



photo: Gary Reneau

Ven. Tenzin Kachö with air force cadets

## nun helps Air Force cadets to stay grounded

People enter the military service for education, training, work, travel and adventure but more often do not consider impermanence and death. The great Buddhist King Ashoka was like this, at first thinking of the glory of conquest. Later, seeing the ravages of war, he completely renounced aggressive conflict and became a great, peaceful Dharma king. St. Francis of Assisi was transformed after seeing the effects of war. I wish we could understand this before we venture out in fields of conflict but it is more often the condition of youth to feel invincible, strong and ready to enjoy the marvels of the world out before them.



The training of cadets at the US Air Force Academy is rigorous with strong academic emphasis, along with military and athletic training. They don't have much personal time to go off the base until their junior year when they are allowed to have cars. For these reasons, the Academy invites chaplains of different faiths so the cadets have access to them. Many of the chaplains are officers but they had no Buddhist chaplain so when one of the cadets asked about setting up a Buddhist gathering, they found that I was teaching in Colorado Springs and contacted me, although I have no military training.

We have a varied group and our gatherings are open to everyone. Some of the cadets are from Asian Buddhist cultures; others come with a strong interest in the Dharma and some because they are curious. Faculty members join us as well. Their life is incredibly disciplined and busy so when I meet them on Friday evenings, some of them are often tired after a long week. Meditating is kept to short, analytical sittings and then we have discussions. As one

When VEN. TENZIN KACHÖ was asked to be Buddhist chaplain at the US Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, she read up on WWII so she could learn about the conflict of war and how people dealt with it. She conferred with a family friend from a lineage of Japanese Buddhist ministers who had served in the WWII US Military Intelligence Service, even while his father was imprisoned in the internment camps for being a minister. Sometimes she feels unsettled about her work and wonders if she is serving the war effort. She tries to focus on being there for the individuals.

teacher said, "Meditating is like arm wrestling without arms," and, after their busy week, sitting without guided practice can put anyone to sleep.

I now start the incoming freshmen cadets on the *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation*, because it is such a potent text for working with others, our emotions and perceptions. These young people are entering the Academy often straight from their family homes and from the Academy Prep School, except for a few prior-enlisted, and are immediately immersed into the military hierarchical training. *The Eight Verses* are a good basis for the cadets to discuss some of the new experiences they must grapple with; they can apply the verses vitally and directly.

I enjoy being with the cadets for their questioning, interest and openness to learn about Buddhism and this deepens my understanding and practice as well.

They have strict discipline in marching, uniforms, meals, and order and their rooms are spartan. They tell me that during inspections a quarter dropped on their beds should bounce, and they have "white glove tests" for cleanliness. Because of their lifestyle, when I go there I feel somewhat like I'm going to a monastery, though of course their focus is totally different. In fact, I sometimes feel they are disciplined and trained to work in harmony together more strictly and overtly than I have experienced. In our monasteries, we learn this through Vinaya teachings and following the examples of our teachers and peers.

Their youth and strength awakens me to the young generation. They have aspirations to do things I would not consider anymore now that I am a middle-aged nun. They wish to go to Mars which I heard takes two years, to fly the newest jets and work in government intelligence.



# freedom inside prison



*Aryadaka, an American, was ordained 17 years ago. For the last four years he has been working with prisoners in Washington State, USA.*

Actually, when my older brother received his appointment to the Merchant Marine Academy while I was in high school, I had the wish to go to the Air Force Academy because I always loved planes and flying. But in those years, girls were not accepted and my vision was not good.

Last January, two cadets attended Ven. Geshe Gyeltsen's weekend retreat in the Rocky Mountains. They went over the Five Precepts and both took refuge vows with Geshe-la at the end of the retreat. I heard that as Geshe-la left the room, he said to one of the cadets, "Don't kill people, but kill your delusions!"

With the current international atmosphere of state power and influence, the belief that a strong military is needed for keeping peace attracts people with a particular worldview. The nature of today's wartime weapons systems seems to encourage an impersonal detachment to their potentially devastating effects. Some individuals in the military who are drawn to Buddhism feel that being with the forces and conscientiously keeping in mind the noble eight-fold path, equanimity and working for the benefit of others is important. I hope these teachings on compassion, and understanding of the nature of reality, will help increase the sensitivity and thoughtfulness of these young, intelligent and energetic students, that there will be positive results for these future officers of the military and others as well.

I'm starting my third year at the Air Force Academy and soon my fourth year teaching in Colorado Springs. I was invited in 1998 to be the resident teacher for Thubten Shedrup Ling, a center established by Ven. Geshe Tsultim Gyeltsen in 1991. After managing a busy center in Los Angeles I am thankful to have time to study the Dharma applying what I learn into teaching and living.

Because I am also working on my master's degree at Naropa University while teaching several days a week, I avoid getting burnt out by trying not to take on too many additional classes or projects. Meditating with the students during an open period when I don't need to teach is very rejuvenating. This way I can sit without the preoccupation of leading the group, yet enjoy the synergy of meditating together. ☸

Prison visitor ARYADAKA is a member of the Western Buddhist Order, founded in England over 30 years ago by Sangharakshita, an Englishman who spent 16 years as a Buddhist monk in the East. Some Order members are full-time meditators living a monastic life; others either live with their families and have ordinary jobs, work full-time in a 'right livelihood' business, or are supported to work at their local center. The Order has about 800 members in 20 countries.

I have wanted to work with prison inmates since I was incarcerated in Scandinavia for two years in 1974. That's when I began my practice. Prison is an incredibly fertile ground for the Dharma to take root.

Since I was able to start working with prisoners, I have met all sorts of people – from murderers to people in for what they call non-violent crimes. Usually I don't get to know the nature of their crimes, except for those in the sexual offenders' unit and even then I don't know nor do I ask the nature of the offense. I do know that most inmates have committed their crimes while on drugs or alcohol.

I have seen amazing results and I am just now working with an inmate going back into society. I am a representative for the 'Way Home Project' headed by Rowan Conrad in Missoula. This Project provides grants to