

DAKINI



DAKINI 14

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A Newsletter for women Order Members and Mitras, produced by the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (Wanstead), Amaravati, 30 Cambridge Park, London E11 2PR. Tel: 01-989 5083

EDITORIAL Anoma

This is the last Dakini of it's kind. In future it will be for women Order members and Mitras only and will lose the Editorial and Amaravati News. Let me explain the reasons for these changes, which were discussed and agreed at a recent weekend retreat for women Order members. Dakini was originally started just for Order members and Mitras, but then other women asked for it. To begin with it was just one or two and this didn't alter things much, but over the months this has grown until now there are quite a number of non-Mitras and Order members receiving Dakini. There are two main drawbacks to this continuing, (1) the further away Dakini gets from just Order members and Mitras, the more general it tends to become. There's nothing wrong with this, but it's not intended as a general newsletter. The original idea was for it to be a communication between women Mitras and Order members everywhere and we felt this was and is still it's main value. (2) I don't have the equipment or the time to produce a large scale newsletter, and I was beginning to feel it was getting a bit out of hand!

The decision to stop the Editorial and Amaravati News sections was to remove any feelings of Amaravati being the main focus of women's activities. In the past this was largely true, but now that things have opened out more, it seemed better for Dakini to be produced more along the lines of Shabda, the Order Newsletter, where contributions are sent to the editor, who is just responsible for typing, duplicating and putting it together, then sending it out. There will still be a page of Forthcoming Events for women and I thought I'd also include a list of new Mitras as and when they come into being, with their addresses. When I feel moved to write something, I will of course do so, but in the same way as anyone else would write in. Other Order members who were present at the weekend retreat, have promised to write for Dakini as often as possible. So I hope to receive plenty of material for forthcoming issues.

As for those Friends who've been receiving Dakini so far, I'm sorry for this change in policy in that it means you will no

longer be receiving it. I know many of you have enjoyed reading it. However, I will be producing a list of all women's retreats and events at the same time as Dakini, which I'm happy to send to any women who'd like it. I'll automatically be sending a copy of this to any Friends who've been subscribing to Dakini who aren't in direct contact with a Centre. Other Friends can get information from their centre or from their local woman Order member. However, if anyone would still like a copy of this list, please let me know. I'd appreciate the 42p. to cover the cost of second class postage for 6 lists a year. I'll be returning outstanding subscriptions where this applies. I hope you'll stay in touch and that we'll meet on retreats etc. in future.

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RECEPTIVITY Margherita Punzi

(First given as a talk at the Brighton Speakers Class a short while ago)

I am going to talk about an aspect of communication which I have found recently to be extremely important. It is that of receptivity as an integral and energetic expression of awareness.

In his lecture, 'Masculinity and Femininity in the Spiritual Life', Ven. Sangharakshita defines the third Paramita - Kshanti - as patience, forbearance and spiritual receptivity. These qualities he terms feminine. The forth Paramita (or transcendental virtue) of Virya being termed masculine. I want to try and illustrate how important it is that the two become inter-related in communication. That both the feminine and masculine facets of ourselves are needed to perfect receptivity in the spiritual life.

In the last Mitrata, Vajradaka, in his article on Effort and Receptivity, mentions passivity as the near-enemy of receptivity, he says passivity is like a bottomless cup, whereas receptivity reaches out. Yet why is it that being passive is so much easier than being actively receptive? Why is it that reaching out is so much more difficult than soaking up? Both, in fact, need a lot of energy; it takes as much energy to resist the world as it does to participate in it. As Ven. Sangharakshita explains, resistance spends all its efforts on keeping up defences and saps energy from others to reinforce them. The empty spaces behind the defences also need the constant filling up of energy to replace that that is leaking away in such negative pursuits. This way of being usually results in an apparent lack of energy for giving or Dana in the widest sense, or reaching out to others with receptivity.

Living parasitically on the energy of others or the constant re-inforcement of our defences are not expressions of the spiritually feminine qualities of ourselves. If we are using conditioned reactions, the reactions learnt and always used to survive in the past, if we use them in the present we are not being open to change in ourselves and others. If I am constantly grinning at you because I learnt that people like that and will not question me - that it makes them grin too - when in fact I am snarling 'Keep your distance' or 'Keep away', or if I am still using my method of looking intensely at you to impress you that I am full of wisdom but do not wish to communicate it, in order to prevent you getting near me, and yet I am calling myself a Buddhist, then I am using outdated methods of communication or non-communication. I have committed myself to change and to become more open. If I can allow myself to open up without all the old defences propping me up then I can be receptive to others also. Instead of fighting people off we can listen to them - for in fact, we hear them because in opening ourselves we really open our ears. We can see them because we really open our eyes. But unless we do open up ourselves our so-called receptivity is nothing but a soaking up of others energies to feed our abyss of negativity and empty spaces.

The kind of effort needed to unlearn or uncondition ourselves needs the spiritually masculine quality of Virya, we need vigor - a driving force. We need to employ what Santideva calls the 'energy in pursuit of the good'. We need to be able to release our energies from behind the defences which thwart them because we need them as a driving force. The more defences we let go of the more energy is released for further letting go. Though there may well be times when this is not apparent and we seem to become listless and apathetic when we discover certain things about ourselves. But this is caused by our conflicting selves. One self may really wish to give up say a certain attitude while our other selves may want to hang on to the familiar and known causing what appears to be an impasse. But once we become used to the 'new' idea and really feel it we cease to feel fearful of the defence-less state, and instead of feeling vulnerable we feel a new kind of strength within us.

To be receptive then needs a lot of energy because we have to work hard on ourselves but it does not finish there, for we need a particular kind of energy which comes from the strength of integration (of integrated selves). We have probably all met the person who is so open-ended that he/she falls out of

him/herself, he/she is in bits and pieces or all over the place - disassembling him/herself, first into one thing then into another, picking up and dropping all the time, or into many things at once - all quite direction-less. You can not see where he/she is going and neither can he/she, though he/she will spend as much time as you can give explaining where he/she is at, unable to see through the muddle of it all that you may be bored stiff. He/she cannot see you or be receptive to you because there is too much clutter in the way. Whereas concentrated energy, coming from a more integrated person's communication is more capable of receptivity, his/her vision is clearer, he/she is able to receive and in a more structured way and is also able to reflect another person's communication in a mutually helpful way. Without his/her mind spinning off in all directions, he/she is with that person.

This is not to say that every encounter must or will be an incredibly intense communication but rather that we are able, the more integrated we become, to open ourselves to the situation we find ourselves in and that we are able to give of ourselves in a receptive way. We can be receptive to what people are really trying to say to us, what they are actually trying to convey. To be receptive also means being receptive to ourselves, being able to listen to ourselves and see ourselves more clearly; knowing for instance when to let go, so to speak, knowing that is, when we are anxious or upset about something or somebody and instead of going into moods or firing off displaced energy, we see it for what it is and let go of it, we give it up, either by sharing it with that person or admitting to ourselves how we are feeling in a situation. This 'giving up' gives us in turn more room to be receptive to others because we are not tied up with our own feelings all the time.

Forbearance and tolerance - the other aspects of Kshanti - become easier to practise the more open we are. By being more open we see the good qualities of others. Not having an axe to grind we do not then spend so much of our time carping about other people's unskilful qualities. Though this does not mean we do not mention them to the people concerned, we do, but not after hours or days of resentment, because by reducing our defensive mechanisms we have less reason or less investment in such feelings or attitudes. We, in fact, are wishing to help that other person for their own sake, for their own spiritual development instead of wishing to change them to make them more amenable to ourselves - this often being the origin of our anger or resentment, that others will not appease our need to reinforce our own feelings. And that which we may believe is unskilful in another could be just that but receptiveness in communication will produce a mutually beneficial situation. With an attitude of insight into our own needs and feelings we can practise forbearance and tolerance because we then become that much clearer and therefore feel less threatened by another's views or differences. Not only are we clearer but there is more room to develop what Ven. Sangharakshita calls 'a positive mental attitude of love' towards others, instead of indifference. We can receive what they have to tell us with good feeling and, with a more skilful awareness present ourselves as an example of what it is we ourselves believe in.

I have tried to show how receptiveness is the result of an energetic awareness of ourselves and others. Reaching out towards others and letting them get near us needs a courageous openness with the defences which prevent real communication. Not only a laying back of ourselves from defence is required, we need also to go out, forward from/with ourselves with energy, with aliveness. Both the spiritually feminine and the spiritually masculine qualities are required for true receptivity. This way we are not only open to our friends but more open to their spiritual influence, for the more integrated we become the more refined our energies are for the receiving and developing in ourselves the qualities necessary for the spiritual life.

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AMARAVATI NEWS Anoma

The Amaravati community is planning on moving to West London, so that we can be involved with the centre there. The community of Ratnadvipa, where the Order members live who have been running the centre, are moving themselves very soon and are trying to get a place nearer the centre, so this seems a good time for us to move into the area too. West London is a small centre at present with plenty of room for us to get involved in a creative way.

So what we're concentrating on at the moment is looking for a large house, preferably in the Fulham/West Kensington area, and making as much money as possible towards this. We feel it's important to maintain a large women's community in London, both for the sake of current community members, and for future members and visitors. So we need a large house. West London have formed a housing association so it's possible we could try and buy a house through this, but due to the procedures involved and the money needed, this could take a long time. So if we can find a house to rent in the meantime, we will take it as we'd like to move as soon as possible. As for making money, Kusa Cushions is piling up meditation cushions and mats ready for sale at the Festival of Mind and Body and also in shops. They're also making lots and lots of curtains. Besides this, there is a possibility of obtaining a contract for making car seat covers which could earn us £600 a week. Unfortunately painting and decorating jobs have not been very consistent. This has partly been due to the time of year and also, to some extent, to prejudice towards us when the prospective customer finds out the team consists of all women. Still, several jobs have been successfully completed. As we are particularly concerned with making money at the moment, and work isn't regular, the decorating team are either taking temporary outside jobs, or are helping with the cushion making.

For the last couple of months, we've been attending West London's classes, particularly on beginner's night on Wednesdays, and I will shortly be taking over leading the class. Anjali and I are now on the council of West London and will be attending regular meetings. So the next step is just to actually move over there...

Incidentally, the house here will not revert to the Department

of Transport when we leave. Plans are already afoot for its use within the Friends. As it may be several years before the motoway scheme begins and the house has to come down, it's pleasing to know that, after all the work that's been put in, it will continue to be used by the Friends.

Changes in the community - Marichi is now in India (I had a letter from her this morning - she'll be meeting up with Susanna from Helsinki soon and has already seen Padmavajra in Pune, Yuvaraj, Virabadra and Padmapani, who are all travelling around India. She's currently at Goa on a sunny palm beach!), Vimala has just moved to Mandarava, where she will be joined shortly by Diana. Vimala's first priorities are to buy a car and to get a full time job, to bring in money for the work that needs doing on the place. Diana may get a part time job and will be working on the greenhouses. Between them they will look after the place and get things ready for the regular women's retreats that are held there. Annie Leigh has her studio there, and there is a possibility of one or two others moving in over the next few months (Anne Murphy has now moved from Mandarava and might be moving to Brighton). Mandarava remains a branch of FWBO Winstead. I wish Vimala and Diana very well at Mandarava.

Something that I've particularly enjoyed recently is leading two short study retreats at White Row (our retreat cottage near Seaford in Sussex), for the community. There were just 6 or 7 of us each time - the first group studying the 11 Positive Mental Events from the recent Mitrata, and the second, The Perfection of Contemplation from the Bodhicaryavatara. We studied in the mornings and had most of the afternoons free for walking and relaxing. The downs are right behind the cottage and the sea about 25 minutes walk away. The combination of the surroundings with study and the small number of people was excellent. If there's time between house hunting and cushion making, we'll be going again soon!

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CONTRIBUTION FROM SARAH CHILDE

Would it be possible to print this section of the Buddha's sayings (Anguttara Nikaya) in the next Dakini? It is just the list of benefits which can be expected from the metta bhavana practice, and found to be very conducive!

" Bhikkhus, when the heart-deliverance of loving kindness is maintained in being, made much of, used as one's vehicle, used as one's foundation, established, consolidated, and properly managed, the eleven blessings can be expected. What are the eleven?

A man sleeps in comfort;
he wakes in comfort;
he dreams no evil dreams;
he is dear to human beings;
he is dear to non-human beings;
the gods guard him;
no fire or poison or weapon harms him;
his mind can be quickly concentrated;
the expression of his face is serene;

he dies without falling into confusion;
and, even if he fails to penetrate any further, he
will pass on the world of High Divinity, to the
Brahma world."

I suppose this seems to be so useful to me because being a
list it was easy to memorise and thus strengthen the awareness
that there are benefits of practice from eleven aspects (no
less) and that they are quite ordinary and common sense except
for one or two improvables.

I also wonder if this piece of my personal writing is readable.
It comes out of thinking about doing the Metta and formed into
these lines very quickly around a bit of the SGAM-PO-PA's
'Jewel Ornament of Liberation' the chapter on Benevolence
and Compassion, where he says that the root of benevolence
lies in memory of benefits received and in particular from one's
mother etc. etc. Here it is (it's not very good poetry or
prose - I know nothing about form).

I am, I feel, I breathe, in and out, over and over
and over, as the tide swells and spreads over
the sands, and I swell, as in my mother,
her womb, I felt, expanding from an oval grain..

* SHE GAVE ME A BODY

over and over, I breathe in, and I contain the air
as the bird holds the air.. 'So ham so ham so ham'
as my mother bore many things to feed and
nourish..

* SHE GAVE ME LIFE

over and over, I breathe out, spreading an
endless wave along the flat sand
as my mother was constant and taught
me patiently what, and how to do..

SHE SHOWED ME THE WAY

over and over, I breathe, and the billion
grains are all one sand, and the waves
one water, the repeating tides are one
movement, in me, .. full of this, ..
I swell, and spread.. towards
a million mothers.

* The capitals signify a sort of 3 part structure and are
phrases directly out of SGAMPOPA.

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THE BEGINNINGS OF A WOMEN'S COMMUNITY IN AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND Eve Gill

I arrived in Auckland, in November, from Christchurch where
I have been living for the last two years. At the airport I
was met by Anne and Udaya, from there we headed off into
Auckland city. As I gazed out the window at the passing
countryside, I noticed a triple rainbow, against the dark
grey clouds. An omen? Astounding in itself!

The week before my scenery had been the total opposite. I
had spent seven days on a tramp in the Abel Tasman National
Park, with Vijaya and two other friends. The Park is just
outside of Nelson (the very north of the South Island). Nelson

Nelson is the main fruit growing area in New Zealand. Well, sun, golden beaches, bush and babbling streams were the highlights. Nature's beauty!

So here I was, travelling into the heart of the grey city, wondering what situation I'd find myself in up here. I had ideas of living with other committed women, but in Auckland, although there are just as many women involved as there are men, most of the women have family commitments. However, after speaking to Margs, I found out that she too wanted to live in a similar situation. So we took the plunge! The house was clean but the colours inside weren't very tasteful. We painted the rooms that needed it, pulled out a few fixtures which were impracticable and made it comfortable and aesthetically pleasing. Not long after we moved in Megha came up from Wellington (which is South of the North Island). She didn't know what was happening up here as she had been in Australia for a few weeks. She moved in. So it worked out well, and we created the situation we needed. It isn't all plain sailing, but I'm finding it less complicated than living in a mixed community.

As for the future - I'm hoping to leave for England in May, and Megha is leaving for Wellington in August, as her Occupational Therapy training takes her back there, so.... Five months is long enough to make the effort.

Our address is 39 Francis Street, Grey Lynn, Auckland 2. If anyone wishes to write, don't hesitate! From 'down under' we don't get half the contact we'd like.

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TWO POEMS FROM ANNE MACMILLAN

Gift of a flower
Flower, a hyacinth.
White, lovely, smelling
strong but sweet.
Lovely smell calls me back . . .
From quick snatched sleep.
Makes me think of frailty
Mine.
(me? frail? never!)
I'm strong.
A gift from my sister.
One of many gifts.
I love these sisterwomen
Women I share with.
(love? me? never!)
Do they see my frailty, weakness,
Tiredness?
Why can't I admit to tired,
Gracefully accept that this body needs a rest?
Why hide what I know they see?
I know they hear--
My lion's roar a quavering meow
Pathetic plea for milk
And comfort
(comfort? me? never!)
I'm strong.

And always
Do they see the fork I carry in my sleeve
To stab off unwanted advances, help, affection?
Pathetically half-hidden in my torn cardigan?
The only flesh it ever rips my own
The main discomfort mine,
I think they do--
To be honest I really think they do.
(honest? me? never!)
It hurts too much--- it means letting go.
I'm not strong.

YOURS SINCERELY

Dear Teresa,
I dreamed last night
I gave you a letterpoem
Consisting of silence.
It had fourteen solid silver lines
of quietness..
It had a rainbow pouring through your window,
It had hot sunny days.
It had a proud field of tulips
But mainly
It had silence.
Wasn't that beautiful?
Wasn't that unlikely?
From me
Who only ever offers words
Smoke - screens.

--oOo--

Here are two talks given by Shridevi and Malini on the Christmas retreat at Mandarava. They were aimed particularly at newer people to the Movement as there were a lot of these on the retreat at that time. However, they were felt by several people to be of general interest - Editor.

POSITIVE EMOTION: LIFEBLOOD OF THE SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY
Shridevi

In the 'Three Jewels' Bhante writes:

"Without a centre, a radius and a circumference a circle cannot exist. Of the circle of Buddhism the Buddha is the radiant centre, the Dharma, as the shortest distance from potential to actual Enlightenment, the radius, and the Sangha the perfect unbroken circumference.

Whether one is in spiritual relation with the Buddha, through the Dharma, and therefore whether one is truly a segment of the circumference of the circle is determined not by the assumption of external differentiae, nor by verbal professions, but by whether one actually practises the Dharma or not."

So practising the Dharma makes us part of the Sangha. It is the Sangha that gives us the opportunity to put the Buddha's teaching into practice, and supported and inspired by others we make progress in, and through, our practice, and grow.

But for us to be able to enter the Sangha and to keep growing something essential is needed, and that is positive energy. We need positivity so that the first glimpse of Perfect Vision can arise, and we need positivity for confidence, Shraddha, to survive and grow.

Human beings are embodiments of energy. We are manifestations of universal energy. But we also have self-awareness, we ourselves can affect the state of our personal energy and so determine how much we are in contact with the universal energy, the Absolute, the Transcendental.

Negativity is resistance to the Transcendental, and therefore it needs to be dissolved before the Transcendental can influence us and take us to higher levels. So constant purification of energies is needed, a continuous transformation.

Only if this happens can we continue to grow. And we are truly alive only if we are growing; developing with the growth process in the universe, and not resisting it, or just stagnating. Only this gives true satisfaction to us, true meaning to our lives. And only if we are alive and growing can the Sangha be a dynamic circle within which we can help each other to grow more and also to spread the Dharma to help those outside to find true happiness for themselves. To keep our ideals functional, to enjoy and to carry forward the Three Jewels, we need to feel, at least sometimes, like the Windhorse in Bhante's poem:

'I am the Windhorse!
I am thought at its clearest,
Emotion at its noblest,
Energy at its most abundant.
I am Reverence. I am Friendliness. I am joy.'

The moments we feel like this, inspired and strong and positive, are the times that strengthen our motivation to carry on, that remind us of our first glimpse of Perfect Vision which made us enter the Sangha and make it clearer, brighter. These moments of great positivity strengthen us because then the Transcendental can influence us. We are not resisting, we are in direct contact with Reality, which at other times seems so distant.

Spiritual Reality seems distant when we feel negative. We are hardly alive in the true sense of the word, and our negative energies can even harm those around us, instead of us being a support and an inspiration to them. These moments are particularly dangerous to ourselves because we are weakened by them. We begin to lose sight of our ideals and our confidence in them begins to fade away. This kind of basic negativity is the opposite of Shraddha, as described in Mitrata No.19:

'Sometimes we are beset by unclarity about our goal. When this happens we lose faith in the possibility of there being such a thing as Enlightenment or growth. Even the words lose their meaning and sound hollow, we lose faith in other members of the spiritual community; we distrust them and close off: our practice becomes dry, empty, and seems a waste of time. This unskilful state is clearly dangerous because it has within it the power to strengthen itself if its dictates are heeded.'

The danger is that we stop growing, slip back - and the eventual result is spiritual death.

To prevent negativity from overwhelming us when trying to purify ourselves from it, to pull us through the times of weakness, we need first of all clear thinking: 'thought at its clearest' is followed by 'emotion at its noblest', then comes 'energy at its most abundant'. Energy comes from emotions, but first with a clear mind we must know and learn to recognise our unskilful negative emotions. We must know what 'the near and far enemies of positive emotion' are, and then work to eradicate them.

It can be quite frightening to experience our hatred, our jealousy, envy, cruelty and greed; our clinging affection, excitability, unhealthy grief and cold indifference. But only when we have become honestly aware of such feelings, can we release the energy invested in them. Then we can begin to transform and refine them into their opposites: metta, karuna, mudita, upeksha; that is: loving kindness, sympathetic joy, compassion and tranquillity - these qualities that make the spiritual community alive and united.

On retreat particularly it can be really difficult to face one's own and other people's negativity, because intensified practice is making us more aware, and we are getting through to deeper layers of unconscious negativity much faster than usual. We can perhaps feel quite concretely the delusive hindrance and the fear that is bred by it: how it makes us cling to the ego, pulls us down towards the wheel of Life, resisting the influence of the Transcendental. It can be hard to make an intense, systematic effort to develop, organised for us hour by hour.

But on retreat particularly we can also experience our practise of the Dharma becoming renewed. We may feel more tangibly than before that our energies actually start flowing together in Mindfulness of Breathing. We may begin to realise that Metta is energy, that in meditation we have the opportunity to attract more positive energy, higher energy, to ourselves and to direct that energy to other people, and at the same time to purify and transform our own psycho-physical organism.

As a result we become increasingly receptive and aware of those around us. When, chanting, we move in a circle we may actually begin to experience our more refined energies. As a result of systematic meditation we push through our negativity and our emotions begin to really flow, and to flow as reverence, friendliness and joy. Our goal is again clearly in sight and we are moving towards it. Chanting 'Namo tassa Bhagavato arahato Samma Sambuddhasa' we really feel: 'homage to him who has developed all positive qualities in himself and conquered all the negative ones and is therefore perfectly Enlightened'. When we move around with others who are also actively, dynamically aware of body, speech and mind, the circle is like a garland, like a radiant sun generating positive life-giving energy. We feel receptive, permeated by the Transcendental and therefore we also radiate outwards. We feel inspired, we feel real, we feel truly alive. Metta, karuna, mudita and upeksha feel real, natural,

and therefore the spiritual community, the Sangha, is real and alive and powerful: because we feel clear about our goal, about how to use our energy.

And when we feel like this, our confidence is strong, and makes us strong. This is what real basic positivity is, what real Shraddha is:

"We experience growth as an actuality, the precepts as profound insights into the way to act so that our lives become adorned with the bright gems of mindfulness, we experience maitri, openness and integrity, our contact with spiritual friends as a treasure of incalculable value. On the basis of such a strong positive emotion, our practice takes on real life and a solid interest develops. When practice is strong then certainty about the goal, the path, and the spiritual community is developed. We tread the spiral path that leads step by step to Enlightenment."
(Mitrata 19)

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THE PRINCIPLE OF NON-HARMING AS AN ASPECT OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE Malini

During the course of the last week we have all participated the Sevenfold Puja and as such we have all chanted the 5 Precepts. These precepts as I expect most of you know are a code of ethical behaviour which has been handed down to us from the Buddha.

So what I want to do is to try to clarify what these precepts are, or rather what is the principle behind them with particular reference to the first precept which is of course to undertake to abstain from harming all living beings.

Firstly, though the precepts are not commandments. There is no God in Buddhism. There is no authority or power who will tell us what we can or cannot do, and therefore there is no guilt if we do not do what we should have done. There is not even a pope to tell us whether or not we can use contraceptives. In Buddhism we alone have to take responsibility for our actions. We are our own judge if you like.

This being the case why did the Buddha give us the precepts to follow? What the Buddha said was, that an Enlightened being, one who has gained insight into Reality, one who has escaped from the bonds of Samsara and Conditioned Existence, will behave in such and such a way. Therefore if you wish to be Enlightened, if you wish to free yourself from the sufferings of Conditioned Existence, by behaving in this way you will be laying down the conditions, or at least some of the conditions upon which insight can arise upon which Enlightenment can be attained.

Therefore the choice is entirely up to us. If we want to evolve, if we want to grow, if we want to be free from suffering then he has shown us a way in which to do this. But the choice is ours.

I think I can safely assume that all of us have or do feel our lives to be less than satisfactory. We have felt that life should be more fulfilling, more satisfactory, and it is this dissatisfaction which has taken us along to a meditation class and also here on retreat, to see if this will help make our lives more fulfilling, and more meaningful.

The Buddha said that all conditioned existence is unsatisfactory. So he simply points out what we have already discovered for ourselves. But he says there is a way out, we can be free from the sufferings of conditioned existence and he gave many teachings pointing the way out.

One of these teachings or sets of teachings is called the Three Trainings and sometimes known as the 3 Fold Path to Liberation, and these 3 teachings are Ethics, Meditation and Wisdom. The Buddha said with regard to this, such and such is morality, such and such is meditation, and such and such is wisdom. Great become the fruits, great the advantages of meditation when it is set around with morality. Great become the fruits, great the advantages of wisdom when it is set round with meditation.

So we can see that the more ethical we are the more benefit we will gain in our meditation. The more we meditate the more we will be laying down the foundations or conditions upon which Wisdom can arise.

For most of us meditation is not easy. Few if any of us sit down to do the mindfulness of breathing and are instantly mindful of our breath. On the whole we find it difficult to be constantly mindful, completely concentrated, completely content for more than a few moments at a time.

And likewise when we sit down to do the metta bhavana we find it difficult. We do not usually feel ourselves to be full of love we do not feel metta exuding from us, radiating from us, encompassing all living beings everywhere. Quite often we have to slave away to get a little spark of positivity shining within us.

So why is this? We have all experienced life as unsatisfactory as unfulfilling to some degree and we want to change it so we meditate, but we still find it difficult. Life is still not satisfactory. So we have to refer back to the Buddha, who says, 'Great will be the benefits, great the advantages of meditation if set round with morality'.

So I think we should assume if we are not already painfully aware, that our lives are not ethical. Some of us might not think that we are that bad, we might even think that we are quite good really, basically we mean well, but how aware are we, how aware are we of the effects we have on other people, how aware are we of the effects of our actions and speech and our thoughts? If they do not appear at first sight to be bad then could they in fact not be better?

Before we can answer these questions perhaps we have to look more closely into the principle of ethics and in particular to the principle of non-harming.

If we look, if we examine all the precepts, we will see that in fact they all fit into the first precept. If we do not follow these precepts, or modes of behaviour, we will be doing harm in one way or another both to ourselves and other people, whether physically, mentally or emotionally.

So the first precept. To abstain from harming all living beings. Is it in fact possible not to harm living beings? No it is not possible. The air we breathe, the ground we walk on, the soil we dig in order to grow our own food or to build our own shelter or even a retreat centre, are full of living beings which we are harming most of the time. Yet if we do not breathe or walk or dig we would not be able to live and that would be harmful to us and we too are living beings.

So how do we solve this problem? Well, as in the title of this talk, it is the principle of non harming that we are or should be concerned with. In Buddhism all actions, whether of body, speech, or mind, are considered skilful or unskilful depending upon the state of mind with which they are performed. Any action which is based on greed or craving, hatred or fear, or ignorance or mental confusion, is considered unskilful and therefore harmful.

Conversely, actions which are based on generosity, love, and understanding or wisdom are considered skilful and are therefore not harmful. So we can see that behind each of the precepts which we undertake to abstain from is the motive of greed, hatred and confusion.

Right at the centre, at the hub of the Tibetan Wheel of Life, thing being a picture or rather a mirror of conditioned existence, we see three animals, a pig a cock and a snake and each one holds the tail of the animal in front in its mouth. And they keep going round and round in viscous circles. Each one of these animals represents greed, hatred and ignorance.

So we can see that right at the hub, right at the centre of conditioned existence is greed, hatred and ignorance and they are all interdependent. And this is us. It is what keeps us spinning round and round in conditioned existence. Although not particularly pleasant, it is quite easy at least theoretically to see this.

Because we are ignorant and confused we crave for things which will not give us any permanent satisfaction. And while we are craving for something we hate anything that gets in our way or which prevents us from getting what we want. If we do get what we want we get attached to it. Then we hate anybody or anything which threatens to take it away from us. So all the time we are concerned only for ourselves. We are not concerned about the effects we are having on other people. Nor do we really see, or we simply shut out the fact that the whole process is not making us happy. How can we be happy or contented if we are feeling hatred or if we are craving for something or if we are clinging on to something for fear of losing it?

And it's because of ignorance, because we are not aware enough that the things we crave are impermanent, are subject

to change. We do not see the cause and effect of our actions. We do not see that they could not make us happy or content.

So the Buddha says, if we behave in any of these ways, with any of these motives, we will not get Enlightened, we will not be free from conditioned existence, our lives ultimately will not be happy or fulfilling. But, however, if we act from motives of generosity, and love and wisdom, we can free ourselves and others from the sufferings of samsara and gain Supreme Enlightenment. It is through wisdom that we can see that all conditioned existence is impermanent and therefore not ultimately satisfactory. Because we see that conditioned existence is not satisfactory we would not want to crave for something which will not satisfy us. And if we are not craving for anything, hatred does not arise as hatred only arises when we don't get what we want. Whether in the form of possessions, position, affection, praise etc. etc.

Knowing this intellectually does not really help all that much unfortunately. As it is the experience, the real understanding, the understanding which involves all our emotions. ~~When with the whole~~ of our being we understand that conditioned existence is impermanent then we are able to change our whole attitude to life. So what can we do to bring about this understanding, this realisation, so that we can feel what we only know with our heads, our intellects, most of the time?

One of the things we can do is to meditate or contemplate the impermanence of conditioned things. We can maybe start by contemplating the flowers on the shrine as in the basic puja. Today they are fresh and blooming, tomorrow or the day after they will be faded and fallen and we reflect that our bodies too are like that.

Or we can simply reflect on our own emotional states and see how fickle they are, constantly changing. One moment we feel happy, next sad. Or we feel energetic, then tired, pleased then angry and so on. Just think how many different feelings or emotions we experience during the course of one single day.

Or we can reflect on our thoughts. One moment we think one thing and the next something completely different, even contradictory. They are all impermanent and therefore only relatively real.

Before I go on any further though, there is one great danger if we reflect too much in this way without balancing these thoughts with metta and generosity. We are likely to do the very thing we are trying not to do which is to harm ourselves and others. If we are only reflecting in this way on impermanence we could end up either very alienated from our feelings or extremely depressed.

Just as the unskillful actions are interdependent, so also in a way are the skillful ones, at least to the extent that they have to be developed equally all the time. If we don't we will have a very onesided point of view which is not skillful and will therefore be harmful.

So along with wisdom we must develop love, the opposite of hate. That is love in the sense of metta, of positive feelings

of friendliness towards all sentient beings. This does of course include oneself.

So many people seem to find it difficult to like themselves, but if we are not friendly towards ourselves, if we are not confident within ourselves, if we do not like the things we do, we are bound to feel negative, and when we feel negative we either act unskilfully outwardly, or we block our emotions which is equally harmful, as our emotions are energy and energy is life. Without energy there is no life. So to the extent that we block our emotions, to that extent we block life which is unskilful and therefore harmful. So we must learn to like ourselves, to be friendly towards ourselves. When we feel positive with ourselves then we can feel positive and friendly towards other people, quite spontaneously. Our friendship will not be based on our need for other people but on mutual enjoyment or mutual discovery. I do of course mean need in an emotionally dependent way. If we do not like ourselves, if our energies are blocked, then I feel inclined to say that we should do almost anything which we enjoy doing at least some of the time. We do have to be a bit careful though. We should at least consider what effects our actions will have on other people. That they will not be harmful to others. There are many things we can do to get our energies moving.

We can do physical work, we can do some form of creative or artistic work which will involve all our emotions, we can listen to music, dance, communicate... and we can even do the Sevenfold Puja, putting the whole of ourselves into it, really trying to feel what we are saying, really trying to feel the emotions which the words convey. Each section of the puja conveys an aspect of positive emotion which we would experience if we really put ourselves into it. And if we do feel these positive emotions as in the last section of the puja, we can transfer these positive emotions towards all living beings.

Although I have perhaps stressed that we should feel friendly towards ourselves, that we should release our own energy, it can of course work the other way round. By giving, by being generous to others, we are not only cutting down our own greed and hatred which will benefit us, but we are also helping others. It makes others happier, which in turn makes us happier. When we feel friendly towards someone we want to give and when we give to someone we feel more friendly towards them. There are so many things we can give, whatever we have we can give, whether it's possessions, material things, food, our time, our affection, encouragement, or any form of energy. The more energy we have the more energy we can give, which in turn will create more energy to give with.

So I think it should be clear to see the principle of ethics and in particular the principle of non harming. Any action, whether mental, verbal or physical, which is based on greed, hatred or ignorance, will be harmful and is therefore not conducive to the spiritual life. Whereas actions which are friendly, generous, and are based on understanding or wisdom, are conducive to the spiritual life, are conducive to happiness and are therefore not harmful.

As in the first precept where we endeavour to abstain from harming all living beings, if we purposely go out to harm any living being we can only be motivated by greed, hatred or ignorance and so motivated, we are not happy. But if we are motivated by understanding, and by friendliness, we would not want to harm any living being, there would be no intention to harm anything.

So as it says in the Dhammapada, we have to:

"Conquer anger by love,
Evil by good
Conquer the miser by liberality
and the liar with truth."

Then perhaps we can truly say as it says in the Dhammapada:

"Happy indeed we live without hate among the hateful.
We live free from hatred amongst hateful men."

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NEW WOMEN MITRAS (from December 1978)

New Zealand - Auckland

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Marion Feasey
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Gina Bond,
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Glasgow: Norma Duff (sorry, I don't have the address - Editor)

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London Noel Lehane,
(LBC) 184 Lansdowne Drive,
London E8.

Cornwall Liz Pankhurst - now living at:
'Beulah',
95 Bishop's Way,
Bethnal Green,
London, E.2.

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS FOR WOMEN MITRAS Dhammadinna

WOMEN'S 10 DAY MITRA RETREAT from 7th to 17th May at Mandarava,

To Retreat Organiser at Mandarava.
cost £4 a day. Bookings for whole period only./ Programme
will include study taken from the recent Mitratas on Kalyana
Mitrata - please bring these with you.

WOMEN'S ORDER/MITRA EVENT

From Thursday evening 21st June until Monday morning 25th June
at Mandarava. Cost £12.

This is a special event we hope all women Order members and
Mitras will attend. The programme will involve meditation,
study groups and every evening talks given by different Order
members on the theme Self and Others.

Sleeping accommodation at Mandarava will be crowded (we expect
30-40 people) so can you bring a tent if you have one?

Bookings to Retreat Organiser, Mandarava, including cheque,
saying whether you are bringing a tent, and how many it sleeps.

GENERAL FORTHCOMING EVENTS FOR WOMEN

3 DAY OPEN RETREAT AT AMARAVATI from Thursday evening 12th
April to Sunday evening 15th April. Cost £12. Bookings to
Retreat Organiser, Amaravati please. If you can only come
for 2 days, that's O.K. Please state which two days you're
coming when booking. Cost then will be £8. Please book as
soon as possible, with remittance.

3 WEEK OPEN RETREAT AT MANDARAVA from Friday evening 3rd
August to Monday 20th August. Cost is £4 per day - 10%
discount if you book for the whole three weeks. This year
the whole retreat is open so you can come and go when you
like over the whole three weeks. Application forms from
Retreat Organiser at Mandarava, Street Farm, The Street,
Aslacton, Nr. Norwich, Norfolk. (Tivetshall 344.)

NEXT DAKINI: MAY

COPY DATE: 1st week in May please