

Shinoda

DAKINI



DAKINI 16

JULY 1979

A Newsletter for women Order members and Mitras, compiled by Upasika Anoma at Amaravati, 30 Cambridge Park, Wanstead, London E11 2PR. 989 5083.

CONTENTS

		<u>Page No.</u>
In Answer to Sanghadevi's Article "Christianity Must Go", My Article: "But Where are the Christians?"	Dominique Buisset	2
3 Poems	Liz Bisson	9
Mandarava's Garden	Dawn Bouic	9
Some Thoughts on the Women's Order/Mitra 3 Day Retreat; or "The Beginnings of a New Woman"	Kay Roberts	10
Hymn to Vajrasattva	Anne Rowlands	11
Let's Develop Metta and Compassion towards the Opposite Sex	Susanna Laurola	12
New Mitras and New Woman Order Member		13
Amitayus	Anoma	14
Confidence	Anoma	14
Forthcoming Events	(compiled by) Anoma	14

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IN ANSWER TO SANGHADEVI'S ARTICLE "CHRISTIANITY MUST GO"
MY ARTICLE: "BUT, WHERE ARE THE CHRISTIANS?" Dominique Buisset

First, Bravo to Sanghadevi for her honesty and even for her anger. It was a shout from the heart, something very refreshing and which sometimes seems to be missing a bit in Dakini, or lost among accounts of the forthcoming events and the number of sandwiches that have been sold at the last jumble sale. Yes, it rang true, it seemed to spring from her true space and of that I am very thankful to her and to that, I say Bravo!

She spurred me to write to Dakini at last and I will try to match her openness hoping also to stimulate others and continue the flow. Her article moved me all the more as I feel very different from her, not to say completely opposed. I feel that I have dealt with the problem of being in a Christian country with a different approach which is only normal as I am a different person endowed with a different physical emotional intellectual and even linguistic background, i.e. different five skandhas and karmic links or patterns. Her skilful means may not be mine, my skilful means - if they are skilful at all - may not be hers...But all the better. On opposition we rise. So, let us give each other space...and in that space, from that space, may flower and dung mounds grow!

The plan of my article will be thus: Her analysis, her methods
My analysis, my methods
Synthesis and beyond.

1. Her analysis and methods.

Her article seems to be focusing on two main issues, two basic "Evils", the Christian God, and the Christian Sex. She says that for her "The root of our problem is God or rather the belief in God" and that the attitudes she had thrust upon her at the tender age of 7 or 8 were just this - they were Christian, were about sex and were stultifying.

I could not agree more with her on these two points. I agree that the Christian faith emphasizes in us some clinging traits in a very unskilful way with the idea of God. "It was a cop out" says she. I would even go further and say that it develops a clinging to a thing that would hold fast true and secure for eternity, craving and dependancy. She also has all my support in her analysis of Christian sex, I think we all suffered from it, directly or indirectly. But as for her methods, I cannot go with them, personally. I feel that attacking and blaspheming the outsides of the Christian religion and trying to wipe them off the earth is only giving more solidity to one's "enemy" and not looking for it where it is. If I knock down the church that is in my garden and then feels so good that I forget the church in my head which is much more powerful and subtle...well, big deal. Well, you may say that it is only a beginning and that you won't forget, but I am not so sure. It is so easy to take exterior motions for actual motions. And in the case of Buddhist history this type of opposition is in-existent. Open conflict war and abuse have never occurred from the Buddhist side. Of course, as the Buddha was not stupid enough to see the stone outside as having more weight than the one inside. It seems to me that this is playing dangerous games and that one has to be extremely careful. If this church outside you is still solid and threatening, if your fists hurt when you bang on its door is because the church inside you gives it substance. I will even say that resenting what has historically taken place as a mistake and something that would not be is an idle thought. What has historically taken place has historically taken place, has roots far beyond and consequence far above what we can see, so it is what it is, what we have and let us do something with it. It seems to me that an effort to handle the "negative" Christian traits by intolerance and aggressive means is functioning as a Christian EVIL on unchristian creeds. Funnily enough, destroying or

dreaming of destroying Christian churches is a Christian attitude, is Christian psychology, is CHRISTIAN. Blasphemy is a Christian act and would not exist even linguistically if there was not a religion to put in the other pan of the scale. Saying that I am not denying the therapeutic effect these behaviours can have - each having to be assessed from an individual point of view - I am only saying that I am sure there are other medicines and that they are less risky. Saying that I do affirm that each of us with the help of "his/her" personal understanding of the Dharma is free to apply to "him/herself" the kind of therapy he feels adequate and I wish to give Sanghadevi my full support if she feels both happy and clear about what she is doing.

But I would also be extremely careful not to encourage other people to use my own medicines, for after all I do not know where they are at, and I may very well have been speaking to a paranoiac who will not know where to stop when I would. There is really a danger in proselytism and dogmatism even if from the outside people seem only to be exchanging good recipes for cooking. Let us all bake our own bread. There again the example of the Buddha should help us to realize that he dealt with each problem or conflict as a particular case and only tried to create a whole situation inside which things could happen rather than verbalized, attacked and fought. Enlightened being - from my little end of the stick - the perception he had of the never-the same-never after never before quality of things, people, emotions and events and no more of great big lumps of concepts, theories, masses, isms, of which Christianity is one... and Buddhism is another. Both being hard to swallow and cause of strife and pain.

Hoping that Sanghadevi will cry at the top of her voice and shout and curse and cry because it seems to be very good for her, and granting her all the space she needs to do so, as her experiences seem to have been so painful, I will personally with a Buddhist smile on my face carry on with my own tale of OE.

II My analysis. My methods

Some of the points she has covered, so I will not go over them again. Mainly God and sex. But my approach being slightly different there and my critics even harsher than hers, I wish to include them into more general paragraphs. God I will include into "Clinging" sex into "Dualism" these are my terms, feel free to use others, but it is on purpose they are "interior" words. Internalized.

- a) Clinging. More than the Christian God I would fear the Christian bend to the idea of a solid belief. The Buddha stresses from the beginning that eventually even his raft is to be discarded. Not so with Christianity. Christianity is never to be discarded it is the ultimate truth. Which leads to rigidity, lack of creativity and imagination and above all to
- b) Dualism. It is the clinging mind, the mind full of fright that has to cling to something definite and therefore create discrimination then opposition. The Christians will see sex as opposed to spirit, matter as opposed to soul, evil to good, past to present etc...which psychologically leads to these swinging rapid motions between elation and despair which Sanghadevi describes so well: she "fancied herself as becoming all pure and holy like the nuns" while having some "outbursts of sheer devilry in the dark recesses of the cloakroom". The pain caused by these movements make the Christian search for a way out embodied in the belief of a linear time which counteracts them. Out of swinging stems the ideal for a direct straight line. So
- c) Time. There is a definite struggle towards a paradise or away from a hell, anyway towards an end seen as an end. The soul goes back to god. Full stop. After having progressed or relapsed. And from PROGRESS, of course stems the idea of a saviour to give you a hand.

d) Christ. He is not like the Buddha. You can rely on him. He is not going to let you fall back on your own efforts exclusively, he actually claims that he has already done something for you. Instead of you i.e. wash your sins. So he will do more. This certainly does not encourage self reliance much. Though obviously you will have to lend a hand to yourself too. But for it to work of course you will need to trust in your saviour or

e) Faith. You cannot be convinced into believing so you will have to believe and simply jump in the dark, you will be given no positive or negative feedback whilst doing so and you are not encouraged to do your own experiences and see for yourself if they work. (Some people call it blind faith but mind you I think it requires a lot of guts).

Well here is the way I slice the cake and if it looks awfully negative let me tell you it is not, because there is nothing that method won't do.

Methods. By now you may have gathered vaguely that my idea is to work from the inside and that the Christian church as such is pretty irrelevant to me. Where is the Christian in little Buddhist me? (us) Rather than banging our fists at church doors and abusing our Christian brothers, let us sieve carefully our insides, search our guts. This I see as the first therapeutic gesture:

i) Attention. Well to be frank, even to a sincere devoted Buddhist trying to sail his boat skilfully, the pitfalls are everywhere, since the PSYCHOLOGICAL traits are so resilient and ingrained. It is extremely easy to change the words and jump without a shiver and in perfect good faith into the most devious form of Christian Buddhism and, as is logical, from that space attack violently the Christian Christians. I have had to face it, the Christian church inside me was everywhere; Clinging to God and Christianity becoming clinging to Buddhism and Buddha. Dualism between good and evil as dualism between being a good committed Buddhist and a non good non committed one, working towards the paradise as working towards enlightenment, loving Bhante as loving Christ, having faith in the ultimate truth of the dharma, as in the bible etc. etc. etc. Sounds pretty bad but no. Let us be thankful that we have got so much shit to work on. It is all very interesting. And walking on a tight rope is the best way to learn about mistakes. Thank God (if you pardon me the expression) we cannot fall completely in all these traps because the Christian Church is there to all the time teach us and warn us. So here is my second point.

ii) Neutralization. To go back to Sanghadevi's article I would say "The Christian church MUST NOT go" if we are aware and skilful it is the best part of our Karma. To work on it on all these pitfalls and beliefs and emotional knots and rancour I feel that the best is to have recourse to the powerful tool of Paradoxe we find in the Dharma. Jumping out of dualism is the key. Christians are neither good nor bad nor good nor bad, they are. The Christian in you is neither a bad dog nor a black sheep nor a little innocent angel nor a nor etc... Thus emotional release can occur not through discharge and acting out but through creating some space in one's brain. And when you have given space to your "adversary then you can begin again to see its good points and reach the stage of

iii) Transmutation. So then you go back to the first analysis paragraph one and see how you can actually digest the energy from Clinging, dualism, time, Christ, faith and turn it into something else. So now you have the Good points of Christian surrounding upbringing and religion. It is very easy.

ALL the bad points serve as warning and reminders, things to observe, analyze, accept eventually (yes) thank and cherish. All the good points which you are already beginning to see are going to bring you a step further. And they are many. To your surprise just as

numerous as the bad points you only saw when you were so blinded by emotions and confusion of thoughts and which are no more bad points.

Sanghadevi says that for her "Christianity holds nothing of inspiration" well for me it does. A lot. They come mainly under two headings. Charity and Man. A) Charity. Here is the place to mention that one of the most confusing factors when faced with Christianity is that it is so incoherent on a lot of issues. There seems to be in the bible bits and pieces stemming from different times styles psychology. The book, the bible presents itself to my eyes like a man growing slowly from infancy towards maturity, from an emphasis on negativity, fear, guilt, phantasms and allegorical stories (old testament) to an emphasis on positive orders, forgiveness, purification, and visions (new testament, apocalypse). It grows from the state of a child that has to be brought up on interdictions (Thou shall not) and reprimands (Hell) to the state of a thinker choosing freely positive behaviour. Thou shall...love thy neighbour etc...to the state of a visionary and poet. Buddhism has grown through fairly similar stages too (Hinayana Mahayana Vajrayana na Tantra) but at least all of it holds together and anyway Buddhism presents itself always as something that must grow, must adapt, must be redigested to be applied practically, whereas the bible pretends in a crazy way that it is whole has always been and will be such for eternity. But to go back to charity, I would say that attacking the Christian on their "intolerance fear and guilt" is attacking them on only part of their scripture. A part they may have themselves long ago digested to step into the new testament only. I know some of them. Or a part which they do not reject but skilfully see as a tool to be applied to a certain subject who being at a certain stage of his emotional development would not understand any other tongue. Even the opposite of charity could be seen in the same light as the wrathful deities. As for charity itself well to my delight, to my joy, each word of the Christ brings light to me. You can turn it in your head a thousand times if you wish you will never find any loophole in sentences like "Love thy neighbour like thyself". Well it is the metta bhavana exactly though not in 5 stages but in two, or "Let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone at her" which is the mirror of equalising wisdom. Look for her faults inside you. You are responsible for your faults and for hers too... or...do not condemn attack or punish without any insight into yourself, your motives, what you are. I could carry on like that a long time but I think that you get the idea. Last comes the beautiful idea of B) Man. I feel that it is marvellous that the Christians gave man such an important place. Contrary to the Greek or Latin mythologies they did not focus really on the idea of God (gods) here we have a man in a central position, Christ and his divinity is to be a man, his highest achievement too. Well if you do not call that inspiration...I do. With all his faults, and you can see then I repeat it as positive warnings against mistaking oneself for the son of God or indulging unskilfully in YOGIC tricks to convince people, or wrong belief in the possibility of cleansing people's bad kharma for them, with all his faults, Christ did achieve a state of compassion that was divine. There his divinity lies. And if he did it (The problem of his actual existence or not being irrelevant) then we can. And hopefully, balancing it with the Buddhist wisdom of which he seemed to be so deprived which led to a lot of consequent mistakes in the establishment of the church and his own horrible death. Yes, I affirm it, there is love to be found in Christianity, compassion, if you know where to look, how to hear, how to use the book skilfully. This trend towards Man was beginning already to be present in the slow progress in Greek and latin mythologies from an interest in the Olympian Gods to an interest in semiGods (Hercules) to an interest in human heroes. But Christ is something else. And there are also a lot of saints in which my heart finds joy: St. Theresa, St. Augustine with his marvellous law "Aime et fais ce que veux" - "Love and do what you want". St. Francis of Aquinas talking to the birds, etc...the list would be too long too. So, you see, there is room for more than hope, there

is room for something even beyond synthesis and beyond, simply beyond.

III Beyond.

In this last paragraph I wish to say that I would be sorry to see the Friends turn Christian for I am not Christian myself and if they do I will have to leave them, for Buddhism. I am convinced that all the traps can be avoided, the Buddha not be turned into another crusader and Bhante another Christ (with no beard) floating on a cloud, beaming light. I am convinced that we have been born with a challenge, here, we get what we get and what we deserve and there is nothing that we cannot turn to our own Good. No need to mope either. Take responsibility. How could I damn Christ and his accursed religion when I made it? If it hurts, I am hurting myself. Here is Hope. For I can stop hurting myself but I have no control on others. I do not walk into churches to shout "God, go away" because I respect other people's beliefs, they are where they are at, and because I would feel slightly foolish in shouting "Go away" to something I do not believe in. Yet I am sure that God do exist in a way for those people who do believe in him like there are demons in Tibet. Here perhaps who knows! As eventually they stem from my mind and go only as far as I can imagine. Sometimes I go into churches like a visitor (nice architecture!) sometimes I catch inside them the very soft vibrations of some genuine people who have been praying in them for a long time and it is very warm and peaceful, sometimes I catch a horrible glimpse of torture and repression and run away, sometimes I am just indifferent and forget all about them, sometimes I am just neutral and do not go in nor out, nor do anything at all, just let the clouds pass slowly in the sky and hum, for as ultimate truth includes error, where is the error that truth cannot include?

May all beings be happy in the Dharma

DOM.

II In answer to Sanghadevi's summary of her Christian upbringing My article "All is grist to the mill"

I think it would be very unfair of me to dump on you only theories without giving you a glimpse of my personal history as a Christian. The parts where Sanghadevi described factually the stages of her life are the ones that moved me most as well as made me see what kind of person she is and how she has suffered.

Well. Here is a little bit of my biography, in this life time and for as far as I can see from the tip of my nose! Even though they had been brought up as traditional Catholics, my parents has soon dropped out of it, so that, long before their marriage, they were already atheists. I think that it made very little difference to them because, in their case, as in the case of Sanghadevi, there seems to have been very little commitment to the actual faith, only outward signs, a going through the motions (which Sanghadevi describes very well for herself: "I don't actually remember why I went"... "I don't think I particularly minded the separation"... "again I don't think I particularly wanted to"... etc... are sentences that keep cropping up under her pen and are I think common to a lot of people that would call themselves Christians). So, into Christianity they had had no spiritual insight, no glimpse into mysticism so I would not say that they dropped out of anything at all. This leads us to the problem of discriminating between Christian and Christian, signs and meanings, rites and contents. A thing we have to be aware of when dealing with religion (It seems to me that a lot of things which Sanghadevi attacks as being Christian behaviour or psychology, a lot of my Christian friends would have attacked just as much-so...) Anyway, I have been brought up in an atmosphere of free thinking, scientific and materialistic preoccupations, with art seen as the highest culminating point the human psyche could achieve. Or genius. My father is a big business man, my mother headmistress of a school both

of them put a strong emphasis on being physically tough (sports) self reliant (Do it yourself it's none of my business) intellectual achievements, travel, arts, money. Where they were Christian throughout, though, is in their clinging to ideas of duality (this is good that is bad) their lack of insight into genuine love (I have been blessed with a smothering mother who would have given me her blood as if I wished to drink it!) and their utter puritanism as regard sex (to my mother it was a sin stain and babies, to my father good sport, but also in a way romantic and sacred: one woman till I die...otherwise...how horrible!) And both aspects I see as puritanical.

So my parents confessed themselves as having no religion, yet they had strong Christian traits and the rest of the family loomed in the background still going on dutifully through the motions but with no conviction either. Even to my young eyes their performance brought no hope nor warmth nor stimulation. And I was even more disgusted by them than by the void inside which my parents moved. Which at least gave itself a true name. Something in me was so frightfully unhappy in spite of the fact that I had all the mental stimulation or material comfort necessary to growth that I decided to explore consciously the side of our Christian branch but as a freelance. What spurred me on of course was the sight of my parents constant misery (they were psychologically unbearable always quarrelling and going often as far as battering each other, my mother ran away from home, committed suicides, was locked into mental homes, had nervous depressions etc etc...while pursuing a brilliant career in the times in between, and while my father stayed late in his office to make big money and avoid her as much as possible) Well all this was very good as it did not leave me any doubts about the salvation of far countries, practical reliability...and going through the "motion-religion". For the half of the family that practised was just as bad if not worse. (I wonder if he will remember me in his will. or..."Plus pres de toi mon dieu mais le plus tard possible", which was my great aunt motto i.e. "nearer to you my Lord but as late as possible, please") All this and the constant picture of death, this great friend, made me swear that it was impossible to live, let alone to die in that state of confusion and psychological torment and that I would devote all my life to find out or die (note the irony here!) So at the age of nine I actually demanded from my parents that they took me to church and religious school to learn and see and find out for myself. After deep consideration having at that age no idea that there existed other goods on the market than Christian religion, I opted for the protestant faith. (The story of the virgin Mary, the crusades and the witches was already sticking up my throat and I just could not swallow) So there follows a span of about two years where my father dutifully drives me to church every Sunday (he was really a square guy and respected my decisions an awful lot because he knew I was quite serious and in some areas my parents have always been cricket) where I studied and practised very carefully from the depth of my heart and using all the resources of my trenchant brain and where my father either waits outside or comes in for a chat with the parson out of curiosity. Well, let me tell you I did learn the texts and sang happily with all the youthful idealism (I still have) getting only amazed at the fact that I could not perceive that here too most of the kids came only out of duty, were reluctant not serious and bored. I had never taken spiritual life lightly and could not see how others could and yet be what they called alive. Now here is the sad bit. After these two years it could not fail to escape my notice that even as in a case like mine that is to say even in the best possible circumstances (free choice etc) the Christian religion brought about some very painful psychological states. I perceived the swinging movements I have described in my theoretical analysis (see former article) a tendency to self hatred, martyrdom, sex repression etc...you know the picture. I had also a problem with God our father, virginity, sado masochistic traits etc. etc. Contrary to Sanghadevi I did not bang my head against the wall with hatred but with despair! Why

is there blood on the cross? Why is there sacrifice? Oh I am sure there has been treason somewhere, misreading, misuse. God is not like that. I rejected even the church and stopped abruptly all outside practises, and in some ways started on the path of the lonely mystic (I read St. Therese of Avilla etc...) To me God was love, full stop, and that was all my scriptures. All the rest Ah. All the rest was thorns in my thighs. I wanted to cry. They are mad!

I did for a long time. It was a lonely path. I did not speak of these things at all but I suppose that a lot of them pervaded the atmosphere around me since my parents called my room the cell. I tried and experimented on my own with a lot of practices even reinvented the mettabhavana exactly before I knew it, had a sort of crazy yoga with a lot of breathing and tratakam (eye fixing meditation) still I was lost and in a lot of pain because something was missing and my mother was very busy taking advantage of what I thought was good love towards her to devour me. (I shall never be thankful enough to her) She made my mistakes so unbearable to myself that I could not fail to discover them. When the point was reached that I was actually becoming to her something like a full time voluntary nurse lady of company char woman dishwasher and suicide listener and had so little space of my own that I started to physically die of anorexia then suddenly leapt out and saw that the bit that was missing was the opening of the door or common sense and paradoxe into my brain. I was fourteen by then and that sentence of Lao tseu across which I had come through my desperate roamings in libraries and bookshops had stuck in my mind and saved me - it simply said: "One cannot see the whole sky from a window". Gosh. At last all the things that I had been trying to put a name to; the neither-nor-bit came together, the openness and release given by humour and paradoxe and no-paradoxe and no-no. It took me another two years to achieve that I wanted, that is to say go to university to actually study the Chinese and Japanese language and philosophy, taoism, zen, from there the next peak was already in sight, Buddhism, the next countries, India, Tibet, and England.

I know that this is a very long article, but to end it I would like to say that contrary to Sanghadevi, and this of course is a personal matter, to be taken as such, I do not see anything as standing between me and Buddhism, not even Christian religion, if I had not been a Christian I would never have been a Buddhist, I am thankful for all the painful mistakes, the repressions, that made me see faults in such broad daylight, I am thankful to the opposition that gave me the opportunity to question and search my way, I am thankful to my parents for having been so lacking, so sexually repressive as well (and here my tale of horror is certainly equal to hers as I actually was one of these kids that feel sick as soon as they undress and actually have to vomit or thought that I was dying the day I had my first period, age eleven, knowing nothing whatsoever about it, still I am glad it gave me a chance to study a bit of medicine as well) and more than anything I am thankful that I have been born in this part of the world where a lot of work and creativity has to be applied to find new ways and skilfully reconcile enemies, the east and the west, Buddhism and Christianity. Let us be happy of the challenge, let us use all the stepping stones, after all we have what we deserved, we wanted what we got so there is no need to pine about it. If there is Christianity let me say that I am entirely responsible for it.

May all beings be happy in the light of the Dharma.

Dom.

3 POEMS FROM LIZ BISON

Sitting
in an attic
before a simple shrine,
dusty sunshine filters
through the skylight.
Sitting,
counting breaths
offering incense,
bowing low.
Chanting,
women's voices
rising and falling together.
Sitting,
quietly joyful
in an attic.

.....

Green and blue
grass and sky
wind blowing
I am here
to some degree
feel the warmth of the sun
hear the wind move the trees
a solitary airplane
drifts across the sky
fades away
so do I.

.....

Feet on the earth
Feet in the sky,
in boots, shoes, sandals
Feet on the earth
Feeling life open up.

--oOo--

ANDARAVA'S GARDEN Dawn Bouic

Sitting I saw flowers
Glowing vibrant colours

Touching the textures
That contrasts and mixtures

Feeling them growing
Sprouting budding or flowering

I knew we laid no blossoms
on the shrine,

we gave ourselves.

--oOo--

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE WOMEN'S ORDER/MITRA 3 DAY RETREAT;
or "THE BEGINNINGS OF A NEW WOMAN" Kay Roberts

Mandarava again. Norfolk. Mmm... breathe in deeply. SPACE!

Ah, but no, hang on, not this time. Look at all these cars sitting in front of the house - hundreds of them! It makes it look like a holiday resort. Shit. Oh dear, all the people there's going to be. Oh dear. I'll just keep quiet, keep on the outside of things, and perhaps I'll get by. I can't cope with lots of people. Just look straight ahead and don't catch too many people's eyes, and then they'll leave me alone. Oh well, here goes....

Women come trickling into the kitchen after the puja - "Hello!" "Hello Joan!" "Oh, hello Jenny, I haven't seen you for a long time!" "Hello Anoma, how are you?" "Hello",.... It's a bit too much. Everyone looks a bit spaced out. Just too many people to take in. Before too long most people have gone off to find their sleeping space, and crawled thankfully into their sleeping bags. Exhausted after a day's work, then travelling, then stepping into this. What have we all let ourselves in for?

The first day seems to pass quite quickly - 3 hours study in the morning, which, as far as I'm concerned, was really good. It's a sunny day, and in the break the grounds are covered in bodies, stretching out and talking. The whole day is quite nice in a way, everyone seems friendly, and it's good to see so many familiar faces. But something is missing. It's nice, but it could be so much more. In the evening, for the talks (by Dhammadiina, Vimala and Punyavati), we file into the shrine-room, and drape ourselves round the walls, trying to get a good view of the evening sky and fields - Mmm.... get a nice stretch on those old legs: it's been a hard week.

The next day I feel in a bad mood. It's "my thing" - I feel blocked, depressed, frustrated. I feel frustrated with myself; and, somewhere, hardly conscious. I feel frustrated with the situation. I haven't communicated with anyone!

In the study group it comes up that the chanting is not very strong. We talk about it for quite a while - it must reflect something. Can people really be putting themselves into it if the chanting sounds like that? Are people tired?

And afterwards, talking with one or two people, we wonder suddenly - is it because there are 40 women here? It feels a bit as if most people are in a 'soft' mood (I don't put 'soft' in inverted commas to put it down, but because I'm not quite sure if it's the right word), in a more passive, 'feminine' mood. Is it because, unconsciously, we are frightened of what might happen if we weren't, if we let go - if there was energy about - it would take off - it would be 'mind-blowing' - the sort of situation where the individual could really expand, where the rudimentary seeds of the Bodhicitta, the will to growth, to Enlightenment, could arise and flow. Perhaps more than just one person had the feeling, from the beginning, of "Oh dear, I can't quite cope with this. I'll lay low".

By the evening of the second day things were beginning to change - maybe through the fact that we'd become aware of some sort of holding back; that it could be so much more. That we can choose to be creative. Perhaps too just because people were more relaxed, and able to open up more.

The three talks of that evening, by Shridevi, Malini, and Sanghadevi, were excellent, each one of them in their own way really thought-provoking, mind-expanding. And the venue for the second and third evenings was

changed to the barn, which seemed much better: it seemed to encourage everyone to be much more there; receptive and alert.

On the third day, most of our study was about stream-entry. It was amazing, and I know I, and several others in my study group, felt really deeply affected by it. We read that Bhante said that it was possible for anyone; if he or she made the effort, to gain stream-entry in this life. It is an actual possibility - we could pass the point of no return, in this life! Amazing! It is something very real we can work towards, and, as Dhammadinna stressed, it means really taking awareness to the first three fetters, and doing everything we can to loosen their hold on us. It is not just another of the Buddha's lists, somehow "out there", that we really do feel sounds good, but somehow doesn't relate to our lives, now. It does. It is practical. It means waking up, putting as much energy as we have available, every minute of the day, into acting creatively, responsibly, individually. Not just going with the flow, even the flow of the community, of the Movement, but acting each time from ourselves, because we can see that such and such a thing would be good for our development. Which doesn't mean that I do what I want all the time, as opposed to being aware of the wants and needs of others. It might, and probably will, help us most to put as much as we can towards the needs of others, towards communities, co-ops, centres. But to do it because we ourselves can see that it is the most positive thing to do. And, on the other hand, to give yourself the space and attention when you need it. For most of us, as Anjali said in her talk "Pleasure and the Spiritual Life" - "a little bit of what you fancy does you good".

(I write this article from the floor in front of a coal fire, in White Row. Feeling full after a lovely meal, with grated cheese (!!) on it. The skin on my face feeling rather tight and flushed after spending a sun-drenched afternoon wandering down by the sea. I'm on a 'Dharma-holiday' for 4 days, giving myself rather a lot of what I fancy, and feeling incredibly good on it!)

So the second half of the Order/Vitra retreat was really powerful. It felt as if people had started to open up, energy was beginning to flow. It was starting to be the amazing event such a weekend could be, with such a large number of committed women together. I know I left, on Sunday night after the puja, feeling inspired (to use that much used word), feeling a burst of determination to evolve, to try and step clear of my old reactive self, to become a "New Woman!"

I hope there will be many more such events in the future, and that we'll learn to give ourselves to them, to use them, to open ourselves to them, and to let ourselves be receptive to the incredible energy and positivity and vision that can arise in such a situation.

--oOo--

HYMN TO VAJRASATTVA Anne Rowlands

Om.
Vajrasattva glistening white,
calm, serene and vajric
radiating light.
Universal.

Om.
Vajrasattva glistening white
strong with bell and vajra
encompassing space.
Love.

Om.
Vajrasattva glistening white,
clear, diaphanous and firm
dissolving all defilements.
Purifier.

Om.
Vajrasattva glistening white,
bright, dynamic and still
according perfections.
Liberator.

Om.
Vajrasattva glistening white,
come close to me
be one with me.
O great Hero of the Vajra.
AWAY WITH EVIL.

--oOo--

LET'S DEVELOP METTA AND COMPASSION TOWARDS THE OPPOSITE SEX Susanna Laurola

While digging in the garden this morning an incident came to my mind and got me think this matter further. It began to bother me so much that I wanted to write to you, especially the women in England and I'd be very pleased if you gave me your comments on the matter. And the matter is shortly: shouldn't we try to develop metta and compassion towards the opposite sex as well!

The incident, which I mentioned, was this: Few weeks ago I visited London from Helsinki with my mother and we stayed in Amaravati. One morning an old friend of mine came to fetch us for a drive in the countryside. I had told him that he isn't allowed to come in but he didn't take it too seriously. So he got quite an unfriendly reception and with difficulty I got him to understand that he really wasn't allowed to come in and so he waited outside until we were ready. Later on he asked me why it would have been so terrible if he had waited in the hall and why the reception was so hostile. I couldn't give him a proper answer which had satisfied even myself. Could you? That's why I am writing to you now.

I agree with single sex communities and retreats, actually quite enjoy them feeling very relaxed. I understand your desire to do all and everything of your own; so would I in your case! I even understand, in some extent, you don't want men visitors in your community. But the thing which I can't understand is the hostile attitude towards male sex! I must add in this connection that neither can I understand men's hostile attitude towards women. I've got an impression that this kind of attitude is quite common in the FBO in England.

It seems to be much easier to be a Buddhist or whatsoever in England than in Finland because the English people are much more tolerant and unprejudiced towards all kinds of nations and religions and movements. This is not the case in Finland. But there is one thing in which we have more tolerance and unprejudice! That's why I want to ask you a question, my friends: Where is your tolerance towards the opposite sex? With my tolerance I mean the feeling of metta and compassion, not sexual dependency. You must admit men are also living beings as well as women. I'm sure the Buddha while teaching us compassion towards all living beings didn't exclude the opposite sex! It seems to me as if you consider the opposite sex as a Mara who is trying to tempt you off the path. It can be but it doesn't have to be the case; it all depends on yourself. I'm

convinced a friendship between women and men is possible and I mean a friendship without sexuality.

Generally a man-woman relationship is based on dependency, attachment and sexual attraction. You can quite easily find the old "composition" of protection-protected. Women want to be weak, protected and spoiled with gifts whereas men want to feel their power and strength while "protecting" their women and children. The strongest tie in their relationship is sexuality and when this brings difficulties, all relationship gradually starts to break. This again brings about unhappiness, jealousy, bitterness. The weak ego has collapsed. That's why it is so important that people develop themselves individually to be dependent only on themselves. As soon as women have proved to themselves they can do without men's protection and help and men have realised women are not only an essential burden to prove one's masculinity, but living beings with their own capacity, the negatively emotional attitude will gradually disappear and a relationship based on friendship will arise. As soon as we realise we are dealing with human beings, not with representatives of opposite sex, we will find it is possible to expand our feeling of metta and compassion towards all living beings, including the opposite sex!

I must admit I far too easily abuse the weak Finnish men whose only hobby is drinking beer and getting drunk. I'll try to develop compassion even towards them, so I hope you who have got these strong energetic woman-haters will change their attitude by showing your capacity through metta and compassion.

--oOo--

NEW NITRAS

London (LBC)

SARAH CHILDE

1 Valette Court,
St. James Lane,
London W.10.

Brighton

PAULA TURNER

51 Cowper Street,
Hove,
Sussex.

NEW WOMAN ORDER MEMBER

During his recent visit to Pune (India), Bhante gave nine Upasaka/Upasika Ordinations. One of these is the former Mrs. Maheshkar, now Upasika Dharmalochana. Here is what Bhante had to say about her name at the public ceremony:

"Next comes Mrs. K. Maheshkar. So, what would be the good name for her? I thought about this a little bit and then I decided it would be DHARMALOCHANA. Dharma of course we know. Lochana means 'the eye'. So Dharmalochana means 'the lady who possesses the Dharma-eye'. That is to say she sees everything from the point of view of the Dharma. So I thought this is a good name for her. In England we have an Upasika named Sulocana, here we've got Dharmalochana."

AMITAYUS Anoma

Oh beautiful, taunting Amitayus
Offering on the one hand... Infinite Life!
And on the other... DEATH.

CONFIDENCE Anoma

The only way to have confidence
is to have confidence.

--oOo--

FORTHCOMING EVENTS compiled by Anoma

3 WEEK OPEN SUMMER RETREAT AT MANDARAVA 3rd to 24th August

Cost is £4 per night - 10% discount if you book for the whole 3 weeks.
Contact:

The Retreat Organiser,
"Mandarava",
Street Farm,
The Street,
Aslacton,
Nr. Norwich, Norfolk. Tel: Tivetshall 344.

If you haven't yet booked up for this retreat - time's getting short!
Remember it's an open retreat so you can come for any length of time you
wish. Incidentally, if you know any women around your centre who might
be interested in coming - do encourage them. Just remember your first
experience of a long retreat and what it did for you..!

WOMEN'S MASSAGE WEEKEND at MANDARAVA 8/9th September

Malini is leading this weekend for women Order members and Mitras. If
you'd like to book the cost is £8 - contact the Retreat Organiser, as
above. If you want to find out more about it first, contact Malini
at:

"Beulah"
95 Bishops Way,
Bethnal Green,
London E2. Tel: 980 4151

ANOTHER GRAND THREE DAY MITRA EVENT AT MANDARAVA!

from Thursday evening 20th to Monday morning (after breakfast) 24th September
Cost is £13. Bookings to Retreat Organiser at Mandarava and please let
Vimala know if you can bring a tent.

At the June event there were 39 Mitras and Order members present and
I think most of us got a lot from it. So I hope there's as many, if not
more! - at the next one.

This time the study groups will be on different texts and you'll be able
to choose which one you want to attend by signing up when you arrive.
The talks will be on different bodhisattvas. Look forward to seeing
everyone there!

--oOo--