

# DAKINI



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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

## CONTENTS

What is a Mitra?	Dhammadinna	Page 2
Beulah	Sanghadevi	5
Christianity Must Go	Sanghadevi	7
"Damn Christ and His Accursed Religion"	Sanghadevi	8
Poems written on the recent women's Study Retreat	Teresa Fisher	13
Wesak Poem	Noel Lehane	14
Letter from Aniketa		15
Forthcoming Events	Dhammadinna & Anoma	18
New Mitras and Order members	Anoma	18

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## WHAT IS A MITRA? Dhammadinna

Before describing what a Mitra is, I would like to recall how the Mitra system came into being in the Movement, and how the system basically works.

For many years, in the early days of the Friends, Bhante took all classes and led all retreats and was thus in personal contact with all Friends who came along. After several years, in 1972, he felt able to hand over the running of the centre and retreats to a team of Order members and take a sabbatical in Cornwall. 1972 was, in fact, an important and eventful year in the Friends. We had found a permanent centre at Archway after many months of being centreless; there had been four ordinations at the Easter retreat, the first for a couple of years, and from then on you could begin to feel that an Order was functioning as opposed to there being a few scattered Order members; Bhante started up ordination classes for other regular Friends interested in taking refuge; he had led the last open large mixed retreat at Keffolds, and delivered the Tantric series of lectures at the Archway centre; the first communities had begun to spring up around the Archway centre, making it possible for several Friends to realise that Buddhism could be a full-time occupation. At the end of the year he left for Cornwall and Order members and Friends in London began to learn to stand on their own two feet and get on with the day to day running of things. He returned the following year to perform three lots of ordinations and then settled in Norfolk.

In 1977 he called a number of Order members together and outlined to us his ideas for the Mitra system, then called the Kalyana Mitra system. Now that Bhante was not in regular contact with regular Friends, how could the contact be maintained? How could regular Friends learn about Ordination, or learn about the Movement in more detail. The system began with any regular Friend interested in taking their involvement further being able to ask two Order members to be their Kalyana mitras. These two Order members would develop regular and intimate contact with the Mitra and give the Mitra a closer link with the Order and Bhante. The three way relationship would be approved by all Order members and a special ceremony would be performed by Bhante. Several such relationships were formed and Kalyana Mitras organised study groups, special retreats and Mitra days under the guidance of Padmaraja who was Mitra Convenor and who also edited Mitrata. In this way Mitras could discover through their closer contact with their Kalyana Mitras what commitment and ordination meant and could work towards that themselves and Bhante would know when somebody was recommended for ordination that at least two, and probably several other Order members, knew that person really well.

After some time of the system functioning in this way we decided to make a change and make the system a Mitra system. To become a Mitra previously had meant that you had to have Kalyana Mitras, you had to know two Order members well enough and there had to be Order members 'available' to ask, (the Order was still quite small at this time). This created a slightly artificial situation in many cases and it was felt to be much more satisfactory if a Mitra became a Mitra in relation to a certain chapter of the Order and



allowed Kalyana Mitra relationships to grow naturally. As Bhante said at the time 'practice often outstrips theory, and that is how it should be'. The system still operates in this way.

To keep referring to a 'system' perhaps draws attention away from the basic principles involved. The main principle of the Mitra system is contact. Contact between Kalyana Mitras and Mitra Convenors, contact between these people and Bhante, and contact between Order members and Mitras and contact between Mitras. We know the much told story of the Buddha telling Ananda that Kalyana Mitrata is the whole of the Spiritual Life and it is to confront this teaching and to put it into practice that the Mitra system exists.

The Movement is not a power structure and relationships within it ideally are not based on authority, power, projection or need. The Movement is not a group and is not therefore something you can join by having the right credentials. It exists to help and encourage people to become individuals and the way we help each other to develop is through metta and through Kalyana Mitrata. The Mitra system exists to encourage and facilitate spiritual friendship between people within the Movement. It is in a way a channel for such positive communication.

Looked at in a more pictorial way it is like a Mandala. In the centre is Bhante our teacher, in touch with his teachers and with the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. In a ring around him are the Order members. In a further ring are all the Mitras and outside them all the Friends. Everyone within the Mandala is in contact one with another through metta.

In more practical terms the system works in a definite way to ensure contact actually happens. If you are a Friend and want to become a Mitra you approach an Order member you know. He or she will take your request to the local Mitra Convenor who will discuss it with the local chapter of the Order. If the request is agreed the Mitra convenor will pass on the feeling of the local Order Meeting to the monthly meeting of Mitra Convenors and Convenor of Mitras (local chapters and communities have a Mitra Convenor, responsible for Mitras in the community or around the Centre; there is also one overall Convenor of Mitras and one Convenor of women mitras). If the request is agreed at this meeting then a ceremony is arranged at the local centre or community and the Friend becomes a Mitra. His or her name is published in Shabda, the Order newsletter. So although you, as a Mitra, may only know one or two Order members, all Order members, and especially all Mitra Convenors, Kalyana Mitras and Bhante, know of and about you. You are in spiritual contact with the whole Order and with Bhante through the Order members you actually know.

So the system exists to help communication flow. Order members, Kalyana Mitras and Mitra Convenors get together to plan retreats, events, study and to discuss whether Mitras are getting the contact they need.

So what is a Mitra? What is the difference between a Mitra and a Friend? First of all let's look at what is a Friend. A Friend is anyone who is in contact with the Movement. A Friend may be someone who is faithful and regular but doesn't



want to take his or her involvement further at the moment. A Friend may be someone who is comparatively new and not yet ready to become a Mitra. A Friend may be someone positive about the Friends but who has other priorities than spiritual development. This may be family life, a career, even an interest in other religions or other Buddhist groups. Friends come and go from Centres with no especial contact beyond classes and retreats.

Becoming a Mitra is quite a step beyond this and a Mitra is someone who already considers themselves to be a Buddhist and someone who wants to explore their Buddhism within the context of the Friends. If you have got to this stage you feel very strongly that the Friends is for you. You have some basic understanding or feeling for what the Friends is about and you want to grow as an Individual. It is very much a feeling thing. You are drawn towards the Movement more and more, drawn towards the Order or individual Order members, drawn towards the whole feeling and practice of the Friends and you want to be more and more involved. You feel very positive towards Bhante and his teachings, towards the Order, towards the Movement as a whole, and you want to give. Your development begins to take priority over other activities in your life and the whole range of positive emotions; generosity, energy, receptivity, devotion and metta begin to flow.

Becoming a Mitra, is therefore, a very definite and positive step. The ceremony acknowledges this step and you move as an aspiring individual into the circle of Mitras. Study groups, Mitra days, special retreats, seminars and other activities are available for you to attend so that you desire for more contact becomes actual.

I would like to stress the point that the contact is actual. The nucleus, the heart of the Friends is the Order, the Spiritual Community; an association of Individuals committed to working on themselves and working within the Movement. We call it a Movement because it moves!, with the most inspired Order members blazing the trail. It is this energy, inspiration, creativity and commitment that you want to be in contact with so that you too can move, can grow and extend yourself more and more. So just as you cannot be a nominal Order member, you cannot really be a nominal Mitra. You must be in contact, and moving with the Movement, though growing in your own unique way. So contact is all, and that contact must to a large degree be physical. So all the events that are organised are arranged to provide as many opportunities as possible for actual friendships one with another and reinforce our individuality which is so often undermined in Society at large.

Most Mitras, I know are in good contact, even living together in communities or working together or attending functions regularly but we can never sit back and think our Metta is strong enough or our communication direct or positive enough. Some mitras are not so regularly in physical contact and don't perhaps live within striking distance of a Centre. Here we must keep in contact through letters and get on retreats when we can. It need not necessarily be a disadvantage. Some geographically distant Mitras make much more of an effort to stay in positive contact with the Movement than others more physically close. If we can't get



along to events regularly we can still keep in touch through Dakini, through Mitrata, through the Newsletter and by making sure we read all the latest publications and transcripts of seminars. In this way we know what the latest thinking and developments in the Movement are, even if at the moment we cannot be directly involved. Of course we can also keep in contact by doing our meditation practice regularly, especially the Metta.

Being in touch really means that the communication channels are open and as long as this is happening there will be movement forward. So take responsibility for any negative feelings that come up. If you feel negative, resentful or critical of the Movement or the Order and you aren't open about it with your Kalyana Mitras or local Order members then the communication flow ceases, you block off and begin to see the Order as an authoritarian body and you will drift emotionally if not physically away.

The main responsibility for keeping in touch lies with Order members, Kalyana Mitras and Mitra Convenors but this doesn't mean that Mitras can't take the initiative in communication. If you are not getting enough contact, demand more. If you have things you want to discuss or any difficulties don't hesitate to see your local convenor or Vajradaka (Convenor of Mitras) or myself. Communication, though based on Metta, needn't be lacking in dynamism and energy.

So enjoy your Mitraship, enjoy your friendships, enjoy your involvement, give as much as you can in all ways and take what you need, be positive, happy, and true to yourself. In this way, quite naturally, in your own time, your devotion will ripen into commitment and you will one day step forward as an individual and 'join' the circle of the Sangha.

NOTE: As Convenor of women Mitras, I would like to keep in touch with all Mitras and to do this I must know where people are. If you change your address can you please drop me a postcard giving me your new address and phone number. A few Mitras have moved recently and I do not have their addresses. If I want to contact you, or come and visit you, or invite you on a retreat, I can't. My address is: Khadiravani, Greengates, Oxshott Road, Leatherhead, Surrey. Phone: Leatherhead 77526. If you want to contact me urgently one of the community members will know where I am. If you don't get an answer from Khadiravani phone, phone the Secret Garden 01-688 2899 and ask for Anne, Anni or Sue who will get a message to me.

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BEULAH Sanghadevi

Hello! I thought I would write a little something about 'Beulah', the womens' community in Bethnal Green, near the London Buddhist Centre.

The house was originally squatted by Marichi and a couple of women Mitras in the summer of 1977, not long before Amaravati was founded. It is now part of a Housing Co-operative formed through the efforts of people squatting



in adjacent house in the same street and two other streets. The three streets form a triangle and everyone's gardens back on to each other, so it is known as 'The Triangle' to locals. It's a couple of minutes walk from Victoria Park and the canal, which is nice, and is on a 'relatively quiet' road. The house can comfortably accommodate a community of six as well as provide a spare room for guests, a shrine room, kitchen and 'bathroom'.

Since I moved in in October from Maravati, a completely new community has formed with the exception of Jan, who was one of the original community members. The community now consists of myself, Malini, Shridevi, Jan, Hilary and Liz who has just moved up from Cornwall.

Jan works for a record company and the rest of us are involved in the Centre/Co-op to varying degrees.

At the moment I am caretaker of the LBC and am also involved in supporting classes most nights of the week. I take two study groups; one for women Mitras and one for women who are not yet Mitras but who are coming to classes fairly regularly at the Centre. I am enjoying getting into taking study groups and would like to develop this area more. I also want to spend more time developing my contact and communication with the women involved around the LBC.

Shridevi is the secretary at the Centre and is also involved in supporting and taking yoga classes and other classes. Malini works in the Co-op and will be setting up a cafe with Liz in the near future. (Hopefully it will be functioning by the time you read this). The cafe will initially serve Co-op members and people attending classes at the Centre and later, the general public. Malini also supports the study groups I take.

Hilary spends three days nursing in a local hospital which conveniently lies a few minutes walk away. The other two days she spends in the second-hand shop in the Co-op. As well as this there is the community itself to put energy into so we are all quite busy. We had a working weekend about a month ago which was very enjoyable and constructive. It is very rare that we can all be together in the community and to actually do something together is even rarer. This weekend we partitioned two rooms whose dividing wall had been knocked down, thus providing an extra room. We also dampproofed and painted some walls and generally cleaned the place. Over Easter we had another 'working weekend' which spread over almost four days. Most of the community was there over this period for at least some of the time; Malini, Shridevi and Liz were there all of the time. Rosy from Maravati also stayed and Punyavati also came for a day. Liz did up the room on the front of the house which had been partitioned off and is now settled in there. I worked on the back room plastering up a large hole in the ceiling and finishing off the partitioning and then joined in the painting of the halls and stairs which the others were working on. Until then all the woodwork in the whole house was green, as was the ceiling. Now quite a lot of it is red or off white and the walls are white with a hint of brown. It was Malini's idea to change



the paintwork from green to red and it feels good to have a change. It'll be nice to get it finished - hopefully in the not too distant future. It was lovely weather over Easter and we sat out in the garden which has also been receiving some much needed attention from Hilary, Malini and Liz.

We have a morning meditation every weekday and a community evening on a Monday and the Order members have an Order meeting on Sundays and are usually joined in the Order members from Amaravati on the Sunday after Order Day, as well as by any other women Order members who are in London that weekend. This usually consists of Dhammadinna and occasionally Shrimala.

So I hope this gives you some idea of what is happening at 'Beulah'. If anyone wants to visit us and stay at Beulah please phone me or anyone else in the community to ask and we'll let you know if it is alright. (01-980 4151). You will be asked to give something to cover your food etc., if you stay, probably 75p. per day.

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#### CHRISTIANITY MUST GO     Sanghadevi

What I mean by this is that as aspiring or even committed Buddhists we must work towards freeing ourselves completely from all traces of Christianity. It is not enough for us to intellectually reject Christianity and the Christian World View (though that is a good start). We must free ourselves emotionally too.

Some of you may perhaps feel that you have enough to work on, enough to get through, without all this. But who knows - the things which are holding you back in your spiritual life may be due to Christian conditioning. It's probably safe for me to say that at least some of the things which hold us back will definitely be due to this.

So, if you haven't ever given much thought to your Christian upbringing and how it is affecting you now as an aspiring Buddhist, or even if you have, I'd suggest you read Bhante's 'Buddhism and Blasphemy' which, among other things, makes it quite clear that sooner or later all of us are going to have to start tackling our Christian conditioning at its roots if we are to really practise Buddhism seriously. Of course at the root of our trouble is GOD or rather, the belief in GOD.

At this point perhaps all of you will be wondering what the problem is - of course we don't believe in God - maybe we haven't for years. Of course we're sure Enlightenment is the true goal for us. But I wonder how many of us really feel that completely, right through to the roots of our being. How many of us can say with the force of our whole being and with complete happiness and confidence that 'GOD' is a myth. How many of us could walk into a church and damn GOD without feeling some fear or nervousness before doing so? And I don't mean fear of being arrested by the police or whatever because I don't think that is where the fear comes from if it is there. I believe it comes from a fear of GOD.



That part of us which is still trapped and held in Christian beliefs. If we have such a fear in us then we have to face it and free that locked up energy, and as a result we'll grow a lot quicker, and be a lot happier.

I've certainly realised I am an ex-Christian rather than a non-Christian - that is to say I am not yet completely free from Christianity. I have realised this before but have not really known how to handle the problem. Now I do, thanks to Bhante and Devamitra (who I believe came up with the phrase 'Damn Christ and His Accursed Religion') I'm starting to handle it by verbalising what I feel about Christianity, how negative and detrimental I feel it is, in whatever form helps me to emotionally reject it, this includes blaspheming.

I enclose in this issue of Dakini a copy of an article I wrote for SHABDA, the Order magazine, in April. Several Order members have got something out of reading it and maybe some of you will too. If you regard yourself as a Buddhist who is tolerant to Christianity, I suggest you become less tolerant. The chances are your tolerance is covering up that part of you which is still a Christian.

I hope this article has a positive effect on you rather than a negative one. If anyone wants to express any feelings on the subject, perhaps we could get together some time over the 3 Day Mitra Event in June for a discussion. Otherwise, talk to your local Order members - or write to Dakini.

Also - just to make matters clear - blasphemous T-shirts are not being produced en masse under the auspices of the FWO. Aloka will produce them according to individual demand.

'DAMN CHRIST AND HIS ACCURSED RELIGION' Sanghadevi  
(first published in SHABDA, April 1979)

Up till the last Order Day I have not felt particularly motivated to read Bhante's Buddhism and Blasphemy. It's not that I have been avoiding it. It's more that it wasn't the uppermost thing in my mind. But, after the discussion at Order Day which arose out of being informed that Devamitra and Aloka were in the process of producing blasphemous T-shirts, I did feel like reading it. In fact I felt I wanted to clarify in some way what exactly I did feel about Christianity. After reading it I started to write down whatever came into my head, or perhaps I should say, whatever burst forth from my unconscious about my Christian upbringing. What you are now reading is the result of several attempts to put my thoughts and feelings about Christianity into some coherent form suitable for Shabda. I don't think I've succeeded particularly well but on the other hand I think it's important that I actually express something. So here goes!

To all intents and purposes I am a Buddhist. To all intents and purposes I am committed to the Three Jewels and the vision they embody. Yet although I am a Buddhist and not a Christian, although consciously Christianity holds nothing of inspiration for me, although it feels narrow and limiting,



I know that I am not yet totally free from its grips; I am an ex-Christian rather than a non-Christian. Some idea of God is still lurking around in me somewhere; some fear of God, which will pop up and surprise me occasionally. And I don't mean pleasantly.

What I am beginning to see since Order Day is why and where this idea of God is lurking in me. Among other things it seems to be connected with my attitude to Christ up until this point in time.

Until the last Order Day I don't think I have ever actually questioned whether Jesus Christ himself is a harmful symbol. I suppose I've felt that Christ himself was O.K. Limited, yes, and of no comparison to the Buddha, but O.K. What went wrong was how everyone behaved after his death. Devaraja said that you can't separate Christ from Christianity, and this is what I am just beginning to realise. I'm going to have to reject Christ intellectually and emotionally, as well as God. In fact until I have rejected Christ I will not have rejected the concept of God.

I've only just made the connection that Christ, assuming he existed (which apparently is questionable, and again is something I had never considered) believed in God, proclaimed to be the Son of God even, and that this is the same God as the one which leads us to feel guilt and fear. The trouble with Christianity isn't the way Christians interpreted the life and teachings of Christ. The trouble is that Christ ever lived the way he did and taught what he did teach in the first place. That the fact of a Creator God was supposedly undeniably confirmed by Christ's very existence.

I thought that at least it was a God of Love that Christ proclaimed, that a God of Power was a later distortion by warped human minds. But I'm beginning to see they can't be separated. I suppose I have vaguely thought that maybe the Christian God could fit in somewhere as a god with a small 'g' in Buddhist cosmology and that maybe Christians would end up in some heaven realm with a small 'h'. Pseudo tolerance and woolly thinking! I am seeing more and more that this won't do. There is no place for 'God became god' in Buddhism and I'm even doubting that 'good' Christians will end up in the heaven realms which Buddhism speaks of.

To attain a rebirth in a heaven realm you have to have lived a skilful life, to have lived a life with predominantly skilful mental states and I rather doubt whether 'good' Christians do this. Christian ethical attitudes are essentially insubstantial and unreal, and are based on fear and guilt, to say nothing of delusion. All unskilful mental states.

I realise now that I have felt Christ and his teachings were basically quite innocent of all the subsequent negative influences Christianity has had on us, whereas in fact, he is linked with all these negative influences, because he is linked with the concept of God. I can't separate Christ from God. I can't divorce a God of Love from a God of Power. I can't hang on to some romantic image of Christ as a moderately spiritually developed being, because while I do I am endorsing the existence of God. I can feel that part of me



would like to be able to separate Christ from God. Reject God but not Christ. It is not possible. They are intimately connected in my unconscious.

I have been too tolerant of Christianity. As long as it doesn't seem to have been getting in my way, as long as I can be a Buddhist, I've let it be. But in fact it has been getting in my way. It is hard to totally free oneself of Christian conditioning when in a way the very air you breathe is Christian. That's how I felt the other day when I started thinking more seriously about how Christianity has affected me. Churches are powerful images, crucifixes are powerful images, nuns are powerful images and we all probably see at least one of these things almost every day if we live in the West, and even if consciously they do not affect us, unconsciously they probably do. They endorse the idea of God. I remember once thinking how much nicer, and easier it would be to live in a country where there were not churches, but stupas. Where Buddhist symbols were manifest, not Christian.

I now want to give vent to some feelings about my Christian upbringing. When I go back in memory to my childhood I feel that if I had only escaped going to a convent primary school, I would be psychologically healthier than I am now. My poor deluded mother thought she was giving me a good start to life. That saying to the effect that it takes all the wisdom of the wise to undo the harm of the merely good seems most appropriate here.

As I remember it I never felt any inclination to go to Church on Sundays or to the Sunday school class my aunt took. I did go occasionally, perhaps half a dozen times a year. I suppose I wanted to go on these occasions, or I was persuaded to. I don't actually remember why I went.

Unfortunately the convent had a very strong effect on me. I often remember in retrospect thinking that for me it was lethal to have gone there. Maybe some other kids, including my sister, passed through it relatively unscathed. Now though, I am even beginning to doubt that. All I know is that I certainly didn't. I must say though, that until today I had never really thought of this detrimental effect as having been due to Christianity. Yes, it was due to the individual nuns who taught me, but somehow I've never really made the connection with Christianity as such. I thought - well it was them - but of course they were entrenched in Christian conditioning far more strongly than a teacher in a state school, or I would presume so anyway.

Take for instance the whole question of sex. Recently in a study group I came across Bhante's comment to the effect that the "orthodox Christian teaching on sex is responsible for the emotional stultification of millions of people". Well, I've only just made the connection that the attitudes I had thrust upon me at the tender age of 7 or 8 were just this - they were Christian, were about sex, and were stultifying.

At this age young children who were just beginning to be more consciously aware of sexual differences and attractions



between each other were told not to look at each other. Suddenly it was taboo to move your head or eyes in a class room in case, horror of horrors your eyes alighted on a boy - or a girl if you were a boy. Goodness knows what would happen, what the nun would do, what God would do if you were caught "making eyes at each other". I can see as I write that it did come down to this - what would God do, and the atmosphere engendered was one of fear.

By the time we were eight we were segregated into different classes because that way we would work better - that was the reason. I don't think I particularly minded the separation, but did we actually work better? All I know is that I came out of that school good at Maths, not particularly good at English, I knew my catechism, had read the same history book three times, had done Art about six times, and had played organised sports infrequently. My education had been narrow to say the least. Fortunately I was pretty intelligent and having been so starved, enjoyed new subjects at Grammar School. But it took me some time to get over a feeling of inadequacy at not having done the sort of things a lot of my fellow school mates had done. Particularly in areas of free expression, games and art did I feel hampered. I can remember that the only other girl in my year who hadn't even heard of netball, let alone how to play it, had also been to a convent, which seems significant. It's only been in the last year or so that I have got over my inhibitions about playing with paints. Thanks to Vimala for instigating a "Blob" Day at Amaravati!

Anyway, this is perhaps going off at a bit of a tangent. About sex. Or rather, the opposite sex. We were not only segregated in class but also in play. A white line was painted down the centre of the playground and the boys played on one side, the girls on the other, and a nun with a whistle stood between. The drinking fountain was on the girls half so the boys had to get permission to have a drink. In some ways all this was quite amusing; gangs of girls and boys would dive bomb each other when the nun disappeared but overall it made me lose touch with any natural ability I may have had to communicate with the opposite sex en masse or indeed individually, on any level, verbal or physical. Suddenly boys became a big number, communicating became a big number. Sex was a dirty word. Sexual organs were dirty. And in a strange sort of way what you are told you mustn't do, is invested with a power that is greater than it actually had.

All this may sound a bit extreme - part of me feels this extreme.

What else was harmful? Well, the whole 'spiritual air' was harmful. I periodically got off on fancying myself as becoming all pure and holy like the nuns. I feared them and yet was in love with them. Loved them in fear, grovelled at their feet, sucked up to them. Would do anything to avoid being told off. Unjust and irrational punishments bred into me the attitude of making sure I never did anything wrong in their presence - which gave way to outbursts of sheer devilry in the dark recesses of the cloakroom where no nun lurked. bred in deceit, a lack of any real ethics, a creeping, crawling monstrosity of a child. I complied and yet at the same



time rebelled. Fancied myself as being really holy and at being really rebellious, and as a consequence was neither, just deluded.

The prayers, so many prayers. Before school started, when school ended, before playtime, after playtime. Prayers to pass your exams, prayers to make people better. It makes me sick to think of it.

On Friday mornings the Catholics went to Communion and us Christians could go as well and be blessed; part of me fancied it, part of me felt inferior because I couldn't have communion too. Later I threw communion back at the Catholic nuns with relish, having heard that apparently Catholics only took the host, not the wine since they were afraid of catching illnesses through sharing the same chalice.

We Christians were braver, as I saw it, we had more faith. I felt the Catholic faith must be pretty shallow to balk at such a thing for such worldly reasons.

I also questioned why women weren't allowed to serve at the altar or be priests in the Catholic church and was quickly silenced.

I think fear was what I received from Christianity, an inability to be myself, whatever that was. I have thought that, perhaps there was something positive in the convent, maybe it did feed my spiritual side. Now I feel that every atom of the sort of spirituality I latched onto there was unhealthy.

After primary school I went to a state school and more often than not would desist from actually uttering the morning prayer at assembly - except when I fancied being spiritual! I got confirmed at the age of 14 - again, I don't think I particularly wanted to - that vague feeling of pseudospirituality was just enough to make me go through with the thing. I took the communion a few times but I don't remember that it ever did anything for me spiritually although I didn't mind the taste of the wine or whatever it was.

I ceased to regard myself as anything but a nominal Christian and certainly at University when I and some friends would have discussions into the early hours of the morning about "what was behind it all" - Life and all that, God never came into it.

I began to notice that when a thought about God did pop into my head it was a cop out, it was a way of trying to get out of my life. Things get difficult, you turn to God. Things look up, you thank God. Having seen this, I worked more consciously on trying to stand on my own two feet, not leaning on anything or anyone. Taking responsibility for myself.

I found to my horror on my last solitary retreat about a year ago that Christian hymns popped up in me. Why did they have to be Christian, why couldn't I express my happiness in some other song, some other tune. I felt those hymns were standing between me and Buddhism, they were getting in my way and yet they loomed up out of my control. It was as if



I could not contain my happiness, could not allow myself beyond a certain point, to just soak myself more and more in feeling good. I had to disown it, give it away, say - it's not mine, it's yours, it's God's. It wasn't me, I hadn't created it, God had. Bharte treated the matter as no big number when I told him - I can see now why he didn't. I'm not going to break through all my negative Christian conditioning through repression and fear.

To end this present account about my conditioning, (there may be more to follow, I don't know), I want to make a few very definite statements.

First of all Christianity has had a very negative effect on me and I'd be very surprised to find that it hasn't had a similar effect on most other people who've been brought up in it.

Secondly, I intend to become a non-Christian Western Buddhist rather than stay as an ex-Christian Western Buddhist.

In order to do this I feel that I am going to have to find those symbols in Christianity which evoke the strongest feelings in me, and start blaspheming them.

So, here goes.

Symbol no. 1.. God - who does not exist  
Symbol no.2. Jesus Christ - who was a failure  
Symbol no.3. Nuns - who are deluded  
Symbol no.4. the Cross - which is obscene  
Symbol no.5. the Rosary - which is a toy  
Symbol no.6. the Virgin - who is a whore  
Symbol no.7. the Devil - who is an illusion  
Symbol no.8. Churches - which should be destroyed

Every child should be told there is no God.

No child should be made to be a Christian.

Every child should be allowed to grow naturally and creatively.

Christianity should be destroyed.

Damn Christ and his accursed religion.

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POEMS WRITTEN ON THE WOMEN'S STUDY RETREAT which has just  
been held at Mandarava TERESA FISHER

As we sat in the shrine-room before a Puja the moon would just be rising.

#### DAY BEFORE THE FULL MOON

Clouds light-up above and around  
Silver edge climbs above the cloud.  
Silent motion,  
Majestic splendour.



Silver edge grows larger, brighter.  
Clouds fall back from dazzling brightness.  
What tones propel you through the sky?  
Such energy!

Alone in your cosmos  
The world bathes  
In your silver radiance.

#### THE FULL MOON OF MAY

Yellow, gentle Moon,  
You rise so softly.  
Quiet, powerful tones  
Lift you through the sky.

The energy level feels high,  
Excitement runs in my veins  
"Yes!" under this Moon  
A Man gained Enlightenment!

One morning as I stood in the garden having a drink before  
the first meditation, the thought came into my head...  
Weeds are wonderful things! ...and the following lines  
got themselves together.

Weeds are wonderful things!  
They come in all shapes, sizes, shades of green.  
Some with flowers of white, purple or delicate blue.  
In the early morning sunlight, against grasses glistening  
with dew,  
They make a fairy landscape forest with their leafy forms  
and lives!

I'd like to thank Dhammadinna for leading such an amazing  
Retreat.

I feel as though I've taken an axe to my Christian conditioning. "Truths I once cheerfully took for granted have turned  
into mirage".

My understanding of Buddhism and Kalyana Mitrata has deepened  
and I feel more truly than ever inspired by the Dharma.

There's no time to write more for this issue of Dakini but  
hopefully the next issue will include people's feelings  
about this retreat and what effect it has had going back  
to their day to day situation.

Teresa (maravati)

--oOo--

#### WESAK POEM    Noel Lehane

Relinquishing his man-made destiny, the Sakya Prince  
Siddhartha, went forth, in those ages behind memory where  
there was no Sangha to support him, no Dharma to instruct,  
and even no Buddha to behold, he went forth alone, and



realised all wordly suffering churning unchanged today as then. Now we who have chosen, and are committed, to making our own journey, yet must see that his we cannot copy. For mere imitation is as a broken axe in the forested lands of delusion, weak and pallid is its shade, the Truth seeker should not stray there. Faint-hearted the self-doubter gains not Enlightenment, too soon waylaid by Mara's servants who with seductive flattery sell eternal fires. Nor yet will blind faith show the goal, this is like a driverless chariot careering down slippery slopes left untended by vanished leaders. Let us also take care that our aspirations do not become fossilised in familiarity with only the ancient traditions, and when even the Buddha, he who has gone beyond, to us seems remote, and our minds remain shuttered, then think on Siddhartha, how he changed, what he overcame as in recollection of his conflicts there lies our inspiration, the beam which illumines our darkness, it is like water when we lie inert, aching on the arid wastes of conditioned existence, and there we discover the foundations of our own efforts.

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LETTER FROM ANIKETA in Auckland, New Zealand

(One of New Zealand's new Order members is Upasika Aniketa. An explanation of what her name means is given later in this issue of Dakini, together with that of Upasika Suvajri. Aniketa wrote to me recently, saying that though it was primarily a letter to me, if I thought it suitable and appropriate, I could publish it in Dakini. I felt Mitras and other women Order members would appreciate the letter so here it is - Anoma)

Dear Anoma,

This letter is first of all to say that I, Aniketa, am now the agent for Dakini in New Zealand. I'm in the process of compiling a list of subscribers, and contacting other women Mitras that might be interested. Possibly the money for subs has arrived by now, has it? However, let me know. By the time this letter reaches you, the women's study retreat will be well on its way, if not finished! However, I send all good wishes - indeed have done so mentally in Metta practises! I am I am hoping to get some money saved up and have my daily life so organised that I can pay a visit to England for the Order Convention next year. At this moment it's not possible - but so much can change in such a short time that it pays to 'think positive' regarding future plans! I've got a 'taste' of Sangha and Kalyana Mitrata and won't be satisfied with anything else!

Now a bit about myself - I'm at an advantage here because I have 'met' you, in a way, through a tape recording of your singing Milarepa's song about all classes of people needing the Dharma. Priyananda (Peter Joseph at the time) had put on a tape during a 'free' period at the national retreat two years ago, and I happened to be present. I was stopped in my tracks! The singing voice - deep and resonant 'touched' something in the solar plexus region and I began to 'dance' inside. As I listened more attentively I recognised one of Milarepa's sons (which inspire me every time I read them) - the one about



different classes of people needing the Dharma. I'd now call that "dance" a-Dakini-dancing-to-Dakini experience, though at the time I had not heard Bhante's tape (nor was it in being) of "Going for Refuge". That moved me very deeply at the time - I started a letter to you then, but like a lot of the little fires I light, it flamed brightly for the moment and then died out - but somehow it never completely 'died', so I'm fanning the embers in this letter.

Poetry, music, song and dance (though I have never been a performer) have a very strong, very powerful effect on me - far more than any other form of communication - excepting direct contact, person to person, which, for me, takes a lot of 'togetherness' - far more than I have all the time, and demands being open to a degree that I'm not always ready to be - I'm a bit of a nervous, 'fraidy cat - I do not immediately dash through a door when it's opened - I like to 'suss out the area first - what's that expression? 'Case the joint!' Do you know what I mean? I'm cagey with 'hearty' strangers, and forceful career women, get defensive when someone is indirectly demanding me to take up a certain position, or when I think someone is demanding this of me, or implying that I should somehow be responsible for how they are feeling and do something about it. (These ways of behaving - of relating to others - of seeing how others are relating to me are by no means set, or static - and in fact the more 'upset' I get by certain behaviour patterns in others, the more I see that they are a reflection of my own.)

To more enjoyable aspects - I enjoy being with the living things of the garden, the countryside, any green plot - and I feel most fortunate to be in New Zealand, where it does not take very long to get into "bush" areas - I'm not much at regular gardening - but I do 'gardening' (i.e. for me - just being in the garden, quietly and unhurriedly pulling up weeds - only those that are smothering other plants - cleaning shrubs of blight - and just sitting 'seeing' the plants individually. Latterly the garden has been neglected as I have a sore arm, and am also busy with other occupations, duties, chores and interests - and of course just being lazy! So as I look out of my window I can see the green grapefruit that is slowly swelling, the young lemons likewise - the rain is falling gently and the breeze has the dark, maroon red leaves of a tall castor oil bush dancing, as well as the leaves of a poinsettia, just beginning to develop its decorative red bracts.

It has been and is a most inspiring experience having Bhante here and we in New Zealand are busy with preparations for public lectures, and looking forward to increased activity. I'm still assimilating all that passed through me at the Ordination retreat. Some poems, surprisingly to me, are bubbling up - if you can call them poems - but they are not 'put down' yet - just scribbling and kaleidoscopic impressions. So much has started to 'come together' since I have taken up a regular meditation practise and spend more time in reflection - and have had and am having contact with Bhante - it's a more inward journey for me now on the 'other' side of the hill!

Yours with Metta

Aniketa



## NEW WOMEN MITRAS

### London

Amaravati,  
30 Cambridge Park,  
Wanstead, London E11 2PR.

KAROLA ADAMCZYK

### India - Pune

(No address given)

SHANTA GOVIND SALVE  
VAJRUDAH

## NEW WOMEN ORDER MEMBERS

(Taken from a report on New Zealand Ordination Retreat by  
Upasaka Purna - April 10th to 17th. Anoma)

'As is the practice with the announcement of names, Bhante went over something of the meaning of the names of the new Order members. For the interest of other Order members I made the following precis of Bhante's explanations, which I've checked by him.

First of all, Barbara Gill became ANIKETA. Niketa is home, abode or dwelling place. Aniketa is that which has no home, no dwelling place or no abode. There are various levels of meaning here. Aniketa is a synonym for Nirvana because Nirvana has, as it were, no abode, it has no fixed form, it can't really be located anywhere, it's beyond being identified as this particular state or that particular state. Then again Aniketa is an important spiritual quality: the quality of not settling down anywhere, in any state, as ultimate, not settling down in any experience which should just be a stepping stone to further experiences. Then of course there is Aniketa, homeless, without abode, in the most ordinary sense. Bhante thought that in Barbara's case, since it might be easy for some people to think that she's just a housewife, lives at home, and that's where she is and that's where she's going to stay, the name Aniketa, the homeless one, the one without an abode, would hopefully dispell all such feelings.

Ann Gill is SUVAJRI, su meaning happy, positive. It's emotional positivity which is so necessary: the dhyana side even. Vajri is one who is vajra-like, the 'i' at the end is the feminine termination, and the vajra of course being the thunderbolt or diamond which is not just powerful in the ordinary sense but which is spiritually dynamic. In the name Suvajri you've got these two sides balanced, the emotional and the intellectual, the samatha and vipassana. Bhante thought this would be a good name for her in as much as we all have to aim at a balance of these two things'.

Addresses: Upasika Aniketa,  
148 Birkdale Road,  
Birkdale,  
Auckland 10,  
New Zealand.

Upasika Suvajri,  
39 Millais St.,  
Grey Lynn,  
Auckland 2,  
New Zealand.



## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### GRAND THREE DAY MITRA EVENT AT MANDARAVA

There will be a three day Mitra event at Mandarava from Thursday evening 21st June until Monday morning 25th June. I am hoping that all Mitras and Order members will make a special attempt to come. The cost for the three days is £12. The programme will consist of meditation, study, and talks by Order members on the theme of Self and Others. Please book for the weekend through Vimala at Mandarava - Street Farm, The Street, Aslacton, Nr. Norwich, Norfolk) enclosing your money. Please be responsible and book soon. We are expecting between 25 and 35 people and need to know numbers in advance for catering purposes. Please bring a tent to sleep in if you have one and inform Vimala of this when you book. This is the first event of this kind for women Order members and Mitras and I think it will be a very energetic and happy occasion. Hopefully we will arrange similar events - possibly a longer and larger retreat next year.

Dhammadinna

### THREE WEEK OPEN RETREAT AT MANDARAVA

From Friday 3rd to Friday 24th August. Cost is £4 per day - 10% discount if you book for the whole 3 weeks. This year the whole retreat is open so you can come and go when you like over the whole 3 weeks (except that it probably wouldn't be very good to just book for say the last two days of the retreat only!) Application forms from Retreat Organiser at Mandarava, address as above. Telephone Tivetshall 344.

noma

NEXT DAKINI: JULY

COPY DATE: 1st week  
July



(Anoma)

1. RELISH (IN A CITY-SCAPE)

2. ALIENATED THINKING

- I wish there wasn't.  
I wish I'd transcended it.

I am a learner of Life's hard story.  
A learner of what is and is not.  
It seems I learn slowly, change slowly,  
grow slowly,  
It seems I have a long way to go.

If there were no Buddha, no Bhante,  
no friends,  
Where would I be?  
Nowhere.



