

Right Views, Red Rust, and White Bones The Eight Garudhammas and Buddhist Teachings on Female Inferiority Reexamined in Light of Psychological and Social Research

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ABSTRACT:

In the Buddhist sutras, Shakyamuni Buddha repeatedly directs that one must not accept spiritual teachings blindly. Rather one must test and analyze each teaching through personal experience or scientific method “as a goldsmith examines gold, by cutting, heating and hammering it to know whether it is real gold or counterfeit.” In many such passages, the Buddha takes great care to set forth a number of standards by which each teaching should be measured. Among them: If a dharma is found to be unskillful or blameworthy, or if when adopted and carried out it leads to harm and suffering, it is not in fact the true Dharma, and must be discarded.

In the past century, new tools and methods have been developed which provide scientific means of testing and measuring the effects of teachings in Buddhist sutras which imply that women are inferior to men; and discriminatory rules and practices, such as the Eight Garudhammas, which limit women’s rights and status within Buddhist orders. Hundreds of psychological and social studies have found stereotypes, discrimination, and segregation based on the idea that one group is inferior to another to be harmful. These studies also reveal that these harmful effects are caused by, and in turn reinforce and perpetuate, “self-identity views”--which Buddhists view as the root cause of all Wrong Views. This substantial body of evidence thus confirms that these Buddhist teachings and rules, which discriminate against women, are harmful. According to Shakyamuni’s own instructions,

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then, they are not the true Dharma, and we should abandon them.

The findings of these studies also corroborate a number of the most important Buddhist Dharma principals, and lend new insight into some of the reasons why every major religion teaches that we must not judge or look down on others, but should “consider them as ourselves” and treat them as we wish to be treated.

Chinese Translation by: Allison Goodwin and Chen Wei Ling

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正見、紅鏽病，和白蠕蟲

——心理學和社會學實驗對八敬法及佛陀教法是否歧視女性的再視

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摘要

在佛經裡，釋迦牟尼佛一再重覆人不得盲目接受任何宗教教導，而應事先以科學方法或個人經驗檢驗每一個法，「正如智者會以火燒、切割及用試金石去檢驗金的純度。」在許多這樣的章節中，佛陀審慎地定下幾個確認佛法真假的標準，用以評量每一個佛法。其中，若某法為不善、無益、有害、或採行後會引來損害和苦難，則其並非真法，應當捨棄之。

上一世紀新工具和方法的發展，提供了科學的方法，讓我們得以測試和測量所有佛經裡暗示「男優女劣」的教導，及如「八敬法」一般，否定女性平等地位、待遇和出家權利的歧視規定，對女性和男性所造成的影響。幾百個心理學和社會學的實驗，證實源於某群體劣於另一群體觀念的刻板印象、歧視和隔離政策，會對身心造成傷害。這些實驗也顯現這些有害的影響是由「我見」（認同自我身分的觀念）所造成，且其會鞏固、加強及延續「我見」。佛教將後者視為所有「邪見」及惡業的根因。這些重大的證據因而證實這些歧視女性的佛教教導和規定具傷害性。根據釋迦牟尼佛本身的指示，這些並非真法，因此我們應捨棄之。

這些研究的發現呼應幾個最基本的佛法原則，並對於為何世界各主要宗教皆教人不應評斷或歧視她／他人，而應視她／他人如己身，及要別人如何待己，就如何待人的原因，開啓了一扇窗。

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All phenomena are preceded by mind, ruled by mind, made by mind.

Dharmapada 1; 2

This essay was inspired in great part by the Dalai Lama.

In speaking about Shakyamuni Buddha's insistence that all spiritual teachings must be closely examined and tested, not blindly accepted, the Dalai Lama has often stated that if some dharma has been scientifically proven to be incorrect, the Buddhist belief would have to be abandoned. "There is no doubt," he said on one such occasion, "We must accept the result of scientific research...When we investigate certain descriptions as they exist in our texts, we find they do not correspond to reality. In such a case, we must accept reality and not the literal scriptural explanation" (Piburn, 60).

At the time I read this, I had been feeling deeply disillusioned with Buddhism. I had been taught repeatedly in classes at several different Buddhist orders in Taiwan that females were inferior to, and had more karmic obstructions than, males. And at Buddhist rituals and in classes and retreats, I had been made to walk, stand, and sit behind men, and speak after men had spoken, because of this supposed inferiority. When I had raised the issue, or asked nuns and monks about their sects' views on Buddhist teachings that women bear a heavier karmic burden than males, though a number expressed their disapproval of the unequal rules, they did nothing to try to change things. And most of those I spoke with believed that Shakyamuni had taught that females are inferior to males and established rules to limit them on that basis. Many of these nuns and monks had scolded me, telling me that if I was concerned with such things I would never become a Buddha, or that I would once again have the "bad fate" of becoming a woman in my next life. Others stated that women in Shakyamuni's time had been incapable of enlightenment, that women's minds are extremely small, or that Theravada Buddhism had died out 500 years after the Buddha's death as a result of women's ordination. I had also spoken dozens of Taiwanese lay Buddhists—both women and men—about

the issue, many of whom told me, “Yes, women are inferior to men!” and went on to enumerate women’s supposed weaknesses and obstructions. This was the most extreme prejudice I had ever encountered. Many of the women and men I spoke to also believed that complete indifference to this, and other worldly problems, was a sign of spiritual attainment.

In the five years I had lived in Asia, I had seen the harmful effects of such sexist beliefs on women, men, and children, and had felt them myself, but I had not realized until then that Buddhism itself was one of the principal vehicles for, and reasons behind, such sexist views. Reading the Dalai Lama’s comments, it occurred to me that it must be possible to prove, through psychological and social studies, that Buddhist teachings that women are inferior, and rules and policies that discriminate against them, are harmful—and by so doing help Buddhism to change. The tremendous quantity of evidence I found surprised even me: Not only can these discriminatory rules and beliefs be proven harmful. There is, in fact, overwhelming evidence that they are so.

How Buddhists should view, and relate with, women and men?

The greatest care must be taken in answering this question—as, in answering, we define the most important practical aspects of Right Views and the Middle Path—how we should put these dharma into practice in day-to-day life; and how we should develop and control our bodies, speech, and minds as we interact with all human beings. Thus, we define the very nature of Buddhism itself.

Those who are new to Buddhism are often shocked to learn that the vast majority of Buddhist orders in the world today teach that we should not view females and males equally—women, they claim, are inferior to men and have more karmic obstructions. These orders also treat women disciples and nuns as inferior to men and monks, and so— through their words or actions, explicitly or implicitly—teach their followers to do the same.

Even in some of the most progressive Buddhist orders in Asia—located in Korea and in Taiwan¹, where nuns enjoy higher status and better

¹ In both Taiwan and in Korea it is estimated that there are 20,000 nuns. In Taiwan

opportunities than nuns in other Asian countries (Tsomo)—in orders where there are both nuns and monks, nuns are not permitted to apply for, or hold, the highest positions of authority within the order, and are often officially required to cede the positions of authority they are allowed whenever a monk is present. Women and nuns are made to sit behind monks and men in ceremonies and rituals; walk behind men in lines; speak after men have spoken; and they are introduced after men have been introduced. And in Buddhist classes, and books written by the leaders of Buddhist sects, it is still taught that women are inferior to men, and that they cannot become Buddhas. In Taiwan, only two leaders of orthodox Buddhist sects, Master Yin Shun, and Master Xing Yun of Fo Guang Shan (Buddha's Light International), have publicly rejected all or part of the Eight Garudhammas and other rules and teachings that imply women are inferior, and declared that Buddhists should view females and males as equals.

In Tibetan Buddhism, though many leaders and practitioners who live or have frequently traveled outside of Asia view women and men as equals, the belief that females are inferior to males has historically been—and probably still is—quite common in Tibetan Buddhist culture, and the percentage of female lamas, monastics, teachers, and leaders, is extremely small. The one exception is in Australia and the West, where women generally have equal status to men within the Sangha, and have taken on important roles as teachers, nuns, and leaders—though most orders are still led by male lamas. As in Mahayana sects in Taiwan and Korea, nuns and female lamas and practitioners are often made to walk and sit behind male lamas and monks, and bow down to them. And in most monasteries it is still taught that Shakyamuni viewed women as inferior to men and created special rules to limit them on this basis, and even in some cases that the true Dharma of Theravada Buddhism died out 2000 years ago as a result of women's ordination. At present, women are not officially permitted to receive full ordination as nuns, because the nuns' lineage was never transmitted to Tibet, and ten fully ordained monastics, of an unbroken

women comprise approximately 70% of the lay practitioners; and in most orders nuns (who are all fully ordained) usually outnumber monks by at least 3:1 and in some cases 7:1 (Schak, 2007).

lineage of transmission, all keeping the same vows must be present in order for a nun to be fully ordained. A small number of full ordinations have been performed, in Taiwan and in the West, using nuns from the Taiwanese Mahayana tradition, but these are viewed as highly controversial by many lamas.

Tibetan Buddhist practitioners across the world have led a movement to establish the full ordination of nuns, and the Dalai Lama and many other lamas actively support, and have played an important role in this cause. The Dalai Lama has made a number of public statements to this effect, including the following message, which he sent to the Fourth International Conference of Buddhist Women in 1995, *which stresses that discrimination against women must be abandoned because it causes harm*:

It is the nature of human beings to yearn for freedom, equality and dignity. If we accept that others have a right to peace and happiness equal to our own, do we not have a responsibility to help those in need? *All human beings, whatever their cultural or historical background, suffer when they are intimidated, imprisoned, tortured, or discriminated against.* The question of human rights is so fundamentally important that there should be no difference of views on this. Our rich diversity of cultures and traditions should help to strengthen fundamental human rights in all communities. Mere tradition can never justify violations of human rights. *Thus, discrimination against persons of a different race, against women, and against weaker sections of society may be traditional in some places, but because they are inconsistent with universally recognized human rights, these forms of behavior should change.* The universal principle of the equality of all human beings must take precedence (達賴喇嘛 Dalai Lama, 1995).

Despite these efforts, however, the outcome of this issue remains uncertain, and few lamas outside of the West have given vocal support to complete gender equality, or publicly rejected the Eight Garudhammas and other Buddhist teachings that imply a female birth is inferior to male birth.

In Theravada Buddhist countries the situation is worse still. Though it

is estimated that there are over 80,000 nuns in Theravada Buddhist countries at present, in all but Sri Lanka² the ordination of women is forbidden. Nuns in these countries—who observe eight, nine or ten precepts—are not even recognized as *sramanerika* (novice nuns), and are not considered part of the *Sangha* (monastic community). As a result, they receive less material support, fewer educational opportunities, and less respect than monks. Women are often barred from entering sacred shrines and temples. And in many of these countries any monk who even supports the ordination of women is subject to severe punishment. It is taught that women cannot be enlightened and that they must be reborn as men in order to have a chance at success in their practice. And women's right to ordination is highly controversial even among the most learned Buddhist scholars (Laohavanich, 2007).

These sexist beliefs and practices are based on Hindu and other Eastern patriarchal cultural traditions and beliefs, such as Confucianism, and on a small number of passages in the Tripitaka and later sutras in which women are criticized, and where rules (such as The Eight Garudhammas) are established to limit their actions and power. Such passages have long caused serious doubts among Buddhist scholars and practitioners—in part because they contradict other passages in the sutras where the Buddha praises women, and where women are shown to be role models in their practice and teaching of the Dharma. But more important, it is because they contradict a number of the Buddha's most basic and important *dharma* principles—non-judgment; non-discrimination; kindness; compassion; and especially non-attachment to the self, the ego, and self-views/self-identity views (*sakkaya-ditthi*, *atta-ditthi*)—the essence and purpose of Right Views and the Middle Path.

In recent decades, Buddhist scholars have made great contributions to the debate on this issue, and have uncovered many important contradictions and other detailed evidence in the Tripitaka and other sutras that the rules and passages that are critical of women, or which imply that women are inferior to men, were not the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha, but were the work of monks of a later generation(s) who interpolated them into the canon

² The largest community of Theravada *bhikkhunis* today is in Sri Lanka, where nearly 500 nuns have received full ordination (Tsomo).

in order to control and suppress women and the nuns' order (Laohavanich, 2007; Sponberg, 1985; Faure, 2003; Kabilsingh, 1998:53; Chung, 1999; Falk, 1989, 1990).

Thankfully, the sutras themselves propose a solution to such controversies. In the Tripitaka, Shakyamuni states that his teachings will at times be misremembered or misrepresented—even during his own lifetime—and is deeply concerned about it. He makes clear that this is one of the main reasons he repeatedly directs that one must not accept *any* spiritual teachings without first testing and analyzing them.

In most such passages, *Shakyamuni* takes great care to set forth a number of standards by which a teaching (or teacher) may be measured to determine whether it (or s/he) is genuine. This is the case in the narrative of the *Mahaparinibbanasutta*, the account of the Buddha's last days, where one would expect to find those teachings the Buddha considered most important, and those he thought essential for the survival of the Dharma. In that text, the Buddha instructs that even when the source of Dharma is a monastic who claims to have heard the teachings “directly from the mouth of the Lord,” or from a community of monastics, elder, or elders who are distinguished teachers, “deeply read, holding to the received faith, versed in Dharma, versed in Vinaya, versed in the Summaries,” the student/practitioner must still put those teachings to the test. The passage reads:

You should not agree or disagree with the words of that monastic, but you should study well the context and details of the claim. Then investigate it according to the Discourses and the Vinaya. Having investigated those words and found that they do not conform to the Discourses and the Vinaya, then it should be concluded that these certainly are not the words of the Lord, and that the monastic has misunderstood, or remembered incorrectly. Therefore you should reject those words. However, if having investigated those words and found that they do conform to the Discourses and the Vinaya, then it should be concluded that these certainly are the words of the Lord, and that the monastic has understood and remembered correctly (Dighanikaya, Mahaparinibbanasutta, IV).

In this passage, Shakyamuni repeats these same instructions four times, for four different potential sources of inaccurate teachings (a monastic, community of monastics, elder, or elders), conveying the great likelihood that one will encounter false Dharma—even from the seemingly most reputable and respected teachers. The repetition also serves to encourage any practitioner who may be fearful of questioning spiritual authorities, to feel confident that—regardless of the teacher’s credentials—the student is to rely on her or his own understanding of the essence and purpose of the Discourses and Vinaya in deciding whether or not to accept the teachings.

The problem of encountering false dharma is reiterated in the Diamond Sutra, where the Buddha implies that false teachings arise as a result of grasping onto ego, self identity views, and the idea of things having intrinsic qualities; and also as a result of grasping onto the idea of things as being devoid of intrinsic qualities. As in the Tripitaka, the Buddha’s conclusion is that such mis-teachings must be abandoned:

If such people allowed their minds to grasp and hold onto anything they would be cherishing the idea of an ego identity, a personality, a being, or a separated individuality; and if they grasped and held onto the notion of things as having intrinsic qualities they would be cherishing the idea of an ego entity, a personality, a being or a separated individuality. Likewise, if they grasped and held on to the notion of things as devoid of intrinsic qualities, they would be cherishing the idea of an ego entity, a personality, a being, or a separated individuality. *So you should not be attached to things as being possessed of, or devoid of, intrinsic qualities. This is the reason why the Tathagata always teaches this saying: My teaching of the good law is to be likened unto a raft. The Buddha-teaching must be relinquished; how much more so mis-teachings!* (Diamond Sutra, Book 6, 22-23).

In another well-known call to question, the Buddha insists that practitioners question and test even the teachings they have heard directly from the Buddha himself:

Brethren, when I speak to you, don't accept it blindly because you

love and respect me. But examine it and put it to the test, as a goldsmith examines gold, by cutting, heating and hammering it to know whether it is genuine gold or counterfeit. If you see it is reasonable, *only then accept it and follow it*" (*Jnanasara-samuccaya*, Bht 285).

Elsewhere in the Tripitaka, Shakyamuni frequently reemphasizes the importance of self-reliance, in statements like: "One is one's own refuge, how can others be one's refuge?" (*Dharmapada* XII, 4, verse 160), and, "Be a refuge to yourselves, and never seek refuge from anybody else" (*Dighanikaya*, *Mahaparinibbanasutta*, 62; *Cakkavatti-Sihanadasutta*).

In an often-quoted passage in the *Kesaputtasutta*, Shakyamuni advises a group of villagers that they are right to question all spiritual authorities, and warns them not even to rely on the traditional bases of religious doctrine (scriptures, teachers/religious authorities, and tradition) when making their determination as to whether or not a teaching is true. The passage reads:

Ma anussavena. Do not believe something just because it has been passed along and retold for many generations.

Ma paramparaya. Do not believe something merely because it has become a traditional practice.

Ma itikiraya. Do not believe something simply because it is common opinion or well-known everywhere.

Ma Pitakasampadanena. Do not believe something just because it is cited in the scriptures.

Ma takkahetu. Do not believe something solely on the grounds of logical reasoning or rationality.

Ma akaraparivitakkena. Do not believe something because it appeals to "common sense" or BECAUSE OF ITS outward appearance.

Ma nayahetu. Do not believe something merely because of mere deduction or inference.

Ma ditthinijjhanakkhantiya. Do not believe something just because it accords with preconceived notions, or previously accepted opinion, or because you like the idea.

Ma bhabbarupataya. Do not believe something because the speaker seems trustworthy, or because what is said seems acceptable or highly probable.

Ma samano no garu ti. Do not believe something because, "It is what our teacher says" and therefore it is right to accept his or her word.

But...*when you know for yourselves* that, 'These dharmas are unwholesome, unskillful and wrong; these dharmas are blameworthy; these dharmas are criticized by the wise; these dharmas, when adopted and carried out, lead to harm and suffering' then you should abandon them. When you know for yourselves that, 'These dharmas are skillful; these dharmas are blameless and good; these dharmas are praised by the wise; these dharmas, when adopted and carried out, lead to welfare and to happiness,' then you should accept and follow them (Anguttaranikaya III, 65).

The reiteration of this same basic message in the Tripitaka and other sutras, and the fact that the Buddha repeats it in his final days, underline its importance as a Dharma: Unquestioning acceptance of the scriptures and of one's teacher(s), and unquestioning faith, are not only dangerous, they are wrong.

To examine, analyze, test, and only then accept or reject teachers and their teachings, and even passages in the sutras, not only is not a sin, nor is it heresy, nor blasphemy, it is in fact *our duty* as Buddhists—the prerequisite, necessary step that must be taken before we accept any teachings as authentic. The best methods for analyzing the sutras, and anything presented as the Buddha's Dharma, are those set forth by Shakyamuni himself.

But how can we "know for ourselves" whether or not a dharma is skillful, blameless, etc.? The best means to answer this question is to put it into practice ourselves, or observe others who are employing or have employed it, see what effects it produces, and analyze what we "know for ourselves" about those effects—in other words we should test the dharma

through personal experience or scientific method.³:

And indeed it is just such an approach that Shakyamuni implies we should use in the Sattusasana Sutta to Upali (*Anguttaranikaya*, VII 80), in the passage from the Gotami Sutta cited below, and in other discourses in the *Anguttaranikaya*, where the Buddha proposes that one should analyze what the *dhammas* “lead to” and reject any that lead to negative results.

“Gotami, the dhammas of which you may know, ‘These dhammas lead...to passion, not to dispassion; to being fettered, not to being unfettered; to accumulating, not to shedding; to self-aggrandizement, not to modesty; to discontent, not to contentment; to entanglement, not to seclusion; to laziness, not to aroused persistence; to being burdensome, not to being unburdensome’: You may definitely hold, ‘This is not the Dhamma, this is not the Vinaya, this is not the Teacher’s instruction’ (Anguttaranikaya VIII, 53, Gotami Sutta (1996). 增支部，八集，瞿曇彌品 A.8.53 Samkhittasuttam 為瞿曇彌略說/Anguttaranikaya VIII, 53 Gotami Sutta (1996))

Scrupulously careful as usual, for clarity, in the same passage Shakyamuni goes on to outline the same standard for the opposite situation—when the dhammas lead to positive mental states:

“As for the dhammas of which you may know, “These dhammas lead to dispassion, not to passion; to being unfettered, not to being fettered...” etc. He concludes: “You may definitely hold, “This is the Dhamma, this is the Vinaya, this is the Teacher’s instruction.” instruction’ (Anguttaranikaya VIII, 53, Gotami Sutta (1996).

One of the most important passages in the sutras that is critical of women, and where rules are established to limit their actions and power, is the Legend of the Origin of the Nuns (bhikkhuni) in the Tripitaka. In that

³ In the scientific method or "systematic empiricism," a hypothesis (in this case, a dharma) is constructed. Then experiments or observations are conducted to test that hypothesis. The hypothesis must then be modified based on the results obtained – that is, the theory must be altered to fit that which is found in real life—or else be discarded entirely if the facts reveal that it is wrong.)

story, Shakyamuni indicates that he disapproves of women's ordination. He reluctantly concedes to let them be ordained, but establishes a set of special rules, or the Eight Garudhammas—the conditions for women's ordination. The rules are:

1. A nun, even if she has been ordained for 100 years, must respect, greet and bow in reverence to the feet of a monk ordained but that day. (Monks pay respect to each other according to seniority, or the number of years they have been ordained.)
2. A nun is not to spend the rains retreat in a residence where there is no monk. (A monk may take an independent residence.)
3. Every fortnight a nun is to look forward to two duties from the monks: asking for the Uposatha (meeting day), and receiving instructions from a monk. (Monks do not depend on nuns for this rite, nor are they required to receive any instruction.)
4. A nun who has completed her rains-retreat must offer herself up for instruction to both the community of monks and to the community of nuns, concerning three matters: [wrongdoings that were] seen, heard or suspected. (Monks only offer themselves to the community of monks.)
5. A nun who has committed a serious violation of a monastic rule of Sanghadisesa must serve a 15-day minimum *mānattā* [penance], with reinstatement requiring approval from both the monk and nun communities. (The minimum for monks is a five-day probation with no approval by the nuns required for reinstatement.)
6. A woman may be ordained only after two years of training in the six precepts, and she must seek full ordination from both Sanghas. (Men have no mandatory postulancy and their ordination is performed by monks only.)
7. A nun may not abuse or revile a monk. (A monk may reprimand a monk, and any monk may reprimand a nun.)
8. From this day on, no nun shall ever admonish a monk. However, monks may admonish nuns. (There are no restrictions on whom a monk may admonish.)

Later in the same text, the Buddha predicts that, because he has allowed women to be ordained, Buddhism will die out in five hundred years—whereas it would otherwise have lasted a thousand:

“If women had not renounced their household lives and ordained in the religion of the Tathagata, the holy life would have lasted long, the *Saddharma* would have remained for a thousand years. Because the ordination of women has occurred in the religion of the Tathagata, the holy life will not last long; the *Saddharma* will last only for 500 years. ...In whatever religion women are ordained, that religion will not last long. As families that have more women than men are easily destroyed by robbers, as a plentiful rice-field once infested by white bones will not long remain, as a sugarcane field invaded by red rust will not long remain, even so the True Dharma will not last long. Ananda, as one builds a large surrounding dike to prevent the flow of water, I prescribe the Eight Heavy Duties for the nuns to adhere to for the rest of their lives without fail” (Vinayapitaka II, 256).

The belief that the true *dharma* died out over two thousand years ago as a result of the Buddha’s decision to allow women to be ordained is surprisingly common in Buddhist communities around the world. But few who have seen the central and vital role women currently play as the vast majority of Dharma teachers and students in thriving Buddhist orders in Taiwan and Korea, and in flourishing Buddhist communities in Australia and the West, and could view the Buddha’s alleged prediction as having been accurate.

Nor have Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, the Jain and Sikh Religions, Daoism, etc., etc, shown any signs of weakening as a result of having allowed women to become fully ordained and take on positions of leadership. To the contrary, women have played ever more important roles in the survival and flourishing of these religions. Yet, the vast majority of Buddhist leaders today continue to teach that the Legend of the Nuns contains the true teachings of the Buddha, and that women are inferior to men. They also continue to subject women to the Eight Garudhammas and other discriminatory rules, and deny them the right to ordination on an equal basis

to men. But, according to Shakyamuni's own instructions, *it is wrong* to accept these rules and teachings without first questioning, examining, and testing them.

Following some of Shakyamuni's methods, proposed in the above passages, we must find a way to see what these views and practices "lead to" so we can "know for ourselves" whether or not they "accord with the Discourses and the Vinaya," and whether or not they are "skillful or unskillful; blameless or blameworthy; and when adopted and carried out, lead to harm and suffering or to welfare and to happiness," etc.

Fortunately, new tools and methods have been developed over the past century which now provide us with scientific means of testing and measuring the effects of stereotypes like Shakyamuni's alleged criticisms of women—that they are easily angered, envious, greedy, and ignorant (Anguttaranikaya, II), and are like "red rust and rice worms," a pestilence that will quickly destroy any religion (Vinayapitaka II, 256)—and Buddhist teachings that women are inferior to, or have more karmic obstructions than men. These tools and methods also provide a means of assessing the effects of rules like the Eight Garudhammas and other rules and policies that deny women equal status, treatment, and rights to full ordination— both on those who discriminate, and on those who are discriminated against:

Hundreds of psychological and social studies, conducted over the past century, have found stereotypes, discrimination and segregation based on the idea that one group is inferior to another, to be harmful. They have also found that teaching children that an individual or group is inferior to another, or subliminally reminding adult subjects of existing negative stereotypes, generally creates detrimental effects in body, speech and mind—effects that hurt both those who discriminate and those who are discriminated against.

Even as early as 1952 there was sufficient research on the psychological and social effects of discrimination, stereotypes, and segregation, that testimony on those findings provided the key evidence in the famous U.S. Supreme Court case on school segregation—*Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka*. The evidence was so convincing that the court ruled unanimously:

Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a

detrimental effect upon the colored children. The impact is greater when it has the sanction of the law, for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the Negro group. A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn. Segregation with the sanction of law, therefore, has a tendency to [retard] the educational and mental development of Negro children and to deprive them of some of the benefits they would receive in a racial[ly] integrated school system (U.S. Supreme Court, Warren Opinion, 1954).

A survey of American psychologists cited in the court ruling reported that “82 percent of the psychologists answering believed that enforced segregative practices under “equal conditions” harm[ed] the majority group [in other words whites]; 90.4 percent that they harm[ed] the minority group. Only 3.3 percent of the 272 psychologists interviewed believed that it [did] not detrimentally affect the majority, and [only] 2.2 percent believed that it [did] not have unfavorable consequences for the segregated group” (Deutscher & Chein, 1948).

This 19th and early 20th Century policy of segregation in the Southern United States—which forced blacks to sit at the back of buses; set up separate schools and other facilities for blacks and whites; barred blacks from upper level positions in society; prevented them from voting; and gave them only limited civil rights, all based on their alleged inferiority and negative influence—was in essence the same as, and in many details was literally identical to, the Eight Garudhammas and other discriminatory rules and practices *still in place today in most Buddhist orders in Asia*, described in the opening paragraphs of this essay:

Hundreds of studies carried out since that 1954 Supreme Court ruling have confirmed the deleterious effects of discrimination, segregation and stereotypes based on the idea that any group is inferior to another. One of the best known of these was designed by elementary school teacher, Jane Elliot, in 1968 as an exercise to help her students understand and question stereotypes, and so avoid discriminating against others. A later version of the study was made into an award-winning film entitled “The Eye of the Storm.”

In that study, Elliot tells her third-grade students, “Blue-eyed people are

better than brown-eyed people,” “more civilized, cleaner, and smarter.” She points out negative behavior of the “brown eyed people,” and implies that it is evidence of their ignorance, bad temper, greediness, and general bad influence on others. (These accusations are remarkably similar to Shakyamuni’s alleged criticisms that women are easily angered, envious, greedy, and ignorant (Anguttaranikaya, II), and that they are like “red rust and rice worms”—a pestilence that will quickly destroy any religion (Vinayapitaka II, 256)). Elliot then institutes a series of rules—a policy of segregation, similar to the Buddhist Eight Garudhammas and other rules enacted by Buddhist organizations today to restrict women, and similar also to policies of segregation enacted in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries by Western Colonial powers in Africa and Asia and by Americans in the Southern States (and policies still in practice today in many countries): The “inferior” brown-eyed people are given special restrictions, and fewer and more limited rights than the “superior” blue-eyed people (Peters, 1985).

At once, the classroom is transformed: The blue-eyed children begin to treat the “brown-eyes” as inferior, and self-righteously see the “brown-eyes” behavior as evidence of their inferiority. Some even avoid the brown-eyed children, mock them, or treat them abusively. The “brown-eyes” in turn are hurt, angry, and dejected. Some misbehave, or fight with other children. The “brown eyes” also have difficulty concentrating, and perform less well than usual on a timed vocabulary test they are given, whereas the “blue eyes” perform better than usual.

The next day the teacher announces that she had misled the class the previous day—that it is in fact brown-eyed people who are superior—and immediately the dynamics switch. The brown-eyed children are given more privileges, etc. and are at once viewed by the “blue-eyes,” and themselves, as “superior.” On the second day it is the “superior” “brown-eyes” who test better than usual, and the “inferior” “blue eyes” who perform more poorly than usual, and who suffer the same effects felt by the “brown eyes” the previous day. Jane Elliot has since performed several versions of the same study on a great number of children and adults of various ages in cultures around the world, confirming her initial findings.

In a later film entitled “A Class Divided,” which includes two such

studies, Elliot discusses the impact of the study on the children's school performance:

I use phonics. We use the card pack⁴...and the brown-eyed children were in the low class the first day and it took them five and a half minutes to get through the card pack. The second day it took them two and a half minutes. The only thing that had changed was the fact that now they were superior people...The second year I did this exercise I gave little spelling tests, math tests, reading tests two weeks before the exercise, each day of the exercise, and then two weeks later, and, almost without exception, the students' scores go up on the day they're on top, down the day they're on the bottom, and then maintain a higher level for the rest of the year, after they've been through the exercise. We sent some of those tests to Stanford University to the Psychology Department and they did a sort of informal review, and they said that what's happening here is kids' academic ability is being changed in a 24-hour period. And it isn't possible, but it's happening. Something very strange is happening to these children because [after the study] suddenly they're finding out how really great they are and they're responding to what they know now they are able to do. And it's happened consistently with third graders (Peters, 1985).

The stereotypes used in Elliot's studies were entirely new to the subjects: None of the children had any previous conception that blue or brown-eyed people were inferior or superior, as this notion did not and does not exist in the cultures tested. Yet, not only did the children immediately accept and embrace the ideas, introduced by their teacher, a figure of authority. The simple act of introducing the idea of one group's inferiority and establishing special privileges and status for the "superior" people, and special rules to limit the activities and rights of the "inferior" people, had immediate harmful effects, not only on the "inferior" children's test

⁴ Phonics is method of teaching beginners to read and pronounce words by teaching the phonetic value of letters, letter groups, and syllables. Here Elliot refers to a pack of cards, similar to vocabulary cards, used to teach phonetics.

performance, but on the bodies, speech and minds of the entire class. As Elliot put it: “I watched what had been marvelous, cooperative, wonderful, thoughtful children turn into nasty, vicious, discriminating, little third-graders in a space of fifteen minutes” (Peters, 1985).

Dozens of other psychological studies on children suggest that young children may be particularly suggestible, and may often accept and embrace entirely new stereotypes (or “self-identity views”), and false accounts about themselves, other individuals, or groups, including stereotypes that one individual or group is inferior/superior to another—especially when those stereotypes are repeatedly reinforced. If those standardized mental pictures and attitudes are negative, they will likely harm both those who are taught to discriminate and those subject to discrimination.

Results from these studies vary widely, indicating that a number of factors play a role in determining whether or not a given group of children will embrace new stereotypes, or continue to hold them over the long term. However, there is substantial evidence that stereotypes are learned—created by temporary causes and conditions in different cultures—and that they strongly color the way we perceive, speak to, and behave towards others. They also influence the way those who are subject to them think and behave.

The fact that stereotypes about any given group vary widely across the world at different times, often even in the same, or neighboring countries, supports the view that they are learned. As does the fact that researchers like myself have found the views that women are weak, “innately evil,” and karmically inferior to men, to be common in Buddhist countries like Taiwan and Thailand (Khuankaew, 3; Learman, 85; Schak, 156), whereas such views are extremely rare in the West. (In recent years in the U.S., in fact, the media has given a good deal of attention to the concern that males are now falling behind females). Indeed, the view that “the self” is not innate and unchanging, but is transitory, constantly evolving, and dependent upon causes and conditions, is one of the most basic and important aspects of Right Views and the Middle Path. To view females as innately inferior to males is to contradict one of the most basic doctrines of Buddhism itself.

To give just a few examples of these studies on children: A Harvard study on children’s suggestibility and vulnerability to stereotypes, conducted

in 1995 on 176 preschoolers of various ethnic and economic backgrounds, found that a high percentage of preschoolers' memories of events relating to a stranger's visit to the school could be profoundly altered by stereotypes presented before his visit, and by erroneous suggestions made about the visit after the event.

Specifically, children in the control group, who did not hear any statements about the stranger before or after his visit, all reported accurately on the visit, and nearly all resisted claiming anything erroneous even when specifically probed about whether he had done anything to damage a book or teddy bear. The children who had heard stereotypes that the man was clumsy and bumbling before his visit did not make any false claims during their free narratives about the visit, but when probed whether he had ripped a book or dirtied a teddy bear, 37% claimed that he did at least one of these things

21% of the youngest children and 14% of the older children who had heard erroneous suggestions that the stranger had damaged teddy bears or books after his visit, made false claims that he had damaged teddy bears or books *in their unprompted, free narratives about the visit.*

Most remarkable, 46% of the children who had heard stereotypes about the man before his visit, as well as false suggestions about his actions after the visit, made *unprompted, false statements in their free narratives* that he had either ripped a book or soiled a teddy bear. *In response to follow up questions, 72% of these children indicated (falsely) that he did one or the other of these deeds.* Many of these children also fabricated new details to embellish their false claims. The study revealed that young children can be vulnerable to suggestions and stereotypes, which may not only color their perceptions, they may also alter memories of actual events, and may even cause children to fabricate new false memories about events that they themselves experienced (Leichtman & Ceci, 1995). These studies suggest that if children are taught repeatedly by parents, teachers, spiritual leaders, or other authority figures, to view all beings and phenomena equally and not to distinguish among them (as the Diamond Sutra teaches), a great many of them will likely come to do so. If, on the other hand, they are repeatedly taught, explicitly, or implicitly (by regularly witnessing the unequal treatment of some group), by those same authority figures that some group is inferior, a great many will likely come to view that group as inferior, and in

so doing, will harm that group, and so themselves.

In a series of well-known studies conducted in the 1960's by Lenore Jacobson and Robert Rosenthal, it was found that when teachers were told falsely that a group of students had scored very well on I.Q. tests, and so were led to expect better performance from those students than from the students in the control group, the students alleged to have high I.Q.s did indeed perform better. In some cases such improvement was about twice that shown by others in the same class—though dozens of later studies on the effects of teachers' (and other authority figures') expectations (referred to as the "Pygmalion" or "Teacher-Expectancy effect") have found large discrepancies in the influence such expectations have on different individuals.⁵

Generally, the average effect of teacher expectations in any one given short-term study is small—recent estimates average from 1-3% (McClelland & Judd, 1993) to 5-10%, (Brophy, 1983). But when individuals (like stigmatized minorities all over the world, or women in Buddhist countries, and countries with other influential conservative religions) are subject to strong negative expectations over a period of many years, the cumulative effects may be substantial.

These findings indicate that, though young children and certain groups are especially susceptible, adults and children alike are often influenced by the expectations of authority figures (especially parents, teachers, employers/bosses, and spiritual teachers or leaders). And children and adults alike will often

⁵ A number of variables have been found to play an role in determining the magnitude of a teacher's influence: Students who are very young, or negotiating transitions (such as at the start of kindergarten or middle school) (Raudenbush, 1984), students from ethnic minority groups or low socio-economic backgrounds (Jussim, Eccles, & Madon, 1996; McKown & Weinstein, 2002), students who have performed poorly in school in the past (Madon, Jussim, & Eccles, 1997), and students with low or unclear self-concepts (Brattesani et al., 1984) are particularly vulnerable to teachers' expectations. And teachers who believe that intelligence or ability is fixed (Trouilloud, Bressoux, & Bois, 2006), or those with a greater desire to control, influence, or dominate their students, are more likely to produce expectations effects (Cooper & Hazelrigg, 1988; Harris, 1989; Hazelrigg, Cooper, & Strathman, 1991). Also, learning environments that provide less autonomy, self-control and independence have been found to increase expectation effects (Trouilloud, Bressoux, & Bois, 2006).

perform either somewhat better or worse because authority figures expect them to do so. Like stereotype threat, the Pygmalion or Teacher Expectation Effect appears to occur because subjects internalize others' expectations (or "self-identity views"). The effect of those expectations can be beneficial or harmful depending on the nature of the "self-identity views" and stereotypes to which the individual or group is subject (See "Additional References – Pygmalion Effect" at the end of this essay).

The over two hundred psychological and social studies on the effect of stereotypes on adult subjects' test performance reveal that a stereotype usually must already exist in some form in the culture in order for it to affect adult subjects' test scores—though the subject need not believe it is true.⁶ Those effects have proven to be surprisingly consistent:⁷ Stereotypes have a profound influence on all our minds and future potential. In the case of those who are viewed as inferior in some realm, it creates long-term, even lifelong subliminal and explicit messages that continuously threaten to undermine their confidence, hopes, interests, aspirations, and success in the domain in question.

As in Elliot's study, this effect has been proven to occur even when the subjects are privileged members of society who do not see themselves as inferior. Everyone is vulnerable to stereotype threat, and everyone is subject to stereotypes of some kind on a daily basis. These stereotypes reinforce and perpetuate self-identity views; create a wide range of psychological problems, (or what Buddhists call karmic obstructions); and can change cognitive abilities and performance in domains of every kind.

⁶ Studies on adult test performance have found that, generally, for stereotype threat to affect adult test scores the following must be true: 1) the subject's sense of identity must be somehow invested in the domain concerned (for example, math) and the subject must identify herself or himself with the group(s) threatened by the stereotype; 2) the test must be difficult (if it's too easy everyone will do well on it); and 3) the idea of the stereotype must already exist in some form in the culture.

⁷ Only about 5-10% of the two hundred odd studies on stereotype threat conducted to date have reported finding that, in some part of the study, expected effects of stereotype threat did not manifest. In most cases it appears that either stereotype reactance caused subjects to increase their efforts, or a stereotype threat that existed in the culture caused subjects in the control group to perform as poorly as students in the stereotype threat group.

In one such study, conducted at a university in France, female and male students were asked to perform three decision-making tasks, using lexical, valence, and affective processing.⁸ The researchers reported: “Half the participants were told that, in general, men perform more poorly than women at affective processing tasks.⁹ No differences between conditions were observed for the lexical and valence tasks. By contrast, for the affective task, [stereotype] threatened men [those told that men were poorer performers than women prior to taking the test], made significantly more errors than did the participants in the other three conditions” (Leyens et al. 2000).

In a similar test on another group of privileged subjects, after being given information prior to taking an exam, that suggested that Asians generally outperform other students in math,¹⁰ and told that the study was designed to identify the nature and scope of differences in performance between Asians and other groups in mathematics, white American males who were highly proficient in math performed far worse on a math test than a second group of equally proficient white males who only given information suggesting that the task was designed to assess mathematical ability. The researchers concluded: “stereotype threat impaired intellectual functioning in a group unlikely to have any sense of group inferiority” (Aronson et al. 1999; Steele, 1999: 50).

To briefly summarize just a few of the roughly two hundred related studies which have confirmed these findings: In a golf exercise, white athletes performed worse than black athletes when told that their scores would demonstrate their “natural athletic ability” (stereotypically, a black trait). On the same test, blacks performed worse than whites when they were

⁸ In linguistics, lexical refers to relating to words or the vocabulary of a language as distinguished from its grammar and construction. Affective refers to expressing, relating to, or influencing feelings or emotions. Valence refers to argument structure.

⁹ According to Western stereotypes, women are better than men at understanding, processing, communicating, and dealing effectively with their own feelings and the feelings of others.

¹⁰ According to Western stereotypes, Asians are stronger than Westerners at math, science, and standardized test taking; and weaker in analytical thinking, and the social sciences.

told that it tested their “sports strategic intelligence” (according to stereotype, a white trait) (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). In another test, expert male golfers who were told “women tend to perform better than men on our putting task” before taking a golf test (stereotype threat), performed more poorly than another group of men who were told “This research is investigating individual differences in golf putting performance” (control group) before taking the same test (Beilock et al., 2006).

When women and men with equivalent math backgrounds and abilities, who had previously tested equally well on similar math tests, were given a difficult math test, women performed more poorly than the men when they were told before taking the test that men generally performed better on the test.¹¹ When, prior to taking the test, a second group of women were told that women and men performed equally well on the test, the women subjects performed equally well. This latter group of women also performed better than a group of women who were given the test after being subliminally reminded of their gender in a standard demographic inquiry that included the test-taker’s gender, which they filled out before taking the test—“proving that the implicit threat of a stereotype which existed in the culture had caused the underperformance” (Spencer, Steele & Quinn, 1999).

However, on this same math test and on a negotiations test, women performed better than men when explicitly told that the researchers expected them to perform more poorly because men were more likely to possess the traits associated with success (Kray, Thompson, & Galinsky, 2001). Among the findings of the two hundred odd studies on the effect of stereotype threat on test performance, this is the one common “exception to the rule” —a set of circumstances under which pre-existing negative stereotypes often do not have an adverse impact on the test scores of groups subject to stereotype threat: That is, when adult subjects are *explicitly* told that the group to which they belong is inferior to another group, they may make an extra effort to succeed, and can sometimes overcome the negative effects of stereotype threat. This phenomenon is referred to as “stereotype reactance.”

¹¹ According to Western stereotypes, women are better than men in the social sciences, and at writing, speaking and other forms of self-expression, and weaker than men at math and science.

In another series of studies conducted in France, a group of college students from low socio-economic status backgrounds performed as well as the high SES students when told the test did not measure intellectual ability¹², but a second group of low SES students performed more poorly when informed that the test would assess their intellectual ability. A third set of low SES subjects also performed less well than wealthy students when they were asked to identify their socio-economic status before a test, but a fourth group performed equally well when that implicit threat (now known as “stereotype threat”) was removed. Numerous other studies have found that subliminally emphasizing a group identity associated with a negative stereotype before a test is given (by asking subjects to identify their race, gender, economic status, etc.) will lower test scores (Croizet & Claire, 1998; Harrison, et al. 2006). Removing that same implicit threat has been found to significantly raise them (Stricker & Ward, 2004).

Comparing how one ethnic group performs in different cultures confirms that cultural stereotypes have a strong impact on how well a group can do: Sadly, minority groups tend to fulfill the expectations of the majority. For example, Koreans do very well in American schools and in the American workforce, where there is no negative stereotype about their academic or work performance, but perform poorly in Japanese schools and businesses where Koreans are thought to be inferior (Ogbu, 1978; Ogbu, 1983; Steele, 1998-1999; Kim, 2006). Finnish children’s failure rate is very high in Swedish schools, where they are perceived as inferior, but when they immigrate to Australia, where no such prejudice exists, they do well—as well as Swedish immigrants (Gordon, 2004). This phenomenon is found in industrial and non-industrial nations throughout the world. In fact, minorities who are viewed as inferior consistently score 15-points below non-stigmatized members of their society on IQ tests. They also perform more poorly at school, have higher dropout rates, and suffer from a number of other problems created by their inferior status (Steele, 1997).

It is no accident that women’s educational, economic, social, and political status remains low in most Buddhist countries—where it is still

¹² According to a stereotype, low SES people are intellectually inferior to high SES people.

taught, and where a significant percentage of the population thus believe that women are inferior to men. Only two Buddhist countries—Sri Lanka (whose educational system was established by the British, and which has been led by a female head of state for 21 of the last 50 years) and Vietnam (influenced by Communist feminist ideology and policies)—were among the fifty countries with the best gender equality listed in the 2007 Global Gender Gap Report issued by the World Economic Forum. Japan and Korea, which are among the most prosperous countries in the world, were listed in 91st and 97th place, respectively, out of the 128 countries surveyed. Another recent study listed Taiwan, another prosperous Buddhist country, somewhere behind Korea.

These statistics confirm that by explicitly teaching that women are inferior, or by implicitly conveying that they are, by denying them equal status, treatment and rights, including the right to full ordination, Buddhism itself has played an important role in causing women in Buddhist countries to become inferior in some ways. But for Buddhists, it is not receiving the effects of past negative karma (being viewed and treated as inferior) that is of concern—as the karma is thus purified. It is the creation of new negative karma that is to be feared. Thus, according to this Buddhist theory, it is not females, but rather those who explicitly or implicitly teach and thus perpetuate the harmful views that females are inferior, whose “karmic obstructions” are heavier.

Negative stereotypes can not only cause individuals to perform more poorly in school and work, they can also lead to psychological and physiological responses which have harmful effects on the body and mind: Studies on a range of different ethnic and age groups have found that people who face discrimination or are subject to negative stereotypes often suffer a wide range of side-effects. These include immediate or short-term responses, such as increased heart rate and blood pressure (Blascovich et al. 2001; Krieger, 1990); confusion; decreased cognitive functioning; and difficulty concentrating, regulating various activities, and making evaluations and decisions, (Croizet et al. 2004; Aronson & Inzlicht, 2004; Stroesser & Good, 2007)—as well as depression and other long term mental (Keller & Dauenheimer, 2003; Kessler, Mickelson & Williams, 1999; Mays & Cochran, 2007; Noh et al., 1999; Grossack, 1956) and physical illnesses caused by on-going exposure to discrimination-induced stress (Landrine & Klonoff,

1996; Pavalko et al. 2003; Ren et al., 1999; Finch et al., 2000; Jackson et al., 1996).

What also repeatedly re-emerges in the reports on these studies is evidence that the effects of stereotypes, discrimination, segregation, and authority figures' expectations are caused by what Buddhists refer to as "self-views," belief in the self/the "other," and "attachments to self-identity." And that those effects, in turn, reinforce, strengthen and perpetuate those same self-views and attachments to self-views. The former is evidenced in the following discussion in one such report, which sounds a good deal like Buddhist sutras:

We begin by positing the existence of six qualitatively distinct core stereotype threats. These threats emerge from a consideration of two dimensions—the target of the threat (the self or one's group) and the source of the threat (the self, outgroup others, or ingroup others). The intersection of these dimensions results in stereotype-based threats to one's personal self-concept, to one's group concept, to one's personal reputation in the eyes of outgroup members, to one's group reputation in the eyes of outgroup members, to one's personal reputation in the eyes of ingroup members, and to one's group's reputation in the eyes of ingroup members" (Shapiro & Neuberg, 2007; 112).

What negative stereotypes and unequal treatment "lead to" then, is Wrong Views. Put another way, they lead to the antithesis of Right Views, and the antithesis of the purpose of the Middle Path and of Buddhist practice—the goal of which is the destruction of belief in, and attachment to, the self, ego, self-identity views, and distinctions between self and "the other." This latter concept is repeatedly emphasized in the Mahayana sutras and in the Tripitaka.

It is stated perhaps most succinctly in the Sammaditthi Dipani, The Manual of Right Views, a commentary on the Sammaditthasutta: "*The root cause of all Wrong Views, evil mental factors, and evil karma is atta-ditthi—[personality belief, soul belief, self-views, attachment to ego, belief in the self, and subtle soul belief]...destruction of this belief is the origin of the cessation of evil*" (Sammaditthi Dipani, 32; 37).

A number of additional studies have explored strategies for counteracting the effects of stereotype threat, and several methods have been proven effective in reducing and even eliminating their influence. It is noteworthy that each of these “antidote” strategies confirms basic Buddhist dharma principles. They work by: decreasing or eliminating “self-views,” or increasing subjects’ awareness and understanding of them; by conveying that personal abilities or traits (the “self”/self views) are not fixed or permanent, but are changeable and dependent upon causes and conditions; and by offering special encouragement and support (showing compassion and kindness).

One “antidote” that researchers have found effective is to remove the stereotype threat (self identity view) prior to giving a test. This has been done in several ways. To give just two of many examples: Black subjects told that blacks had previously performed as well as whites on a test, did indeed perform as well as white subjects. And in a study in which a group of male MBA students performed more poorly than women when told that an upcoming negotiation exercise was highly diagnostic of negotiating ability and that “excellent verbal skills, listening skills, and insight into other’s feelings (stereotypically, female attributes) assist in negotiations,” a second group of male MBA students in the control group performed better than women on the same test when the stereotype threat was removed (Kray et al., 2002). A study for the Educational Testing Service found that moving the demographic questionnaire, which included the test-taker’s gender (an implicit stereotype threat), to the end of the Advanced Placement Calculus test, resulted in significantly higher scores for women (Stricker & Ward, 2004).

Another strategy found to successfully reduce stereotype threat is to convey to subjects that the skill in question is not fixed or genetic, but is subject to change at different times and in different circumstances. This has been done by changing how abilities are described in a test; by having researchers praise subjects for their efforts rather than for their abilities (Stroesser & Good, 2007); and by directly or indirectly presenting subjects with the theory that the traits or abilities being assessed are not innate but are impermanent and dependent upon their environment and experiences (causes and conditions)—thus they themselves have the ability to improve them.

Research shows that students’ concepts of intelligence have important

effects on academic achievement, and that when confronted with stereotype threat, students who view intelligence as changeable generally do better than students who view intelligence as fixed or innate (Diener & Dweck, 1978; Elliot & Dweck, 1988; Elliot, McGregor & Gable 1999; Pintrich & Garcia 1991; Utman 1997; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Dweck & Sorich, 1999, 232-251).

A number of studies illustrate the effectiveness of presenting subjects with the theory that the traits being assessed are not innate, but are dependent on experience. In one of these, four groups of women were given GRE English tests before taking a difficult math test. There were four different versions of the English test. The first two each contained an essay that argued that math-related gender-differences exist. One version stated that they are due to genetic causes (G). The other version said that they are due to experiential causes (E). A third essay argued there are no math-related gender differences (ND). The final essay (S) raised issues relating to gender without addressing the issue of math stereotypes (*implicitly* threatening subjects with a stereotype which existed in the culture).

Women who read essays that stressed that there are no math-related gender differences (ND), or that gender differences were the result of experiential causes (E) performed significantly better than women who read the (G) (genetic argument) and women who were threatened with a general reminder of gender (S) (implicit stereotype threat). The studies revealed that the effects of stereotype threat on women's math performance can be reduced, and even eliminated, when women are presented with written accounts stating that stereotypes arise as a result of experience, and not as a result of genetic/innate differences. The researchers concluded: "These findings raise discomfiting questions regarding the effects that scientific theories can have on those who learn about them and the obligation that scientists have to be mindful of how their work is interpreted" (Dar-Nimrod, & Heine, 2006). How much more so—as Shakyamuni might say— must spiritual leaders be mindful of how they interpret the *Dharma*!

As stated earlier, increasing subjects' awareness and understanding of the effects of discrimination and stereotype threat (in Buddhist terms, their awareness and understanding of "self-identity views" and their effects) can

also reduce the influence of such threats, and has been found to improve minority students' test scores and overall achievement (Johns, Schmader, & Martens, 2005; Cohen, G.L., et al. 2006). This antidote to stereotype threat was also discovered by Jane Elliot, whose students performed better not only when they were viewed as superior, but also throughout the school year after the experiment had ended.

Having learned what they were capable of when they were viewed and treated as superior; having felt the negative effects of being viewed and treated as inferior; and having realized that those self views were delusions, they were able to use their newfound awareness to change their performance at school.

Praising and giving special support to subjects of discrimination in addition to increasing their awareness of self-identity views has also been found to be an effective antidote to stereotype threat. In one study of this strategy, a program at the University of Michigan found that black students who received special encouragement and validation, and who attended weekly rap sessions where they discussed their experiences at school (including discrimination), with black and white students, got better first year grades than black students outside the program, and grades nearly as high as white students (Steele, Thin Ice, 1999).

The effectiveness of “antidotes” like these has been confirmed by the real life experience of groups subject to discrimination and negative stereotypes, who have overcome the negative effects of those stereotypes, and have transformed themselves and their cultures through many of the same means used in the aforementioned studies: Changes in educational policies, practices, and theories; religious and cultural attitudes—even ideas introduced by a single social activist, philosopher, scholar, spiritual leader, etc.—have reduced and even eliminated the harm and suffering caused by stereotypes by “changing the minds” of those who discriminated, and of those subject to discrimination and stereotypes. Over time, such measures can completely eliminate the negative stereotypes and their effects.

A recent example is the great strides that have been made by feminist movements throughout the world. In the U.S. and Western Europe, for example, for the past 25 years, women have comprised the majority of students on college campuses (currently 60% in the U.S.), and, except in the

fields of science and engineering, they also make up the majority of graduate school students. U.S. Department of Education statistics show that, regardless of race or socio-economic group, women are more likely than men to get bachelor's degrees, and to complete those degrees more quickly. Men also get worse grades than women. As a result women are receiving a disproportionate share of the honors degrees. Throughout their schooling, boys are far more likely than girls to be suspended or expelled, or have a learning disability or emotional problem. And as adolescents they are more likely to drop out of high school, commit suicide or be incarcerated (Lewen, 2006). U.S. census data since 2005 has also revealed that the salaries earned by young women of all educational levels who work full time in New York and several of the nation's other largest cities have surpassed those of men of the same age. According to experts, a principal reason is that more American women than men have been graduating from college, and that many of those women are moving to urban areas. And as many of those women are not marrying young, they are now able to focus on their careers (Roberts, 2007).

A number of analyses of social and psychological studies conducted in the West over the past two decades have found that women and men today are "basically alike in terms of personality, and cognitive and leadership abilities;" and that "from childhood to adulthood...[they are] more alike than different on most psychological variables" (www.psychologymatters.org, 2007; Bourke, R., 2002). All the above demonstrates that groups subject to stereotypes, and the stereotypes themselves, can undergo tremendous change even in a short period of time. These changes can lead to a significantly more equitable society.

This is even more so the case in Scandinavia where progressive religious and cultural beliefs; comprehensive social welfare systems; and laws enforcing national objectives of gender equality, have resulted in the highest levels of gender equality in the world (xinhuanet.com, 2007; Global Gender Gap Report, 2007). In recent years, women in Sweden occupied an equal number of seats to men in the legislature; half of young physicians were female (Riska, 65); 56% of CEOs in the public sector were women (Alfredsson, 2008); and women's participation in the workforce was equal to that of males (Moen, 19). Sweden has also been successful in creating a

culture that has achieved equality on many others levels.

In Bangladesh and many other developing countries, poor women who have received micro-loans from the Grameen Bank and a number of other foundations, have improved their lives, increased their freedom, status, confidence, economic position, and their decision-making power in their families and communities, and have given their children better nutrition, and better educations. The Grameen bank has been so successful in the latter regard that nearly 100 percent of the children of Grameen borrowers now receive an education (Grameen Dialogue, 2006). The Grameen bank and other international micro-lending institutions have in fact decided to lend almost exclusively (97%) to women because when men were given such loans they did not use their profits to provide healthcare and educations for their children. The men were also much less reliable in repaying loans (Khan, 2004).

The success of these programs underlines another truth that research in global development has long revealed—women’s social, educational, and economic status can have direct and profound effects on the health, educational levels, and personal development of their children, and of their cultures. The link between women’s literacy and population growth (the world’s greatest environmental problem) is also well known: Statistics show that when women’s literacy rate is high, fertility rates tend to be low. For example, in Guatemala, women with no education have an average of 7.1 children and women with a secondary or better education have 2.7 children on average (smallworld, 2007). In other words, the negative effects of teaching that women are inferior, and treating them as such, thus extend far beyond the women themselves.

It is significant that the findings of hundreds of studies on the effects of stereotypes, discrimination, segregation, and authority figures’ expectations, confirm basic Buddhist dharma that we are transitory, interconnected, and dependent on causes and conditions; that clinging to self-views “leads to harm and suffering,” and letting go of self identity views “leads to welfare and happiness”; and that “everything is created by the mind.” This latter idea is explained succinctly in the Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch: “...all things are the manifestation of the essence of mind/Buddhahood nature” Sutra of Hui Neng, I 73, and in the Dharmapada, “*All phenomena are preceded by mind,*

ruled by mind, made by mind.” (Shakyamuni Buddha, *Dharmapada* 1; 2). The Hindu religion describes this phenomena: “Things begin first in the mind and then become manifest in the body and in the environment” (Sivananda).

Our minds are inseparable. We are the creations of collective karma, and each thought we give rise to affects the thoughts, words, and actions of others, as well as our own. As one researcher wrote: “Current research shows that the mere thought of a negative stereotype about one’s group can impair performance” (webpace.ship.edu, 2007). The opposite thought can improve it.

The findings of these studies also show clearly that had Shakyamuni in fact viewed women as easily angered, envious, greedy, and ignorant (*Anguttaranikaya*, II) and as “red rust and rice worms”—a pestilence that would destroy any religion (i.e. innately inferior and flawed); had he set up special rules to limit and control women on this basis, and had he taught such views and rules to others, he would have *harmed* the laywomen/nuns, laymen/monks, future generations, their cultures, Buddhism, and Shakyamuni himself—just as those same self-views, and policies that deny women equal ordination, rights, and status to men, continue to harm women, men, and children, Buddhism, and entire cultures today. Such teachings would also have undermined the essence and goal of Right Views and the Middle Path: It is precisely by knowing that the self is not fixed, unchanging or innate, but is a transitory delusion—a constellation of constantly changing, fleeting phenomena, subject to causes and conditions—that one can end belief in, and attachment to, self-views, and bring an end to suffering.

Had Shakyamuni set down such rules and practices, he would have also conveyed not only that it is *acceptable*, but that it is *morally right* to discriminate and to view others as inferior to oneself, and to establish social systems that treat them as inferior. He would thus have promoted, reinforced, and perpetuated a discriminatory state of mind and system of beliefs that are the antithesis of the principles of non-attachment to self-views, non-judgment, non-discrimination and equality set forth in the Diamond Sutra, the Lotus Sutra, The Heart Sutra, the Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch, and in many passages in the Tripitaka. There it is stated one should not judge others, but should view all beings and all phenomena as fleeting, interconnected and interdependent,

created by karma, and inseparable from one another and from oneself—without discriminating among them.

“...one should not make distinctions by saying, “This is a man,” “This is a woman.” Do not try to apprehend phenomena, to understand or to see them. These are what I call the practices of the bodhisattva. All phenomena are empty, without being, without any constant abiding, without arising or extinction. This I call the position the wise person associates with. From upside-downness come distinctions, that phenomena exist, do not exist, are real, are not real, are born, are not born” (The Lotus Sutra, 200).

“...The World Honored one declares that notions of selfhood, personality, entity, and separate individuality, as really existing, are erroneous—these terms are merely figures of speech...Those who aspire to the consummation of incomparable enlightenment should recognize and understand all varieties of things in the same way and cut off the arising of [views that are mere] aspects. Subhuti, as regards aspects, the Tathagata declares that in reality they are not such. They are [merely] called aspects...

In which manner may [one] explain [this discourse] to others? By detachment from appearances—abiding in real truth. So I tell you: “Thus shall ye think of all this fleeting world: A star at dawn, a bubble in a stream; a flash of lightning in a summer cloud, a flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream.” (The Diamond Sutra, #31, #32 p. 52-53).

The findings of these psychological and social studies on discrimination, stereotypes and segregation also shed new light on why most of the world’s major religions teach that one must not judge or look down on others, or discriminate against them: As a Sioux Indian Prayer reads: “Oh great spirit, keep me from ever judging another until I have walked in his or her moccasins” (Peters, 1985). It is stated in the New Testament, “Judge not, and ye shall not be judged” (The Bible, Luke: 6:37);

“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” and “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” In the Old Testament it is written: “Judge not thy

neighbor till thou art in his/her place” (Ab. ii. 4). In Islam, “Happy is the person who finds fault with himself instead of finding fault with others” (Hadith, p. 612). And Hui Neng says, “To look down on others is an immeasurably great sin” and “He who is in the habit of looking down on others has not got rid of the erroneous idea of a self, which indicates his lack of *gong* (merit). Because of his egotism and habitual contempt for others, he knows not the real essence of mind; and this shows his lack of *de* (morality)” (Sutra of Hui Neng, I, p. 72; III, 89).

Or as Shakyamuni makes clear in the Dharmapada, “Consider others as yourself” (Dhammapada 10:1) and in the Diamond Sutra—not only must we not judge, we must not even distinguish between ourselves and others. “No bodhisattva who is a real bodhisattva cherishes the idea of an ego identity, a personality, a being, or a separated individuality” (The Diamond Sutra, Chapter 3). Jesus teaches: “Ye are Gods!” and “The Kingdom of God is within you” (The New Testament, Luke 17:20&21). The Indian Yogi, Babaji, expresses this same idea: “I don’t indulge in any kind of differences. The divine is playing. Whatever is happening is being done by the supreme source. All are my own true self, having different roles to play” (Babaji).

Ideas of superior/inferior, good/bad, self/other, female/male originate in all our minds and are manifest in the outside world. When we give rise to negative judgments of others, or to the idea that some group is superior or inferior, or when we establish unequal policies and rules that implicitly convey such ideas, we not only perpetuate a spiritually counterproductive, discriminatory state of mind, and one that is attached to self-identity views. The resulting thoughts, words and actions also influence and harm others, and so harm us ourselves. “A foolish passing thought makes one an ordinary person, while an enlightened second thought makes one a Buddha. A passing thought that clings to sense objects is klesha, while a second thought that frees one from attachment is Bodhi.” “By thinking evil things, hell arises. By thinking good things, paradise appears.” (Sutra of Hui Neng, II 82; VI 106).

The practices of viewing any group as inferior, or treating them as such, are “unskillful; blameworthy”; and “when adopted and carried out, lead to harm and suffering.” They do not “accord with the Discourses and the Vinaya” but lead to further attachment to self-identity views, and reinforce and

perpetuate belief in the self/the other. They are “Wrong Views”, and thoughts “not fit for attention” (Sabbasava Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 2). Thus, according to Shakyamuni’s own instructions, “these certainly are not the [dharma] of the Lord,” and we “should abandon them” (Anguttaranikaya III, 65).

What is “fit for attention” is that we are all inseparable, and in every moment in a state of change—temporary phenomena, the result of an infinite number of causes and conditions, interconnected and interdependent, suffering embodied, but also Enlightened Ones and Buddhas. Research shows that by viewing others equally, as Buddhas, we will help them to become just that. The Buddhist practitioner should focus on helping all beings to develop wisdom and compassion, and to reach enlightenment and Buddhahood—without differentiating among them.

Ridding Buddhism of these harmful Wrong Views and practices must be the most pressing task for Buddhists today. We are all responsible for what our religion teaches, and for its actions, and we share collectively in perpetuating this negative karma. If we are not part of the solution, we are part of the problem.

Note: The documentary film “A Class Divided” (English language version)—of Jane Elliot’s studies in discrimination can be watched free of charge online at: www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/divided/etc/view.html

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Additional References – Teacher Expectation Effect
(A List of Just A Few Dozen of the Many Studies on the Subject)

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