



31. MARTINE BATCHELOR

MARTINE BATCHELOR was born in France in 1953. She was ordained as a Buddhist nun in Korea in 1975. She studied Zen Buddhism under the guidance of the late Master Kusan at Songgwang Sa monastery until 1984. Her Zen training also took her to nunneries in Taiwan and Japan. From 1981 she served as Kusan Sunim's interpreter and accompanied him on lecture tours throughout the United States and Europe. She translated his book 'The Way of Korean Zen'. Following Master Kusan's death she returned her nun's vows and left Korea.

She returned to Europe with her husband, Stephen, in 1985. She was a member of the Sharpham North Community in Devon, England for six years. She worked as a lecturer and spiritual counsellor both at Gaia House and elsewhere in Britain. She was also involved in interfaith dialogue and was a Trustee of the International Sacred Literature Trust until 2000.

In 1992 she published, as co-editor, 'Buddhism and Ecology'. In 1996 she published, as editor, 'Walking on Lotus Flowers' which in 2001 was reissued under the title 'Women on the Buddhist Path'. She is the author of

'Principles of Zen', 'Meditation for Life' (an illustrated book on meditation), 'The Path of Compassion' (a translation from the Korean, with reference to the original Chinese, of the Brahmajala Sutra, i.e. the Bodhisattva Precepts), 'Women in Korean Zen' and 'Let Go: A Buddhist Guide to Breaking Free of Habits'. Her latest book is 'The Spirit of the Buddha'.

With her husband she co-leads meditation retreats worldwide. They now live in France.

She speaks French, English and Korean and can read Chinese characters. She has written various articles for magazines on the Korean way of tea, Buddhism and women, Buddhism and ecology, and Zen cooking. She is interested in meditation in daily life, Buddhism and social action, religion and women's issues, Zen and its history, factual and legendary.

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INTERVIEW

Q: In the Anguttara Nikaya V.159, Udayi Sutra, Buddha said “The Dhamma should be taught with the thought, 'I will speak not for the purpose of material reward.’”

But 2,500 years later, on a very different continent and culture, from your experience. do these same principles concerning dana still apply today?

Martine Batchelor: I would like to reflect on how one understands that quote. It could be looked in 2 ways: literal and interpretative. 1) Does it mean that when one speaks the dharma one should never receive money for it or that 2) one should not expect money or a certain amount.

1) is difficult as even the monks and the nuns whose needs were very simple had to be supported financially or otherwise as they did not work. It looks like the Buddha saw it as an exchange of generosity; the monastics practiced hard and gained wisdom that they shared with the community that supported them. Once it was suggested that the monastics live just in the forest in a very ascetic life and the Buddha refused, he seemed to have seen the benefit of the monastics' close connection to the laypeople and mutual support.

2) if one teaches with the main thoughts of acquiring goods then one might be tempted to talk in a way which will make one receive more goods than less. Then it could be the difference between expectation and aspiration. Expectation: "I am waiting for and expecting something definite"; aspiration: "people have asked me to teach because they seem to find it beneficial and I am happy to receive whatever they want to give me to support my work and practice in the dharma".

Q: Does one have to be gift worthy to receive dana and if so, how is this?

Martine Batchelor: First one has to ask: how come one is teaching? Has one set up a teaching shop to make money out of that? Has one practiced for a while and people have asked one to teach? This is a different start. To teach one has to find people who want to be taught what one teaches.

Gift worthy? What does this mean? That one has practiced a lot? That one is ethical? That one is compassionate? That one is wise? That one has something to teach?

Q: If someone makes a claim that they have “seen the nature”, or has had a glimpse, is this enough to teach and ask for dana?

Martine Batchelor: Some people work on the dana system, some do not. It is not enough to have seen the nature and want to teach, will people want to be taught by you? Are they benefitting from your teaching? Do they want to support you?

Q: Does one have to be an arhat or a monk to receive dana?

Martine Batchelor: Not necessarily.

Q: What if someone has a full time job or is independently wealthy. Should they still ask for dana when they don't really need it?

Martine Batchelor: Some people do this, some do not. Some people ask dana for their centre and not for themselves. This should be the big difference between laypeople and monastics. The dana to laypeople generally go to individuals, the dana to monastics is supposed to go to the monastery or nunnery but sometimes it goes the other way around.

Q: Are there times when one should not give dana but pay a set fee or price?

Martine Batchelor: Where and how one is teaching? Is one setting up an organization around one or building a centre or is one responding to invitation? In the first case one can choose dana or fees according to what one thinks is more appropriate. In the second case one will go along with the way the centre one teaches at is set up unless one is strongly in favor of the dana system.

Q: What are your thoughts on lay Buddhists charging a fee for the dharma and teaching outside of a tradition? Not using dana at all?

Martine Batchelor: There are a lot of discussions about this. One of the advantages of the dana system is that it is not based on a fixed fee, which means that people can give according to their means.

Q: Does it appear to you in any way that the Theravada type Buddhists are the only ones to be sticking firmly to this ancient dana model. I ask this because some of the Zen and Tibetan Buddhists seem to be using more of a business model. They ask for a set fee for retreats and so on?

Martine Batchelor: The Theravada tradition is more monastic and more into ethic than the other two, also the view of the teacher is less elevated. He is seen more as a friendly advisor.

Q: But why are the Theravada teachers more ethical and less elevated? Does this have to do with just being a monk or is there more to this than that? I ask this because Zen teachers are also monks and so are some Lamas?

Martine Batchelor: A lot depends on if they are celibate or not. Some Zen teachers in Japan or in the West are married and they have to support a family. Some lamas are monks some are not. Many lamas are married with family even if they look like monks.

Q: What about innovative Zen roshis trade marking their teachings and asking for suggested donations of 1,000 per person per day for a retreat? Is there anything right or wrong with this?

Martine Batchelor: This is Genpo Roshi who had to leave his Zen tradition due to ethical misconduct and who studied economics or who has an MBA.

Q: What about Tibetan lama Geshe Michael Roach who used the Diamond Cutter Sutra in the context of business?

Martine Batchelor: At the moment there are a lot of questions ethically about Michael Roach and about what he said he studied or did among other things so I will not comment on that one.

Q: Where do you see this heading in the future? Do you see this leaning towards a western entrepreneurial Buddhist model or the

ancient Indian dana model or something in between? Some kind of a middle road?

Martine Batchelor: There will be different ways to deal with this and that is fine. Ken McLeod might have interesting things to say about this.

END OF INTERVIEW