

Ha dad, ik ben benieuwd wat je er va vindt, laat je het lezen en dan met opmerkingen weer naar mij terug-sturen. O.j.a. schrijf jij het editorial, als voorzitter zijnde, mijn inspiratie is op!
gr. m.

BUDDHISM IN THE NETHERLANDS (*)

In 1865, H. Kern occupied the first Sanskrit chair in the University of Leiden. With this the study of Buddhism in the Netherlands began, although Kern held a rather mythological and eccentric view of the teachings of the Buddha, as being a manifestation of the God of the Sun, (den Boer 1990, p. 65). Following in the footsteps of Mme. Blavatsky, who contacted spiritual masters in Tibet, and the theosophists, an esoteric, mystical view of Buddhism gained ground in Holland towards the end of last century. (op. cit., p. 66).

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After the Second World War, Buddhism, as we know it these days in the Netherlands started to form. From the end of the forties onwards, the first circles of Buddhist friends met in Huizen, The Hague and Groningen. They were a great success. In 1965 Peter van der Beek, from the University of Groningen, a member of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order and later of Arya Maitreya Mandala, pleaded for a more formalized co-operation between these groups. This resulted in the foundation of the Dutch Buddhist Center in The Hague in 1967. The center encouraged the study of Buddhism and its practice, it also published a magazine, Saddharma, that still exists. The committee focused on the development of a European Buddhist tradition.

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Initially the Dutch Buddhist Center represented all Buddhist groups. In the following years, both the number and the diversity of Buddhist organizations increased. Many of them were, and still are, closely related to traditional Asiatic lineages, by means of their teachers and rituals. I will mention some representatives of Buddhist traditions here. For a complete review I refer to "Boeddhisme in Nederland" (van Gemert, 1990). (see below)

- Theravada

In the sixties the Buddhist circle in The Hague met at the Thai Embassy. The ambassadess, Mrs. L.D. Bhakdi taught vipassana (or insight) meditation herself and organized meditation courses, guided by monks in the Theravada tradition. Mrs. Bhakdi tried to gain recognition of the values of vipassana meditation, in her view scientific proof might help to get this (in the West). Therefore she permitted psychologists from the University of Leiden to conduct physiological measurements of her own body, while meditating. In 1966, when her husband was transferred, Mrs. Bhakdi left The Netherlands.

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In 1973, the venerable P.K.K. Mettaviharee was appointed Abbot of the first Thai Buddhist temple in The Netherlands, the Buddharama Temple in Waalwijk. He was originally sent by his preceptor to carry out religious services for the Thai community. Inspired by his own meditation experiences with U Asabha Thera and U Indavamsa, in the Burmese tradition of Mahasi Sayadaw, he intended from the beginning to spread the practice of meditation and to teach insight knowledge and the wisdom of Buddhism. After some years he moved to Amsterdam and founded the Buddhavihara temple.

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{ 10 years later

* Many details in this article have been taken from Victor van Gemert (ed), "Boeddhisme in Nederland", Zen Uitgeverij Theresiahoeve, Nijmegen, 1990. With contributions of I. den Boer, N. Tydeman, Dr. H.F. de Wit and Mrs. Dr. T. Kurpershoek-Scherft.

For the specific history of the B.U.N., I talked to Mrs. Dr. T. Kurpershoek-Scherft and Prof. Dr. R. Janssen.

mindfulness or -hallucination?

- Zen

In 1968 the Zen Circle was founded, of which the author J.W. van de Wetering (De Lege Spiegel) was a member. From the seventies onwards many of the attractive aspects of Zen, in particular of Japanese culture, have been integrated in Dutch society. There have been famous contacts between Zen and Christianity personified by Prof. K. Durckheim and Dr. H. Enomiya Lasalle, which have influenced the development of Zen in The Netherlands. Zen meditation is practised in several Catholic monasteries now. An important Zen meditation center is the Tiltenberg, closely connected to Sanbo-Kyo-Dan (H.M. Enomiya-Lassalle and Gen-un-ken Arokiya Samy) and the Kanzeon Sangha (Genpo Merzel Sensei and Gesshin Prabhava Dharma Roshi). Mimi Marechal, a student of Yamada Koun Roshi, co-ordinates the center and is authorized to give meditation instructions.

Nico Tydeman was involved in many aspects of the development of Zen in The Netherlands. He is one of the leading persons and authorized teacher of the Kanzeon Sangha, he became a member of the Tiep Hien Order, founded in 1964 by the Vietnamese monk and exile Thich Nhat Hanh. For some years, he worked as a member of staff for The Kosmos in Amsterdam and he is a former secretary of the B.U.N..

- Tibetan

In 1977 Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, belonging to the Kargyu and Nyingma tradition, founded his first European center, Dharmadhatu in Amsterdam.

The largest Tibetan centre in the Gelugpa tradition in The Netherlands is the Maitreya Institute in Emst. It was founded in 1976 on the initiative of Paula Koolkin. The Maitreya Institute is closely connected to Lama Thubten Yeshe and lama Zopa Rinpoche as a part of the Foundation for the Preservation of Mahayana Tradition.

For more than 10 years the residential lama of the Maitreya Institute has been Geshe Konchong Lhundrup Rinpoche. He will be succeeded by Geshe Sonam Gyaltzen this year, who has been working at the Institute of Buddhist Studies at Ladakh for the last 10 years.

When in 1978 the E.B.U. asked for an official, national umbrella organization, the Dutch Buddhist Center no longer considered itself representative and decided to step back. Its name was changed into Foundation of the Friends of Buddhism. The B.U.N. took its place. Representatives of several Buddhist traditions; Zen, Tibetan and Theravada as well as the Friends of Buddhism joined. Mrs. Dr. A.C.M. Kurpershoek-Scherft became the first president, she was also named vice-president of the E.B.U.. The first B.U.N. assembly was held in the house of Mr. Bloemsma, a civil engineer. Bloemsma had stayed in Asia for long periods of time. When he came back, he worked on the spreading of Buddhism in Holland quite solitary. Among other things he had collected an impressive Buddhist library. Bloemsma opened the meeting by laying down the law. (He exposed the pride of other members present, who, compared to him, hadn't done a thing for Buddhism yet, and never even visited his library!) An unofficial agreement to co-operate was signed, (Bloemsma was made an honorary member) and the foundation of the B.U.N. was a fact.

(known for his book)

policy

in his own individualistic manner

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whose primary objective is to

(too) strong!

One could say, the Buddhist Union of the Netherlands started as a paper tiger. Had not the European Buddhist Union decided that only national umbrella organizations would be admitted as members, it would not have been founded at all. As was said before the primary reason to found the B.U.N. was to obtain the E.B.U. membership, and with that, contact other Buddhist organizations on an European level. Objections from several countries to the structure of the EBU ^{were} could be heard: it would induce a paralysing hierarchy and get entangled in the networks of Buddhist groups that ~~already~~ were internationally organized. In 1990 this policy was finally changed by the new E.B.U. constitution. All Buddhist organizations, ~~that~~ undertake Buddhist activities and whose membership is of a reasonable size can become members.

In some countries, such as Germany and Belgium the national Buddhist unions functioned well. ^{books} England and France and the Netherlands it was merely a paper organization. In the Netherlands, all Buddhist groups were very busy with the establishment of their own tradition and their own centers. The attendance at the B.U.N. meetings ^{dropped to} already reached a minimum several years after its foundation. ^{While} the B.U.N. was ^(softly) put on ice ~~asleep~~ while an undeniable process of growth in the field of Buddhism was taking place.

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After the E.B.U. conference in Paris 1988, the B.U.N. ^{was brought to life} ~~was called forth~~ again. The conference ^{had been} was inspiring. Many traditions were represented by their sangha and a great number of younger people participated. Considering this, Prof. Dr. R. Jansen, president of the Friends of Buddhism, decided to initiate the B.U.N. activities again.

On behalf of the B.U.N. committee, Mrs. Kurpershoek-Scherft wrote to nearly all Dutch Buddhist groups:
"In spite of all controversies that exist between the different Buddhist traditions, the elementary teaching of the Dharma should inspire us sufficiently to develop common activities. Our goal might be the development of a truly European Buddhism, as the Dharma took its own form in Tibet and the Far East after the Indian phase."

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What numbers is the estimated point to

According to Mr. Jansen a "truly European Buddhism" would be a ^{non-sectarian} Buddhism that stands above all traditions. Traditions are not the point in Buddhism, its principles are universal and they would exist even nameless. ^{The} Dharma can also be found in the doctrine of others. Transformation and fructification are at stake here. ^{How} ~~The exact form Buddhism will find in Europe is beyond our range of control. Some say it will take ages.~~ ^{development}

Ultimately

^{As far as the Bun was concerned} Times had changed. After years of a sleeping existence, more than forty people attended ^{first} the meeting. ^{At this meeting} Soon afterwards, after 10 years of presidency, Mrs. Kurpershoek retired, both from the E.B.U. and from the B.U.N.. ~~For the time being, the continuity of the B.U.N. was ensured by its recent revival.~~ She was succeeded by the present chairman, the Buddhistologist Dr. A. Verboom. Under his presidency, times appear ^{to} be quite favorable. All important Buddhist traditions being represented in the B.U.N., the number of participants has stabilized at about 20 organizations, including all larger ones. The regulations of the union ^{are} updated and a number of joint activities ^{were} established. Working together will certainly add to the mutual understanding and the development of Buddhist traditions in the West.

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In 1990

organized by the B.U.N.

Every year an open meeting ^{is} held in one of the centers. ~~The~~ groups ^{where} ~~will~~ get acquainted with each others work and traditions. These meetings, being open to the public as well, a program is presented, music and dance in Buddhism (1990) and Buddhism and ecology (1991). On a small scale, the B.U.N. is beginning to participate in the interreligious dialogue in the Netherlands. The B.U.N. has instituted several working groups:

- for schools an inventory of educational appliances is taken and a critical review is given of them, guest-teachers on Buddhism are recommended;
- for the Buddhist community in the Netherlands, practical knowledge is assembled in the field of birth, death (burial ceremonies) and spiritual consolation (in prisons e.g.).

counseling

On education: at present

Mrs. Mayje Schuur,
Secretary of B.U.N.

a list of guest-teachers is managed
& B.U.N. is an intermediary herein.

- on education: an inventory of educational material on the subject of Buddhism is taken and on some of these a critical review is prepared. A list of guest-teachers on the subject of Buddhism is kept, for which the B.U.N. is an intermediary.

- on death and dying: practical knowledge is gathered/collected on the subject of dying, death and the various methods of burial/cremation, for the Buddh. community in the NL.