brought Buddhism in this country into disrepute.

The ASA recognizes there is a difference of opinion with the Dalai Lama on various issues. It is the right of NKT and WSS members to disagree with the Dalai Lama's opinions but their disagreement should be expressed in a peaceful, respectful and reasonable manner.

Therefore, in the spirit of Dharma and in accordance with Buddhist principles the ASA would encourage the NKT and WSS protesters to request forgiveness from the Dalai Lama for their behaviour and in future to conduct themselves with humility and restraint.«

And from the letter.....

»According to our information the robed members of this group have not taken monastic vows as defined by the Vinaya which, as I am sure you know, is the collection of teachings by the Buddha that articulate the moral discipline to be followed by the ordained community.

The Sangha is a 2500 year old institution which has always kept the Vinaya rules as its core practice. It is this moral code which is the foundation of Buddhist monasticism and adherence to it is what defines a person as a Buddhist monk or nun. It is the most important thing that we as monastics from different traditions have in common and is what

enables us to come together under the auspices of the WBSC and ASA to celebrate our shared commitment to the Three Jewels.

Members of the NKT who wear robes do not follow this tradition. They have taken 5 precepts including a vow of celibacy and make 5 additional promises to behave in a manner consistent with Dharma and spiritual practice. This is indeed an admirable and praiseworthy commitment and we do not wish to imply that such practitioners are anything other than sincere and genuine in their devotion to the path. However it must be emphasised that this is not a monastic ordination according to the teachings of Buddha.

These precepts are said by their teacher Kelsang Gyatso to derive from the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra and he clearly states they are different from those found in the Vinaya. According to him a monk or a nun becomes a Bhikhu or Bhikhuni 'merely by holding these ten vows of ordination and developing a strong realisation of renunciation that is ever present in the mind.'

This definition has nothing in common with the traditionally accepted understanding of ordination and confuses the notion of a Bhikhu or Bhikhuni in the spiritual and conventional sense. From earliest times a 'true Bhikhu' has been one who realised the Dharma. However all Buddhist traditions, while fully understanding this, have always insisted on the necessity for the conventional Sangha to hold Vinaya vows properly received in accordance with the prescribed rituals.

The opinion of the ASA is that for NKT members to represent themselves to the public as authentic Buddhist monks and nuns is wrong and misleading.

One of the principal aims of the ASA is to help ensure the integrity and good reputation of Buddhism in general and the Sangha community in particular. We ourselves are not sure how to respond to this challenge but have decided to share our concerns with you. If you have some suggestions we would welcome your input. For now we feel that bringing this issue to the attention of the public is the best thing we can do.«

21 July 2008

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