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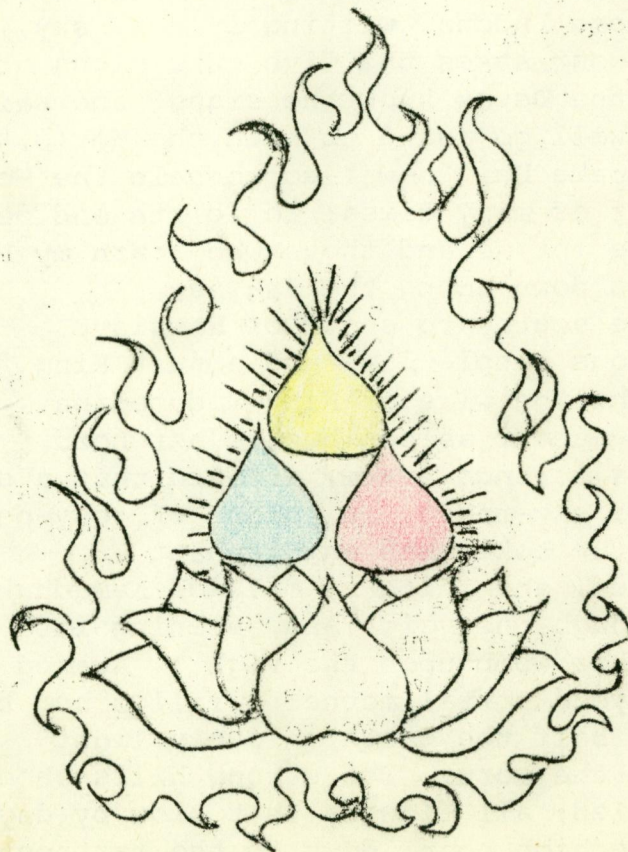
MARCH 1978

A Newsletter for women Order members, Mitras and Friends, produced at Amaravati, 30 Cambridge Park, London E11 2PR. Telephone 989 5083.

EDITORIAL Anoma

I'm writing this a few days before setting off for the Order Convention which is being held at a school near Hastings, Sussex. There are about 70 Order members attending, including ones from Finland, Holland, Germany and New Zealand. During the Convention, on 7th April, we will be celebrating the Tenth Anniversary of the foundation of the Western Buddhist Order, which should be quite something with so many Order members attending.

I've asked Anne Farnham to draw the Three Jewels beneath this editorial, as they are the most precious things in an Order member's life. However different in other ways they might be, every member of the Order has that in common; she or he has gone for Refuge to the Three Jewels. They are the heart of the Western Buddhist Order.



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THE BUDDHA'S BIRTHDAY Dhammadinna

"Thus came he to be born again for men.

Below the highest sphere four Regents sit
 Who rule our world; and under them are zones
 Nearer, but high, where saintliest spirits dead
 Wait thrice ten thousand years, then live again;
 And on Lord Buddha, waiting in that sky,
 Came for our sakes the five sure signs of birth,
 So that the Devas knew the signs, and said
 "Buddha will go again to help the World."
 "Yea!" spake He, "now I go to help the World
 This last of many times; for birth and death
 End hence for me and those who learn my Law.
 I will go down among the Sakyas,
 Under the southward snows of Himalay,
 Where pious people live and a just King."
 That night the wife of King Suddhodana,
 Maya the Queen, asleep beside her Lord,
 Dreamed a strange dream; dreamed that a star from heaven-
 Splendid, six-rayed, in colour of rosy-pearl,
 Whereof the token was an Elephant
 Six-tusked, and white as milk of Kamadhuk-
 Shot through the void; and, shining into her,
 Entered her womb upon the right. Awaked,
 Bliss beyond mortal mother's filled her breast,
 And over half the earth a lovely light
 Forewent the morn. The strong hills shook; the waves
 Sank lulled; all flowers that blow by day came forth
 As 'twere high noon; down to the farthest hells

Passed the Queen's joy, as when warm sunshine thrills
 Wood-glooms to gold, and into all the deeps
 A tender whisper pierced. "Oh ye," it said,
 "The dead that are to live, the live who die,
 Uprise, and hear, and hope! Buddha is come!"
 Whereat in Limbos numberless much peace
 Spread, and the world's heart throbbed, and a wind blew
 With unknown freshness over lands and seas.
 And when the morning dawned, and this was told,
 The grey dream-readers said "The dream is good!
 The Crab is in conjunction with the Sun;
 The Queen shall bear a boy, a holy child
 Of wondrous wisdom, profiting all flesh,
 Who shall deliver men from ignorance,
 Or rule the world, if he will deign to rule."
 In this wise was the holy Buddha born.

Queen Maya stood at noon, her days fulfilled,
 Under a Palsa in the Palace-grounds,
 A stately trunk, straight as a temple-shaft,
 With crown of glossy leaves and fragrant blooms;
 And, knowing the time come - for all things knew -
 The conscious tree bent down its bows to make
 A bower about Queen Maya's majesty;
 And Earth put forth a thousand sudden flowers
 To spread a couch; while, ready for the bath,
 The rock hard by gave out a limpid stream
 Of crystal flow. So brought she forth her child
 Pangless - he having on his perfect form
 The marks, thirty and two, of blessed birth;
 Of which the great news to the Palace came.
 But when they brought the painted palanquin
 To fetch him home, the bearers of the poles
 Were the four Regents of the Earth, come down
 From Mount Sumeru - they who write men's deeds
 On brazen plates - the Angel of the East,
 Whose hosts are clad in silver robes, and bear
 Targets of pearl: the Angel of the South,
 Whose horsemen, the Kumbhandas, ride blue steeds,
 With sapphire shields: the Angel of the West,
 By Nagas followed, riding steeds blood-red,
 With coral shields: the Angel of the North,
 Environed by his Yakshas, all in gold,
 On yellow horses, bearing shields of gold.
 These, with their pomp invisible, came down
 And took the poles, in cast and outward garb
 Like bearers, yet most mighty gods; and gods
 Walked free with men that day, though men knew not:
 For Heaven was filled with gladness for Earth's sake,
 Knowing Lord Buddha thus was come again."

from "The Light of Asia" by Sir Edwin Arnold

The Buddha's birthday (which we in the Friends will be celebrating
 on 8th April) is surrounded by myth and legend. In other stories
 it says "The Buddha was born in full awareness, not thoughtless

and bewildered as other people are. When born, he was so lustrous and steadfast that it appeared as if the young sun had come down to earth, and yet when people gazed at his dazzling brilliance, he held their eyes like the moon. His limbs shone with radiant hue of precious gold, and lit up the space all around. Instantly he walked seven steps, firmly and with long strides. In that he was like the constellation of the Seven Seers. With the bearing of a lion he surveyed the four quarters and spoke these words full of meaning for the future: 'For Enlightenment I was born, for the good of all that lives. This is the last time that I have been born into this world of becoming.'

From these stories we get the feeling that the Enlightenment principle eternally existing becomes concrete in the child of Siddhartha. In all the canonical Jataka tales we are aware that the Buddha had many, many previous lives in which he was a Bodhisattva, training arduously in all the Perfections aeon after aeon until, now at this point, his last birth. However, Siddhartha is not born Enlightened. He is born with the potentiality of Enlightenment. According to the stories he has all the marks of a Buddha or a world ruler. He can become through his own efforts Enlightened in this life, or become a universal monarch. The potentiality is there, but Siddhartha himself has to make the effort to win the goal of Enlightenment. He is born human like us, though endowed with great gifts, and much accumulation of past good karma, but nevertheless he himself has to tread the path.

Atisa, the aged seer, who comes to see the baby, sees the signs and marks which make him exceptional and says of the future Buddha, 'Uninterested in worldly affairs he will give up his kingdom. By strenuous efforts he will win that which is truly real. His gnosis will blaze forth like the sun, and remove the darkness of delusion from this world. The world is carried away in distress on the flooded river of suffering, which the foam of disease over-sprays, which has old age for its surge and rushes along with the violent rush of death: across the river he will ferry the world with the might, boat of gnosis. The stream of his most excellent Dharma shall flow along with the current of wisdom, banked in by firm morality, cooled by Transic concentration, and holy works shall cover it like melodious ducks; the world of the living, tormented with the thirst of its cravings, will drink from this stream. To those who are tormented with pains and hemmed in by their worldly concerns, who are lost in the desert tracks of Samsara, he shall proclaim the path which leads to salvation, as to travellers who have lost their way. Creatures scorched by the fire of greed, which feeds on sense objects as its fuel: he will refresh them with the rain of the Dharma, which is copious like the rain from a mighty cloud when the summer's burning heat is over. With the irresistible hammer of the most excellent true Dharma he will break down the door which imprisons living beings with the bolt of craving and the panels of dark delusion, and thus he will enable them to escape. The world is entangled in the snares of self delusion, it is overwhelmed by suffering, it has no refuge: after he has won full Enlightenment this boy, then a king of Dharma, will free the world from its bonds.'

All the events of the Buddha's life are important to us, not

just the wealth of teaching he gave and his example after his Enlightenment, but the events leading up to that; his life of ease and luxury shielded from the world by his father in the hope that he would opt for becoming a world leader rather than a Buddha; his growing dissatisfaction with this life; his seeing of the four sights; the great renunciation or going forth; his years of trying different paths until dissatisfied with all this he finally sits under the Bodhi tree and vows to gain Complete Enlightenment. All these events can be related to our own lives.

When celebrating the birth of the Buddha, or his birth as Siddhartha, we can think of our own birth into this world. We have after all been born this time as a human being, we have the most fortunate birth, for from here we can achieve Enlightenment. We are born with certain potential, perhaps not as much as Siddhartha, but it is possible for us to make something of that potential. We are all as Bhante said in a lecture, foci of universal consciousness, but we have to become aware of this. We must make full use of our potential as human beings by trying to follow a spiritual life. We are born with potential, but we have to realise that potential by our own efforts just as Siddhartha did all those years ago. Siddhartha's path to Enlightenment wasn't easy. He had no teachers, he had to rediscover the Way which had been lost, but he did it. We are more fortunate in that we have his life and teachings to follow, we have the whole Buddhist tradition, we have a teacher, the Dharma, and the Sangha, we have the ways and means to discover our own potential. We may not reach complete and perfect Enlightenment in this life (but who knows until we try) but we can certainly go all out to make some breakthrough into the transcendental, to put ourselves strongly in the pull of the unconditioned.

The Buddha was born a Bodhisattva and therefore represents the breaking through of the transcendental into the mundane, the unconditioned into the conditioned and we don't have to see this as just something which happened 2,500 odd years ago in India. If we make enough effort in our own practice, if we build up our sila and our meditation, then insight can arise on this basis; the transcendental can break through in us, can transform us. Just as Siddhartha, though born with great advantages had to realise his own potential, so we have to realise our human potential, prepare the ground for the arising of insight, (the birth of the Buddha in us) and then work at transforming more and more of our lives through that insight until we too are ready to sit under the Bodhi tree and achieve complete and perfect Enlightenment.

So we can say, The Buddha was born as we are born,
and go on to say, What the Buddha overcame, we too can overcome,
What the Buddha attained, we too can attain.

So the occasion of the festival of the Buddha's birth can remind us that the Buddha was human, not a god or a divine being, but a human being, born of woman, coming into a world of suffering and unsatisfactoriness just like us. What we make of this birth, whether we believe it to be one of many, or perhaps the only one we have, or perhaps just don't know, is up to us, each of us as individuals. Our birth into this world can be the basis for our birth into the Buddha-family. Our life and our body/mind is our

basis and starting point. In this very life the Thought of Enlightenment could arise so that the following words of Santideva would have meaning.

"Today my birth is completed, my human nature is most appropriate;
today I have been born into the Buddha-family and I am now a Buddha son."

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AMARAVATI NEWS Anoma

Probably our biggest piece of news is the recent Working Week Retreat, on which Hilary has written some chosen lines. But besides this, there are a few other things which might be of interest. We have just taken on a nearby allotment, where we plan to grow our own vegetables. We do have quite a large garden but this is basically lawn and trees and we'll probably use the beds for flowers. Helen has done quite a lot of work in the garden, digging the beds and clearing a long-covered-up-path around the lawn.

We've had two Art Days under the guidance of Maggie - one for drawing each other and one for painting 'blobs'. Those of you who were present at the last Order/Mitra day might remember I mentioned these in my talk on communication, when I was going into possible ways of getting in touch with ourselves when we've got a bit alienated. So 'blobbing' is just painting whatever comes into your head onto a piece of paper. Usually one would do it when one 'felt the call', but on this occasion, we all got together along two sides of an enormous piece of lining paper and 'blobbed' together. The result was very powerful! I'm not sure if it's actually a good idea to 'blob' to order. It was an interesting experiment but it may be better to just stick to doing it alone, when one felt there was something unexpressed that might be liberated in this way. Generally though, people got a lot out of these Art Days and we'll certainly be having some more.

With the Convention coming up, the four Order members will be away and so in fact will most of the rest of the Community. Maggie is going to help cook at the Convention, Anne Farnham will be helping out at the Rainbow Restaurant to Norwich for a few days; Kay and Anne Murphy will be on solitary retreat, and Helen will be spending a couple of weeks in Devon. Hilary and Joan will be looking after the place and hopefully taking a first crack at the allotment! I'm going away immediately after the Convention for a month's solitary in a caravan in Wales. I haven't been on solitary for 2½ years (the last one was just before I was ordained) and so I'm looking forward to it. People are ringing up coach and rail stations; asking which are good lectures to take on solitary; borrowing each others books; "is there any electricity in the caravan?"...etc. There's a general air of people on the move in the air. Because of this, I've been thinking particularly about the community over the last few days. As I sat in the shrineroom tonight before the puja, I got this feeling of a quiet, strong sense of commitment filling the room. It moved me especially as we sat before the golden Buddha, graced either side with yellow tulips and daffodils. And all this within the house that we've been living in and working on for the

last nine months. There's rarely a feeling of anyone pulling in a different direction here. I feel that things run smoothly most of the time because we basically all want the same thing... to evolve.

I was thinking that as time passes and people eventually start going different ways (in the course of their spiritual lives), there'll always be that strong feeling of spiritual friendship between the members of the Amaravati community. When writing to old so-and-so in New Zealand (!) I feel sure that the bond will still be there, even though we might be far apart physically. After the Convention, we'll be welcoming Marichi to the community too, which will make 12 (5 Order members, sufficient for the Council of FWBO Wanstead, all under Amaravati's roof!). I hope she'll be happy here too.

So...I wish you well, wherever you are, and hope that you'll come and visit the community before too long, either on Order/Mitra Days, or Working Retreats, or any other time, provided you let us know first. It'll be good to see you. And now I'll hand you over to Hilary for news of the Working Retreat.

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AMARAVATI'S FIRST WORKING WEEK RETREAT Hilary Swain

Last week the first long retreat (needless to say a working retreat) was held here at Amaravati.

I am an old campaigner from the first days last June, when we all worked like lunatics getting the place into some sort of order. Since then the work on the house has tended to proceed at a somewhat slower pace. Kusa Cushions, administrative work and household duties have taken up quite a lot of time.

Something of the flavour of those earlier days was recaptured during the eight days of the retreat. I'm not sure if it was a "'diluted' dhyana state" the community members and guests were enjoying as we balanced precariously on planks and trestles, paint-brush in hand; or demolishing a partition wall; or the endless scraping, blow-torching, plastering and wallpapering; not to mention the battle against the dry rot which threatened to give us a shrine room with a view, both below to Anjali's room and to the street outside. However, amidst much energy, enthusiasm and positivity (at least the enthusiasm and positivity lasted until the eighth day), two rooms were converted into one large shrine room and the decorating almost completed, and work on one of the bedrooms was begun. The new shrine room is light and airy, painted in white and buttermilk with a frieze depicting birds and flowers on some of the wall and a view through french windows into the back garden.

For varying periods of time, nine visitors from Brighton, Glasgow, Norfolk and the other London centres, joined with the ten community members in the usual programme of meditation, work, eating and puja.

The completion of our new larger shrine room will mean that we will be able to hold retreats, study seminars and Order/Mitra days here.

As Amaravati, the "Realm the very thought of which fills one with

bliss" rises from the wreck of a burnt out ex-guest house and I experience the changes happening both within myself and to the community. I feel a growing appreciation of the importance of Amaravati as a place to break through conditioning and stereotyped roles and as a symbol of the spiritual aspirations of women throughout the FWBO.

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FIRST WOMEN'S ORDER/MITRA DAY - February 19th Beryl Dewane

It was a chilly Saturday that Suzy and I left Mandarava, to hitch a lift to London, for the first Women's Order/Mitra Day. But not the welcome we received on arriving at Amaravati. A candlelit supper, Puja and meditation. A good night's sleep. Then ready the next morning for Order/Mitra Day.

A walk to the tube station, off to Bethnal Green and the E.E.M.C. We started with double meditation, walking and chanting and the basic puja. The big shrineroom, with large rupa, made by Chintamani, at first seemed rather overwhelming. By the end of the day it became rather different and much more friendly. Lunch was brought by the girls from Amaravati, and heated on the stove at the Centre.

This was the time to meet and talk to friends old and new. So what followed in the afternoon was apt. A series of three talks all on the same subject of communication, given by Dhammadinna, Anoma and Anjali. This was followed by a discussion.

I feel communication is what Order/Mitra Day is about. Communicating not just talking to each other, but by being together in meditation, walking and chanting and pujas too, giving a real feeling of the Sangha.

This day generated a lot of energy. So it is good that there will be other Order/Mitra days for women in the future. For one Mitra at least will be looking forward to them.

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WRITTEN ON RETREAT AT ARYATARA 12th March 1978 Jenny Roche

Aryatara seems to be for me the place which has witnessed changes and milestones since my first contact with the Friends 17 months ago. I remember vividly my first retreat here; I was a real beginner having started to meditate only a few weeks previously and I was thrown in at the deep end on a regular's retreat with double meditations. I remember my body groaning in response to these long enforced periods of stillness and my mind likewise. But going home on the Sunday night, having been apart from my family for the first time ever, I was filled with positive energy such as I had never before experienced and was able to see my life and situation through new eyes.

John (my husband) and I felt these weekend retreats to be so beneficial in every respect that we decided to try and attend one alternately every two months or so. This has worked out well and together with longer retreats last summer and Christmas has given me the opportunity to experience the Dharma in a more conducive and intense situation than can normally be managed at

home with children.

Although coming to this practical arrangement of alternate retreats with John, I did discover that there were very few if any other married people trying to evolve side by side. This filled me with alarm as I heard tales of broken relationships and single-sex communities. Aryatara was again the witness of a retreat last spring when I felt it was either the spiritual life or family life, that somehow the two were incompatible. But that crisis was passed. I realised that the Dharma can find you in any situation and that you must work from that situation. I was married and had two children and certainly did not want to change that. I realised I was looking for a pattern to follow, other families who had gone before that I could emulate. At that time we met Ray and Jaya Chipps (it was really good to read Jaya's positive and happy article in the last Dakini) in similar circumstances to ourselves and we thought with enthusiasm of a family community in the country. But none of us was quite ready for that large step, there was still more individual work to be done and Ray and Jaya moved as a family to Norfolk.

The Sangha is really important. Just as the women have gathered together in Amaravati, Mandarava and Beulah, and the men in Sukhavati, Padmaloka etc., so the families seem to be gathering together. A family day was held at the East End Meditation Centre in January where 12 families were represented and the energy sparked off from that small beginning is still reverberating. It was obviously a great comfort and inspiration to find so many other people in family situations trying to practice the Dharma. As Abhaya said then, the main danger of the nuclear family is to put too much, almost an unbearable strain on the other partner. And this is where the Sangha plays its vital role. There are other people to whom one can relate in a free and open manner, who have no emotional axes to grind, who can give objective criticism and encouragement.

I have recently found the women in the movement a great source of inspiration. I had found myself at Pundarika and now at Mandala greatly outnumbered by men. On this retreat I am the only woman with 10 men. Although I do not find this a great disadvantage (!) there is an element missing, and since the women's Christmas retreat I have realised the importance of contact with other developing women. What many of the women at Amaravati are trying to do is, to quote Dhammadinna from the last Dakini, "to become healthy, happy and human as women and to get in touch with a real experience of femininity". I am only just becoming aware of the importance of this, but as a married woman I feel the challenge for me is to do that in the context of the family. This would be incredibly difficult if I did not have a partner who felt the same and who encouraged this self exploration and development. I sometimes feel we have a spiritual community in miniature. But there are no other women and that is why frequent contact with other women in the Friends is high on my list of priorities.

Of course, the ideal would be to bring together all the elements of the Sangha, and eventually and inevitably a family community must evolve. Then there would be no conflict between family and spiritual life, no separation of the two, the one would be the other.

LETTER FROM TERESA FISHER

Norwich, Norfolk.

Dear Women,

Reading the latest D. kini I was struck anew by its value as a form of communication between us all. So this time, instead of just thinking it would be good to write something, until the copy date has again gone by and it's too late, I've sat down to put pen to paper. I don't have anything very startling to say. It's just about what's been happening within myself of late.

For the benefit of those of you who don't know me, I include the following few details. For the past few months I have been living in Norwich with Srimala, my unofficial Kalyana Mitra, and her two children (Shanti aged 4 years and Sundari aged 2 years). Before this I was living and working at Mandarava, the women's retreat centre about 14 miles outside of Norwich. In November last year I moved back to Norwich to take over the running of the Rainbow Vegetarian Restaurant from Kulamitra. This is a small, busy restaurant in the centre of Norwich with which I have been closely connected since it's conception over a year ago. During which time it has become more closely linked with the Friends.

However, to return to what I wanted to write about, a few weeks ago I had a very vivid dream. In this dream I was left to breast-feed an abandoned baby lamb. At first I felt shocked. Then I wondered whether I would be able to produce milk as I had never had a child of my own, nor breast-fed one (let alone a lamb!). Srimala then appeared and quite regardless of my 'squeamishness' roughly thrust the bundle of white wool at me saying, "Of course you can do it!" I didn't dare argue, it was a real lion's roar, and so I did it. And to my amazement the lamb suckled happily at my breast.

So what's been happening? I've gradually come to accept and to enjoy myself as a woman! I've also come to accept and enjoy children. Disentangling myself from a deep desire of wanting my own, or the experience, and resenting children, although that's putting it rather strongly, because I hadn't got any. For instance, when I first stayed with Srimala I couldn't meditate in the house at all. I found the children very distracting, even when they were asleep. Their presence was emotionally distracting. But around the time of this dream maybe straight afterwards, I don't remember now, I could meditate quite happily in the house.

In November, apart from changing my environment and daily occupation, I took a vow of celibacy for a year. Or more correctly, I vowed "to abstain from non-celibacy". This was partly as a result of moving from the quiet and relative seclusion of the countryside to the 'samsara' of the city. My withdrawal from the 'world' while living at Mandarava had been invaluable but I was still distracted (albeit less often) by the lure of sex. The other reason for taking this vow was that at the time I had what I euphemistically phrased a "non-demanding sexual relationship". How we like to fool ourselves! All relationships are demanding in some degree but sexual ones are especially so, for they drain away our emotional energy. I reached a point in this relationship where my mind stepped in, took me by the collar and pointed to the Wheel of Life, the Big-Wheel, on which I was

a Spiritual Tourist. While craving and desire were in control of this Wheel I may sit safely in my seat and look up at the sky, but I'd never feel the freedom of flight.

Actually taking this vow felt quite traumatic - when it came to it I could hardly get the words out. But since I've begun to feel fuller and freer, far more aware of myself and others. I felt I had 'got rid' of something and yet gained in the process. Similar to her fellys after childbirth Srimala said one evening when I was talking about this. Slowly, I've begun to wake from years of conditioning and I realise it doesn't matter whether or not I have children, or the experience of childbirth, to gain self-fulfillment as a woman and as an individual. Just being me is sufficient justification for my life. I don't have to fulfil anyone's expectations of me.

To feel happy within oneself is vital if we are to proceed further on the spiritual path. So it positive emotional support. Relationships based on fear of one's own insecurity are expected to resolve all one's needs - real and imaginary. We need emotional props; social props; political props; economic props. At all points in our life we consciously or unconsciously refuse to take responsibility for ourselves and demand that others take responsibility for us. This may be other human beings or the State as a collective 'body'. Relationships based on spiritual friendship (Kalyana Mitrata), however, are not based on neurotic needs. We take only what we really need and give what we can. We no longer 'need' to confine ourselves to one or two 'close', i.e. enclosed, relationships or one relationship and a few close friends. Instead we find that the number and level of our relationships expand and deepen. Somewhat we are led eventually to perceive that, "It is people, not the relationships between them that matter".

Lots of love,

Teresa.

P.S. We are at present looking for larger premises for the Rainbow Restaurant. Anyone interested in working with us, we'll teach you how to cook etc., drop me a line or phone NORWICH 25560

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WAKING THOUGHT Anne Murphy

May my every thought, word and deed
spring from the eternal beauty that is the Law.

---oOo---

LETTER FROM FAITH JOHNSON TO Helen, her daughter at Amaravati
(reproduced in D. kini, with Faith's agreement as I felt it would be inspiring for others to read - Anoma)

Zeal Cottage (Devon)

7.2.78

Dear Hel,

Have now confirmed and got the time off to go to the retreat at St. Austell on the 17th. In the meantime the three tapes arrived, and I have been listening to them over and over. They are certainly a revelation, and I was glad to have the opportunity of soaking in them, (as well as soaking them in) before going on the

retreat. I have now realised that my attitude was way out, although I had an underlying right instinct about things. I realise I was wasting a very great deal of time in negative self examination, instead of just letting be. Now I am glad to say that I have largely (for the time being I expect) given up self examination in favour of a great need to practice awareness, and find out more about the teachings, because of this I am dying to meet other people on the retreat. One thing that absolutely came over to me with absolute clarity of meaning, was the little Mitrata on The Greater Mandala. I picked it up expecting it to be far over my head, but instead found myself immersed in it, almost as if the room were full of these warm sincere people, to say nothing of their teacher. His words on the greater Mandala suddenly clicked very many things into place for me. I had a 'why, that is what I have been feeling all the time, now put into words' feeling. If you should have a copy do just glance over it, I can't possibly quote it all. Anyway what it did was to put things into perspective. Now if and when they slip out of perspective again, at least one had the vision of how it really is. One brief quote was speaking of the Bodhisattva, "You could say that a Bodhisattva is one who tries to see things directly not through the medium of words or even through the medium of thoughts or concepts. You could even say that the Bodhisattva is one who tries to experience things aesthetically rather than conceptually. He tries to get the feeling of things rather than to know them". Also somewhere Bhante says one is an end in oneself, one does not have to prove anything, rather one is just a part of the whole without having to justify one's existence, or be guilty about lacking this or that. But the greatest revelation to me was where Bhante says that one should view the whole of life etc as a great and lovely mandala, all the great circle of it, and that any little human doings and affairs should be viewed as a tiny little unimportant circle within the Greater Mandala. Somehow that put the whole thing into perspective. "Why" thought me "I can begin to enjoy life for what it is". It gave me a lovely nice joyful feeling. I feel that whereas I was fumbling about for the keyhole of the door, now it has opened one tiny crack, and a wonderful light is shining out. Re-reading this I see it gives almost no insight at all into what has been quite a blinding revelation. So much for the power of, or one's inability to use words.

I expect you will certainly be amused at my feeble efforts. However, efforts they are, for what its worth, and to me it's worth such a lot because it makes some sense out of what has gone before.

Lots of love,

Faith.

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"THROUGH THE FLOWER" MY STRUGGLE AS A WOMAN ARTIST" by Judy Chicago, Anchor Books, 1977. Review by Maggie Oakshott

I found this a very moving book to read. It is the autobiography of a resourceful and energetic woman who gradually becomes fully conscious of how being a woman in a pre-eminently paternalistic culture has affected her development both as a woman and an

artist. In order to succeed in her vocation as artist, she has to suppress much of her real femininity by putting on a pseudo masculine front, and as she progresses, events both in her personal life and her artistic career lead her to see more and more clearly what this process is doing to her, and how it prevents her from being able to be true to herself. With sincerity and an underlying sense of her own vulnerability she sets about the process of reconciling and integrating herself as an artist and herself as a woman, knowing now that this is the next necessary step in her growth as a person.

The form that this takes is firstly her decision to teach an all-woman art class at Fresno College in the hope that in this way, the reconciliation in her can take place, and that moreover, it can also take place in others. For one of the things she felt strongly was that a truly feminine art is content-oriented art, overt content arising from the experience of being a woman; and that such art is unacceptable to West Coast culture, if not the culture of the USA as a whole. This experience of having to "hide" the content of her own art in order to succeed previously had been one of the factors involved in the conflict which led her to evolve towards an all-female situation.

And in fact, she writes, after her one-year experience at Fresno: "...The main emphasis of the 'program', which is what we had begun to call it by then, was to plug into our own psyches and work with the material of our experiences in whatever way their material dictated....The most powerful work of the first year of the program was the performances....Theirs was content-oriented art. Although I never instructed them to make any particular kind of work, I had encouraged them to use the content of their lives as the basis of their art....It was like being at the moment of birth, the birth of a new kind of community of women, a new kind of art made by women."

Given Judy Chicago's energy and drive, though, it is difficult to see how the year program at Fresno could have turned out otherwise. This is implicit in all her ventures.

Fresno was the prototype. After that Judy started the Feminist Art Program at the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, in 1971, along with her friend Miriam Schapiro and art historian Paula Harper. The major project of this year was "Womanhouse", doing up an old house near downtown Los Angeles, and turning it into a total, feminine, environmental art form, which included:-

- a lipstick bathroom, painted entirely red;
- a bridal staircase, in which was shown the radiant bride at the top of the stairs, her train covering the carpet going up the back of a mannequin who was attached to the bottom wall, headed into the obscurity of marriage and domestic life;
- a private, personal space, all pink and soft and feminine, hidden inside a dirty, messy room;
- and
- a nurturant kitchen, in which the floors, walls and objects were covered with a flesh-coloured skin, and plastic eggs transmuting into breasts cascading down from the ceiling on to the walls.

When it was completed, Womanhouse was open for a month during which ten thousand people came to see it, mostly by word of mouth.

With the growth of the female art community, it was perhaps inevitable that the Feminist Art Program at Cal Arts should increasingly feel imprisoned by its masculine-oriented surroundings. The issue came to a head with the refusal made by the male faculty of the art school concerning the painting of a woman student of FAP in the annual graduate show. Early in 1973 Judy handed her resignation in to Cal Arts.

By now she wanted, or felt that the growing female art community needed, a completely separate situation which not only involved art-making, art history and consciousness-raising, but also things like making exhibition space available, constant support for growth, and control over what was made visible of women's art work to the general and artistic public. With art historian Arlene Raven and feminist designer Sheila de Bretteville, Judy decided to establish the completely separate Feminist Studio Workshop. Built into the programme of FSW was the expectation that women who benefitted from it should also eventually contribute to helping other women develop, rather than just using it for their own development and then leaving. This would ensure that the task of changing society's values with regard to women, would continue to expand.

FSW rented an old art school near downtown Los Angeles. The Feminist Studio Workshop was established as a non profit making educational corporation, and the corporation rented the building, which was sub-let to a number of groups, including:

- (1) Grandview, a women's co-operative gallery;
- (2) Gallery 707, a private women's gallery established earlier and then moved to the building;
- (3) Womanspace, which had a group gallery, a one-woman gallery, and an open wall gallery for which women simply signed up;
- (4) the Sisterhood Bookstore, a feminist outlet for women's literature;
- (5) Several women's performing groups;
- (6) the Associated Women's Press, a network of women's journals;
- (7) NOW and the Women's Liberation Union, a couple of political groups, also rented space in this Woman's Building, which opened on 28th November 1973.

At the time of writing "Through the Flower", plans were afoot to develop a feminist resource library on women's art, and a graphics centre.

These, then, are the outward and visible political results of the growth process that Judy Chicago went through. But there are a couple of other strands in her story which I want to pick out.

Having been to art school myself, I couldn't help being interested in Judy Chicago's experiences as an art student, and in following through her vocation as artist. As she had sufficient self confidence to start herself off with - the result of a secure home background which encouraged her natural talents and suitable ambitions - it was only half way through her art student

days that she began to be aware that she was "different" from other girl students because she insisted on giving her own point of view, while they didn't, tending, rather, to remain passively silent. She also became aware that if she produced any art with overtly feminine content, ie vaginas, etc., it produced a reaction of shock and disapproval; so she felt she couldn't continue this line of artistic development. Finally, having successfully suppressed this content by using more acceptable forms, she produced acceptable art products - acceptable, that is, to the West Coast art scene, which was mostly men. However, as soon as they found out that this artist was a woman, many of these people - artists, critics, museum directors, etc. - ceased to take her work seriously. Their conditioning made it impossible for her to function as an artists in a way that fulfilled her. How could it? She was telling lies in her art, which was her way of communicating with the world, and men's reactions to women were preventing them from truly seeing her art work.

Later on, when she was working just with women, she and Miriam Schapiro went the rounds of women artists, and found that they had all come across this dilemma and usually solved it in one of two ways. Either they worked in isolation in their own homes, fitting their artistic activities in the context of running a home and bringing up children; or, if they were professional artists, they worked virtually ignored in their studios, discriminated against because their work was not understood or acceptable. Judy herself had an exhibition in 1969 at California State College at Fullerton where for the first time she showed work which was overtly feminine, a breakthrough for her personal artistic development. However, it was not recognised as such, even though on the wall opposite the entrance to the exhibition, she put up a notice which read:-

"Judy Gerowitz hereby divests herself of all names imposed upon her through male social dominance and freely chooses her own name Judy Chicago."

The significance of her message, written and visual, was not understood. After this, she decided she could only work in an all-female situation, and got the job in Fresno.

In 1972 Judy produced a set of lithographs called "Through the Flower" - she saw the flower as meaning femininity, symbolising longings for transcendence and personal growth. She felt that they were first steps in making clear, abstract images of her point of view as a woman.

She set about studying women's literature and art, seeing what message they had for her, a woman and an artists. "...In examining the work of (Virginia) Woolf and (Anais) Nin, I had discovered a quality of transparency, both in the writing and the imagery. I asked Anais about it and she spoke about the 'transparency of the psyche' - the sense of being able to see through successive layers to the very core of reality...The work of Woolf, Nin, and (Georgia) O'Keeffe (paintings), combined with my new knowledge of women's art, literature, and history, provided me with the impetus, the confidence, the nourishment, and the ideas to enrich my own form language so that it could allow me

to truly be myself as a woman artist."

In 1973 Womanspace held the first show to do with female sexuality, there being much discussion around at the time about 'central core imagery'. Judy contributed a painting of hers called "Let It All Hang Out", which meant a great deal to her, combining as it did both forcefulness and femininity, the two extremes of herself brought further together. She cried for several hours after she'd finished painting it.

When the Woman's Building opened, it also opened with one of Judy's exhibitions. This was called "The Great Ladies", a series of paintings based on her study of women in art and literature, searching for new aspects of herself, promoting her own growth. It was a great success - through her art she was getting the validation as a person that she felt she needed.

In the spring of 1974, she felt she had made another breakthrough in her work, finding a way to convey clearly the content that was hidden in her earlier images.

In charting the progress of her work, we see Judy's urge to communicate herself more and more clearly to the world, an openly feminine point of view, repeated again and again, until the desire is completed, and fulfilled, and no longer exists.

The other aspect of the book that inevitably interested me is that of the all-female community, as I live in one. We too at Amaravati have passed through various things in relating to one another. We too are literally building our own distinctively feminine environment.

At Fresno, for example, Judy met her all female art students for the first time, expecting them to be full of ideas about women's art. Instead, they started to talk about clothes, food, boy-friends, and casual experiences. When she truthfully said that they were boring her and talking about nothing, there was a silence, and then a voice said, "...Well, maybe the reason we don't talk about anything is that nobody ever asked us what we thought'...". Realising then the level where they were, Judy and they set about learning to be together, to talk and discuss experiences, say how they really felt as a preliminary to any art which would naturally arise out of this truly feminine context. They also did role-playing and performances of situations they had encountered to find out how they really felt. These eventually evolved into performance pieces shown to other women. They also built their own studio out of an old place called the Community Theatre, using the tools and techniques needed for it as they went along, developing self-confidence and breaking into their conditioning in this way. After this, and a seminar at the University of California, Berkeley, Judy broke their dependency on her as a mother figure, relating to them on the basis of art teacher to art students; and thus the situation changed to one where the group looked to each other for support, ie, began to relate to each other more individually. One might say that the change was from unawareness of any sort of being, to aware child-in-a-group, and thence to aware adult-in-aggroup. From this healthy human growth as a woman was possible.

In the FWBO, it does not just stop there, we progress further on, from the development of the healthy human being into the true individual in the context of the spiritual life. But from Judy Chicago's book we can see how some women arrived at the healthy human being stage, a very necessary stage, from which further higher evolution is possible.

There are two further quotations from the book which provided me with some food for thought. I would like to share them with you, without further comment.

"....As I became more aware of the patterns of behaviour that each group went through, it became evident that this rejection mechanism happens when a woman feels that she is becoming stronger. One way of demonstrating that strength, which although negative is still an assertive act, is to reject the "mother" figure who helped her become strong. By saying 'I don't need you any more', the woman feels a sense of power. Unfortunately, this need to feel powerful often results in hurting the very woman who made the growth possible. Instead of giving her back the love she provided, women sometimes feel a need to repudiate her and thus provide themselves with a false sense of independence, probably because their egos won't allow them to acknowledge their gratitude..."

and:

"....The compression of human personality creates anger, and if that anger is not expressed, it turns in upon itself, diminishing the personality into a state of nonbeing, non acting, passivity.... Anger can lead to creative growth. Women are made to feel guilty about any direct expression of anger. We are not allowed physical expression of anger, have few socially accepted outlets, and when we try to express anger verbally, we are accused of being 'bitches' or 'loudmouths'. We are allowed only covert displays of anger: silence, passive withdrawal, manipulative behaviour, covert actions and the use of 'feminine wiles'. Women, prohibited from the direct expression of anger, are thereby also denied the creative aspects of anger."

Judy Chicago's experiences working with women, clearly seen and effectively dealt with, seem to be of immense value to anyone who is living, or going to live, in an all-female environment - good reading for anybody in the FWBO. I felt that you don't have to be artistically inclined to enjoy reading "Through the Flower" - in Judy's attempts to integrate herself, and in the women she meets, you will recognise, inevitably, aspects of yourself.

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

4 DAY WORKING RETREAT AT AMARAVATI

We'll be having another Working Retreat from 28th April to 1st May (inclusive). The 1st May is a Bank Holiday, by the way. If you'd like to come, please let us know beforehand. You can come for all or any part of the time. There's a small charge for food only. We'll probably be working on our entrance hall (currently black and dilapidated!) so it'll be mostly decorating work. Please bring any paintbrushes, scrapers etc. you might have,

plus a sleeping bag and old clothes.

ORDER/MITRA DAY AT AMARAVATI

On SUNDAY 14TH MAY, there will be another Order/Mitra Day, this time here at Amaravati, when we'll be dedicating our new shrine-room. The day will start at 10.30 am. Again there will be a small charge just to cover food. Please let us know if you're coming and also if you'd like to stay the night before or after. The last Order/Mitra Day at the EEMC was very enjoyable, with about 27 of us there, so it would be good to see everyone again and hopefully others who couldn't make it last time.

3 WEEK SUMMER RETREAT AT MANDARAVA

From Friday 4th August to Saturday 26th August there will be a 3 week open women's retreat. This means all women are welcome and you can come for any part of the time, except the last week which will be closed (no comings or goings). The cost will be £4 a day, with a 10% discount if you come for the whole time. Booking forms will be sent out with the next issue of Dakini and will also be available shortly from Centres. So make a note of the dates and arrange your time off from work etc.!

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NEXT DAKINI: MAY

COPY DATE: 1st May