

Janet Nash

DAKINI

DAKINI III

March, 1977

Quite a lot has happened since the last DAKINI, probably the most important thing was the womens' retreat at Christmas at Arjantara. You will probably have read Do's account of it in the latest Newsletter. It was the first time there has been 5 women Order members on awomens retrain, and the first week especially came together in an incredibly positive and intensive way. Out of the overall feeling of the retreat came the inspiration for Malini, Srimala, Annie Leigh and Teresa Fisher to form a community, and set up a womens retreat centre in Norfolk. Things are also moving as far as the Wanstead situation is concerned and by the time the next Dakini comes out, many of us will be in new and fresh situations creating something which will eventually be of positive benefit to everyone.

Dhammadinna

Individuality and the Higher Evolution of Women

Dhammadinna

Basically, within the overall context of the Friends, we are trying to do one thing, and one thing only. Quite often this simple fact gets submerged underneath a sea of distractions, wrong views, rationalisations, subjective emotions, confusions, delusions, busyness, work (even for the Movement sometimes) etc etc. So what is this one thing we are trying to do and which is the reason and purpose for all our activities and projects? No marks for the right answer. It is to encourage the growth of the individual, both on her own, and in association with others. Of course, we have heard it all before, but we still take it for granted. We have to realise that it is not at all easy to be an individual in the sense meant in the Friends.

It is probably the hardest and most difficult thing anyone can attempt. In a recent seminar discussion on this topic Bhante gave the impression that to maintain one's mindfulness or self-awareness (which is essential for the development of true individuality) is exceptionally difficult. All the time group consciousness and group values are pulling us back. We are, emotionally, if not intellectually, firmly embedded in the group.

Anyone seriously involved in the Friends, will of course be an aspiring individual and will understand only too well the difficulties involved and the need to create the right sort of environment for individuality to grow in. We should, therefore, be quite clear about what we mean by the word individual, within the context of the Spiritual Life and how it differs from a group.

Also how individuality differs from individualism. Bhante has given three lectures which cover some of this ground and the topic came up several times on the seminars in the summer. Hopefully Bhante will write something specifically on this topic soon.

Simply, an individual is someone self aware; aware of her own states of mind, feelings and thoughts; aware of what she is doing and why; aware of the extent of her own conditioning; aware of her own basic motivation; of what is happening in her relationships with other people; and aware of her own uniqueness. An individual is also independent, not in a strained or forced way, not being blind to objective needs for assistance from those more evolved than her, but independent nevertheless. An individual is also integrated so that all her energy is flowing in a positive and skilful direction. It is only the individual who can commit herself. These are the main qualities of individuality, but an individual is also, open, warm, compassionate, receptive, sensitive, energetic, and creative. Another quality of individuality is to have had some insight into the True nature of Reality, some glimpse of Perfect Vision. It is very difficult for us to extricate ourselves from the stranglehold of the group, from its warmth, shelter and security. Only insight or vision can weaken, loosen and finally sever this hold on us.

So perhaps we can realise that most of us have a very long way to go. At the most we are aspiring individuals. We need the guidance and help of true individuals to help us from falling back into the group. Ultimately, of course, we take our guidance from the Buddha himself, and also from his Enlightened disciples, from our own teacher, and from Order Members also, who have at least reached a point in their own development where they are integrated enough to commit themselves.

So everything we do within the Friends is done to help us grow towards individuality, and to be able to relate with other individuals or aspiring individuals on a clean, clear, non-neurotic basis, thus forming the Sangha.

So having put everything we do within this context, I now want to talk about more specific things. Following on from what I have previously said, we can see that the setting up of any centre, community or project within the Friends is done to provide a positive situation for individual growth. To set up a community, which you hope is going to be a Spiritual Community implies certain prerequisites. First of all you need some Order Members, people who have some idea what individuality is about, who are in contact with the teacher and with other members of the Sangha, and who can provide the situation with impetus, guidance and direction. What the Order is, what the Sangha is and what individuality is, are all things very difficult to communicate just through speech. Contact and example are much better ways. Now ideally to convey the full flavour of the Sangha (individuals relating as individuals) you need at least five Order members. One Order member can provide energy, impetus and perspective, but is still usually seen in terms of her personality; it's just old so and so doing her thing, and telling us what to do etc. Two Order Members can seem like a couple even if of the same sex. Three and four can begin to work, but with five, people begin to see and feel the Order at work in a situation in both obvious and subtle ways.

Perhaps we can see, if we are thinking in these terms, that in the whole area of single-sex activities we have a slight problem or difficulty. We have very few women Order Members, especially working in the movement in classes, retreats and study groups. (Why there are so few Upasikas could provide another article which might not be unrelated to the difficulties of becoming an individual). Until recently it has been very rare to get 5 Upasikas in one place at one time, let alone in a community or on a retreat. Consequently women Friends and Mitras do not get the best opportunity to see and feel the Order operating among women. When it does happen that 5 Women Order Members are on a retreat together, the results, compared to the results when it hasn't happened are really marked and quite amazing. (The Christmas Womens retreat) I would also like to add, at this point, that one of the reasons for having single sex activities at all, is because they encourage individuality. A lot of stuff that goes on between the sexes is Bhante once said 'sub-individual'. That is not to put it down. Love and sex and all the rest of it are all right on their own level, though attachment, especially neurotic attachment and dependence are not. Bhante has also said 'to the extent that one is dominated by the sex instinct one is not an individual'.

So at the present time, intensive contact between women Order members and women Friends and Mitras is quite rare. Since the growth of the Movement and the individuals within it is based on personal contact, we can see at least one of the reasons why the growth of women Mitras into Upasikas is rather a slow business.

Recently 6 Upasikas formed a Council of the F.W.B.O. basically so that the Wanstead Community could be a legally and financially autonomous Centre, with our own Charity Registration and Bank account. Since we have been meeting together for Council purposes and since the Christmas Retreat, we have realised how important it is for us to just meet. This is of course going to be much more possible now that we are all either living in London or Norfolk. Contact with other Order Members is the most important event in an Order members life, it is our foundation and our base, and provides what we can call 'horizontal' communication. So we see our first priority as being providing the time and situations where we can meet as often as possible for days or weekends or longer. Our second priority will be the setting up of the communities in Norfolk and in Wanstead, so we can extend our experience to others in a n intense (not heavy) situation. From here we will move outwards to provide retreats and study retreats and other activities which seem right. So you see we start from the centre and move out.

One of the things we have discovered through experience in the Friends over the past few years is that things work best (i.e. the level of consciousness is higher) when there is a reasonable ratio of Order members to Friends and Mitras. This is obvious when you remember that the Movement is founded on personal contact. A one to one ratio is obviously best, and a one to four probably the limit. So the communities will probably be fairly small at least to begin with. Over the last few years there have been retreats and study groups, but usually one or two Order members have been spread out rather thinly over a lot of people. Obviously benefits have been gained, but I don't think that it is the best way to work.

So in the next few months we will be concentrating mainly on meeting amongst ourselves and then doing what is necessary to set up the communities. There may not, therefore, be many or any

retreats or study groups for a few months. Also we will have to plan retreats, at least, so that at least 4 Order members can come. If you are not directly involved in the communities, please be patient and try to see that when the communities are set up (one of which is going to be an actual retreat centre) we will be able to do so much more than we have been able to up to now. Any one not getting that much contact, can be carrying on meditating, getting contact through a centre, perhaps going on a solitary, and give whatever support, whether emotional or financial (preferably both) to the ventures in hand.

I feel sure that if we work in this way, slowly and intensively from a centre or nucleus, we will actually achieve more. If there are going to be more and more women coming along wanting retreats and study groups and contact, then there will need to be more Upasikas. I think it might have been Bhante who said - we should be training Physicians not trying to treat all the sick ourselves.

If the inspiration grabs me again around the time the next DAKINI is due out, I would like to continue with something else on the whole question of individuality and its development and how it relates to us.

F.W.B.O. (Wanstead)

Dhammadinna

It looks as though we will be getting at least one of the houses fairly soon. We have been having meetings of those thinking of living there and also discussions about raising money. This copy of Dakini contains a tithe form, which I hope you will read and act on! Everyone going to live in Wanstead is trying to get at least £50 together (some are also giving to Pundarika as well). We will need quite a lot of money to decorate the place to a good standard, buy a rupa etc. One person has volunteered the money to buy a van, and someone else is getting tools together. Please give what you can, however little (or however large) either in the form of a tithe or a lump sum.

Dhammadinna

Me

Just a few personal lines before I give the rest of Dakini over to the other contributors. In October of this year I am going to India with a number of other yogis to do a months course with Mr. Iyengar in Poona, either or before this we will spend a month looking around. Consequently I am working full time to get the necessary £500 - £600 together, which will probably take me up to 6 months. I've been supported for my expenses by the F.W.B.O. first as Secretary then as Mitra Convenor (for women) for 3 and a bit years at around £8-£10 a week, so I don't have any little nest eggs tucked away! It does mean that with working, teaching, study group, Order meetings, keeping up my own individual meditation and yoga practice and doing things for Wanstead I have very little time. If I owe you a letter, I will get around to it in time. If you want to see me, be patient! You may wonder why I am taking off when I am or will be in the middle of starting something new, and when I should be available. Some of you know that my health is not very good. In fact for the last three years it has been diabolical. After doing a class with Iyengar in the summer, I feel he can sort me out where Western and Quack Doctors have failed. I feel very

hampered by my poor health and the effect it has on my energy level and feel it would be better to take the time to put it right. Also I am very much looking forward to a completely different scene and situation from Archway where I have lived for $4\frac{1}{2}$ years. Thats it folks, lots of love to you all everywhere, and I am thinking about you even if I have'nt written or seen you lately.

NON-HARMFUL EATING

Dawn Inkster

I don't understand Gotami's concern with the first precept - her attitude seems quite obsessive to me. One has to eat to stay alive and eat quite well in order to make progress on the Spiritual Path. The Buddha discovered this, we are told, when he gave up ascetism. My own approach to a non-harmful diet involves an increasing awareness of what I am eating, but it doesn't seem to be accomplished by what I would term unhealthy oversensitivity. To maintain oneself in a 'vibrantly alive' condition surely means to protect oneself from disease. Personally I would rather kill a mosquito than suffer malaria, and similarly kill a rabid animal rather than contract rabies. If I were quite happy to support the local worms and slugs then I'd cultivate enough apples and lettuces for all of us, but I suspect I'd want to do other things with my time.

One could argue that I've drawn my own 'emotional limit' because of my livelihood - I'm a cook in 'Sunrise', the Brighton Vegetarian Restaurant. But if I thought of carrots screaming and so on, having to chop vegetables all day, I'd become very depressed and probably wouldn't continue for very long. All the food in the restaurant is vegan, i.e. doesn't involve the use of eggs or dairy produce. Through literature and personal contact we are showing our customers that it is possible to obtain all the necessary vitamins, minerals and protein through eating the following diet:-

50-60% grains (brown rice, millet, buckwheat, wheat, barley)
5-10% soups (including miso - a fermented soya bean paste)
20-30% vegetables
5-10% seaweed and beans (aduki, lentils, red beans, chick peas)
and herb teas or grain coffee.

Being around food conscious' people most of the day I am becoming aware of the importance of the state of mind with which one eats. There's a lot of mechanical, sentimental, intellectual eating about, and the more obsessed with food one is, the worse one's eating habits. Food and its care of preparation does affect the mind, but to have a beneficial effect it also has to be chewed well, eaten in moderation and with a sense of gratitude to our environment.

New Zealand National Retreat - My thoughts and reflections

Eve Gill

We arrived in Waikanae in the rain. There was a good atmosphere in the van, as we were all aware of the gathering of the New Zealand Sangha at the National New Year Retreat. We stopped at a petrol station to get oil and petrol. It was a good thing we stopped because in the distance three figures, packs on backs, made their way towards us. It was Vijaya, John and John. We were

as pleased to see them, as they were to see us. A year had passed and yet little had changed.

Our drive out to Ngatiawa Camp was cosy and comfortable. The rain beat against the van's body and formed a glistening veil over the countryside around. All this intensified the feeling of friendliness. A definite feeling of Sangha was building up and continued to build up until our departing after the ten days. At one point numbers built up to forty but there was approximately thirty-six at the retreat full time.

The basic theme of the retreat was openness. Openness in every sense - from the niggling thoughts that clutter the mind and makes communication hard; to the releasing of emotions which have been blocked up. All the while knowing that by releasing these and by being yourself, you will always be accepted.

Each of the ten days was balanced between meditation - the integration of energies; study - intellectual clarity through reading and group discussions; devotion - emotional involvement by means of the Puja and chanting; and communication - the interacting of energy from one to another.

For a more intensive communication we did a series of communication exercises. This is an exercise which helps us get back into contact with our emotions, usually more positive emotions and to share with another being ourselves, fully and openly. People sit facing a partner. Here they look directly at one another. A bell is rung. The silent sitting, looking....exploring...feeling and communicating without a sound. Bell. A simple sentence is said by one and the other acknowledges with a response - just a simple yes. Bell. Now they change - one initiating the other responding. Bell. Again a simple sentence is said by one and the other acknowledges and replies again using a simple sentence to do this. The word matter is irrelevant. Are we flowing? Am I truly aware of your presence as a human being? Am I letting you know that I acknowledge you? These are the types of questions which usually go through my mind at the beginning but which are soon gone.

An incident which left an impression on my mind was one that began as an experiment. Upasika Padmashri suggested doing a puja in just women's voices. There and then we - a group of ten women - practised chanting together. It took a while to tune in and get used to our voices without the accompaniment of strong masculine voices. That evening the puja was just in women's voices except for the chanting of the On Vajrasattva mantra at the beginning. This gave us an added boost. We then sat for ten minutes. Each of the seven verses was led by a different woman. The chanting we did was soft and delicate. Someone later commented on how it was soft like wind-chimes. A very encouraging compliment.

This was not only good for the women to build up confidence in ourselves but it also brought out receptivity in the men. In the discussion afterwards it was apparent that for most of us present, it had been very moving. A few wished they could have joined in and one or two reacted rather strongly. The puja was a very positive step to take. It is invaluable to have a Sangha - a spiritual community - based on a healthy individual level; to practise the Dharma - the involvement of our growth and development in our daily lives; and the Buddha - the ideal of human Enlightenment, as our common goal.

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If we base our individual commitment on these "Three Jewels" (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha), the role playing of man and women need not be the most important game for us to play.

Therefore, if the community is a supportive one, which is conducive to our development as individuals; it can help us free ourselves from mast 'male' or 'female' conditioning. This will enable us to just be ourselves, in our own feminine or masculine way. This puja we did opened my eyes to the meaning of being an individual as well as adding something quite relevant to the retreat as a whole.

So far I've not mentioned the less structured side of the retreat. By this I mean the times when one can stroll down to the stream and watch others skinny-dipping, building dams, and just splashing and bathing in the icy stream water. Walking up through the bush seeing still figures, in meditation, beneath the shade of trees. Peoples voices could be heard, expressing the joys and woes of life to the chords of guitars. Yet all of us, in our own ways continuing our meditation and mindfulness.

A SONG OF MILAREPA

Christine Seymour

In January I went on my first solitary retreat to a caravan in Cornwall belonging to a Mitra; Helen Johnson. I really enjoyed myself and recommend it to anyone who has not yet been one! Quite often I would find a reading for the puja I performed before going to bed; something to keep my impetus going or something to read just for the sheer beauty of it. In the former category came the following song of Milarepa which he sang during his stay in the tiger cave of Singa-dzong. As I remember it he was being questioned by some future disciples about his ability to stay alone in such a frightening place and yet be happy. It seemed when I read it that I was rejoicing in my own solitude. Now, reading it again in hectic London I find to my surprise that it still inspires me, still seems appropriate - on reflection I guess it's because wherever you are - you are essentially alone in your spiritual life. Perhaps other readers of Dakini will find it inspiring also.

"I bow at the feet of my father, the wish granting gem,
May he bless you, my children, with an abundance of aids.

I beg him to bring you to firm knowledge
In the divine fortress of your own body.

Frightened by fears, I built up a castle.
The voidness of absolute being, this was that castle,
And of its destruction I now have no fear.

Fearful of cold, I made up a garment,
The producing of warmth within, this was that garment,
And from cold I now have no fear.

Fearful of poverty, I sought for some wealth,
The seven glorious and inexhaustible jewels, these were
that wealth,
And from poverty I now have no fear.

Fearful of hunger, I sought for some food,
Absorption in the Absolute, this was that food,
And from hunger I now have no fear.

Fearful of thirst, I sought for a drink,
The nectar of mindfulness, this was that drink,
And from thirst I now have no fear.

Fearful of melancholy, I sought for a friend,
The blissful void, this is my lasting friend,
And from melancholy I now have no fear.

Fearful of straying, I sought for a way,
The practice of two-in-one, this was that way,
And of straying I now have no fear.

So I, yogin, complete with all desirable wealth,
Am happy wherever I stay.

Happy is the state of one who lives in such a spot as this,
Without the presence of a single companion, and even in this
one is happy.

And now by the song of this rejoicing yogin,
May the sufferings of all beings be removed."

THE NUN SOMA

Translated from the German by Jinamata

Once the Lord was dwelling in Savatthi. Then the nun Soma, after she got dressed in the morning, went to Savatthi in alms quest with her begging bowl and robes. And after she had finished her alms quest in Savatthi and had had her meal, she went to a dense forest to spend the day there. After she had gone deep into the forest, she sat down under a tree in order to spend the day there.

Then Mara; the evil one, went to the place, where the nun Soma was sitting, intending to instil fear, terror and horror into her and to disturb her deep meditation. And after he had gone there, he said to the venerable nun the following verses:

"This place which is very difficult to attain, which can only be attained by the Holy ones, - it is impossible that a woman, whose intelligence is only two fingers wide, can reach it."

Then the nun Soma thought to herself: "Who is it, human or demon, who is saying a verse here?" And the nun Soma thought to herself: "Surely, it is Māra, the evil one, who is saying this verse, who has come with the intention to instil fear, terror and horror in me and to disturb my deep meditation."

As soon as the nun Soma had recognised that it was Māra, the evil one, she answered Māra, the evil one, with the verses:
"What difference does it make, that one is a woman, - if the mind is fully concentrated and insight had arisen in a human being, who has understood the perfect teaching? Well, if someone thought: 'I am a woman or a man', or: 'I am anything at all', - well, to someone who thinks like that Māra may talk!"

Then Māra, the evil one, realised that the nun Soma recognised him, and unhappy and in a bad temper he disappeared.