

I Give You My Life

Ayya Khema



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Ayya Khema (1923-1997) was the first Western woman to become a Theravadan Buddhist nun. As such, she has served as a model and inspiration for women from all the Buddhist traditions who have sought to revive the practice of women's monasticism in modern times. Though her renown as a teacher is widespread, few know the truly amazing details of her life before her monastic ordination at the age of fifty-eight. And what a life it was. Born Ilse Kussel in Berlin, Germany, she grew up in a prosperous Jewish family that was broken up by Nazi terror in 1938. The story of her escape alone to Scotland, and her journey to rejoin her family in China, would be enough for a thrilling adventure novel in itself-but it is only the beginning of the story. Her later adventures included-but were not limited to-surviving the Japanese invasion of China; living the life of a suburban housewife in Los Angeles, California; journeying up the Amazon; studying in a Bolivian university; building a power plant in Pakistan; and establishing the first organic farm in Australia. Her Buddhist practice was a result of a pursuit of the spiritual life that began in her forties when she encountered spiritual teachers in India. She eventually founded a monastery in Sri Lanka, from where, through her books and her teaching travels, she became one of the most widely respected of contemporary teachers, particularly skilled in interpreting the Buddhist teachings for her fellow Westerners.



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