



# FWBO NEWSLETTER 43

**“When I rain down  
the rain of the Dharma,  
Then all this world is  
refreshed  
Each one according to their power  
take to heart  
This well-preached Dharma, one in taste.”**



# Weekly Programmes

## London Buddhist Centre

Monday	7.00pm	Dharma or meditation Course Yoga courses (at annexe)
Tuesday	7.00pm	Friend's Night: Meditation, study, talks, puja
Wednesday	7.00pm	Open Night: Beginner's meditation, Yoga, communication exercises, talk, discussion
Thursday	7.00pm	Taped lecture and discussion (Also live lecture series – see separate advert)
Friday	6.00pm and 7.30pm	Hatha Yoga (at the annexe)
Sunday	2.00pm	Beginner's meditation

(Many other courses and events – send for full programme)

## Mandala (West London)

Monday	7.00pm	Meditation evening with puja
Tuesday	6.00pm	Hatha Yoga
Wednesday	7.00pm	Beginners' meditation class

## Brighton Buddhist Centre

Monday	7.15pm	Introductory evening with meditation instruction
Tuesday	10.30am	Hatha Yoga
	7.15pm	Meditation evening with puja
Wednesday	7.15pm	Meditation and Buddhism course (by arrangement)
Thursday	6.00pm and 7.30 pm	Hatha Yoga

## Aryatara (Surrey)

Tuesday	7.30pm	Meditation and puja
Wednesday	7.30pm	Beginner's meditation class
Thursday	7.15pm and 8.30pm	Hatha Yoga

## Heruka (Glasgow)

Tuesday	7.30pm	Beginner's meditation
Wednesday	7.30pm	Friend's regular meditation and Dharma study
Thursday	7.00pm	Taped lecture

## Norwich Meditation Centre

Tuesday	7.00pm	Friend's Night: Varied programme including puja and meditation
Wednesday	10.00am	Hatha Yoga
	7.30pm	Open Night: Meditation, talks, communication exercises

## Manchester

Wednesday	7.00pm	Regular meditation and study
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## Akshobya (Edinburgh)

Tuesday	7.30pm	Meditation and puja
Wednesday	7.30pm	Meditation and taped lecture



## Editorial

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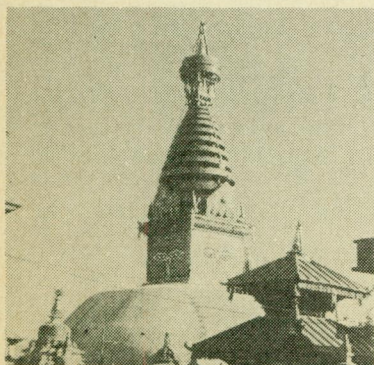
A little while ago, shortly after returning from New Zealand and India, the Ven. Sangharakshita gave a short talk to about sixty Order members and mitras who were gathered at 'Padmaloka' for a weekend event. He wanted, he said, not so much to give a lecture, but rather to think aloud and pass on some reflections about the FWBO prompted by his travels.

During the course of his thought-provoking talk, Bhante mentioned that he had come to see how the FWBO could be compared to a river. As you fly high above a land-mass it is quite easy to see how a river takes on many different forms as it adjusts itself to the terrain through which it is flowing. Here it is a boiling torrent, digging a deep, narrow gorge through the mountains; there it meanders lazily across the plains towards the sea, yet, in all its forms, in all its moods, it is always the same river. In the same way he had come to see how the FWBO is already taking on certain different aspects as, through the work in the various centres, it adapts itself to a wide variety of local conditions. The outside observer in England, for example, might get the idea that the FWBO is predominantly a 'young people's' movement, while in India the FWBO might appear to be a movement for older married men. Of course, he said, there is no essential difference between the FWBO in England and the FWBO in India; simply it seems as if the kind of freedom required by the individual to become involved in, or indeed committed to, a movement such as ours comes later in life in India, given the economic realities of life there, than it does in England. But even in England, I think it would be fair to say, certain differences of aspect – and not always subtle ones – are already clearly discernible between, say, the London Buddhist Centre and the Norwich Meditation Centre. No doubt, as more centres are established throughout the world, the FWBO will take on many new aspects, yet everywhere the essential aims, objects, not to say ideals of the Movement will remain the same. And in that each centre will in some way contain, like the jewels of Indra's net, a reflection of all the others, who can calculate the richness that this diversity in unity will bring?

That the FWBO is adaptable in this way should come as no great surprise to anyone, for isn't the FWBO a Buddhist movement, and isn't the whole history of Buddhism a history of the integration and adaptation of an essentially unified teaching to the immediate needs of those to whom it has been communicated? Above all, isn't the Dharma a 'personal invitation', a communication from one friend to another, in the form and language that springs most readily to hand? Throughout the 2,500 years of its history, since the Buddha sought out his five former companions in austerity, in the Deer Park at Benares, the Dharma has travelled far and wide, not as a monolithic structure of dogmas and imperatives, but as an ever-growing, ever-developing tradition, continually taking refreshment and inspiration from the experience and inspiration of the individuals who have practised it, as well as beauty from the cultural environments wherein it has taken root.

In the last issue of the Newsletter we looked inwards and explored a little the theme of meditation. In this issue, the biggest ever, we turn our eyes outwards – in space and time – to take in something of the richness and diversity of the Dharma, and something of the richness and diversity of the FWBO.

NAGABODHI



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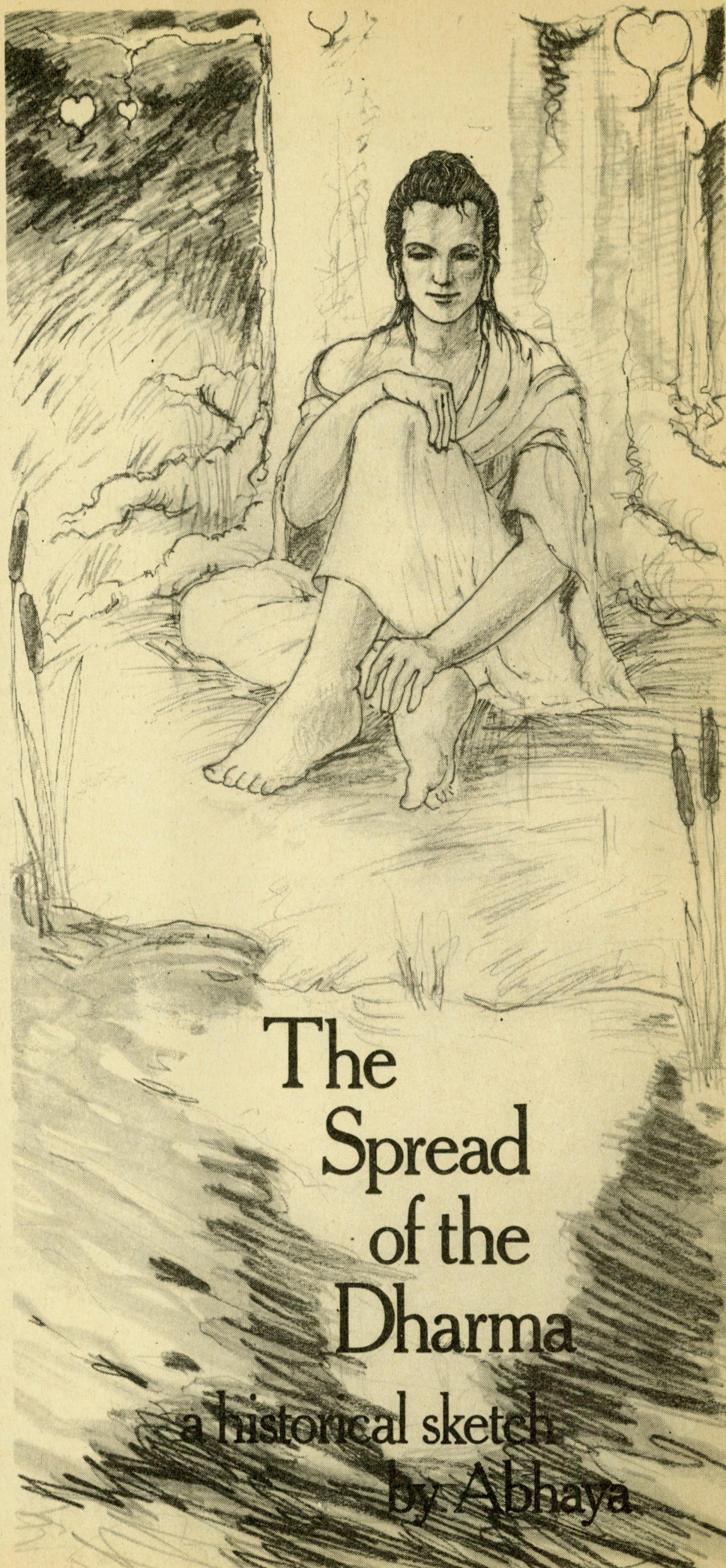
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<i>Bhante's travels continued; Vinehall Event, Women's Retreat; E.B.U. Paris Conference; Glastonbury Fayre; F.W.B.O. and the Media; Festival for Mind Body &amp; Spirit; U.K. Centre News; Aryatara featured.</i>	



The story of Buddhism begins with a man who became Enlightened, that is, with one who had direct and abiding Insight into the Nature of Reality.

This simple fact can easily be lost sight of, or never even seen in the first place, not only by novice students in the field of Buddhism, but even by the most distinguished scholars. Consequently, one can derive the mistaken impression from the works of those who do not take this vital fact into consideration, that the Buddha, though He was the first historical figure to have a profound influence on the Indian mind, was at best a great man of unusual charisma, who had many first-rate ideas about how men should live their lives. We are told that the Buddha stayed alone for several weeks after His Enlightenment, assimilating the fruits of that tremendous experience, which was the culmination of many thousands of lives as a Bodhisattva practising the Perfections. One of those fruits was the spontaneous awakening of Compassion, the reflex of Wisdom in the Enlightened mind, a compassion for others, including the most respected teachers and yogins of the time, who had not achieved the hard-to-attain Realisation of the Truth. He was, therefore, irresistibly moved to teach the Dharma, to communicate the Truth about Reality, quickly developing skilful methods by which He might lead others to the same realisation. Within a very short time, within a matter of months, or even weeks, He had gathered around Him a small band of disciples. Already, the Dharma was beginning to spread. Thus the prime impetus originating the spread of the Dharma was a Compassion of unimaginable potency, the spontaneous urge of a Fully Awakened One to communicate to all beings the nature of Enlightenment.

The appeal of the Buddha's Teaching was such that, by the end of His life, which, according to modern scholarship, was around 483 BC, its influence extended throughout that area of North East India roughly corresponding to the modern states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, an area comprising the whole of the Ganges plain, up to the foothills of the Himalayas, in other words, the main centre of Indian civilisation at that time. During the course of the next fifteen hundred years, up to the sack of Nalanda by Muslim invaders in the 12th century of the Christian era, which marked the beginning of the decline of Buddhism in India, the Dharma had spread throughout the greater part of Asia. Westwards, it extended as far as Afghanistan, to include the kingdom of Bactria, ruled over by the Indo-Greek kings, the most famous of whom was Menander, or Milinda, who, in the second century BC, is reputed to have received the Teaching from Nagasena. In the last two hundred years, Buddhist texts have been unearthed from the deserts of Afghanistan. To the North, the Dharma took hold in Nepal, and Tibet and the whole of China became strongholds of Buddhism for centuries. From China, the Dharma was passed on as far East as Korea and Japan, the latter country being the soil



# The Spread of the Dharma

a historical sketch  
by Abhaya



of the flowering of some of the most magnificent blooms of the Mahayana. In the earliest phase of its development, the Dharma spread southwards to the island of Ceylon and to all the countries of Southeast Asia, that is to Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. Further south still, the Dharma was established in the Malay peninsula and held sway for some time on the islands of Sumatra and Java in Indonesia.

That the Word of the Buddha should have spread throughout such an extensive geographical area bears testimony to its stature as a universal religion, that is, one which is of appeal not just to national or ethnic groups such as are Hinduism and Judaism, but to the whole of mankind. (The word 'religion' is used here with caution and some reluctance with reference to Buddhism, since Buddhism is quite definitely non-theistic and 'religion' has come to acquire such heavily theistic connotations!)

Buddhism is often referred to as a missionary religion, in that one of the methods by which it spread was by the decision of teachers and monks, either at their own prompting or at the bidding of their rulers, to go out to other parts of India or to other countries to communicate the Dharma and persuade others of its value. The Buddha Himself initiated this process when He encouraged his Enlightened disciples to go forth and spread His Teaching 'for the welfare of the world, for the happiness of gods and men'. It is to be noted, however, that the history of Buddhism is notably free of any sign of either bribery, or coercion or persecution in its proselytising activities.

Another method by which the Dharma spread was by the contact the various indigenous peoples had with Buddhist traders and travellers, who followed the trade routes along the coasts of Southeast Asia and the famous silk and spice routes of Central Asia. There are also several instances in Buddhist history, for example in China and Tibet, of monarchs and statesmen actually requesting the visit of great acaryas or yogins to sow the seeds of the Dharma in their countries, or sending their own scholars to India to study the Dharma.

In these three ways, then, did Buddhism spread throughout its sphere of influence: through missionary activity, through contact of travellers and traders, and through the mutual exchange of scholars or the invitations of teachers. Perhaps in some cases, in which only the second of these methods applied, where Buddhism was introduced exclusively by traders and travellers, the Teaching did not take spiritual root but came to little more than the superimposition of a more highly developed culture on a weaker one, or to the mingling of Buddhist cultural elements with other foreign influences. This seems to have been the case in Cambodia during the early period of Buddhist influence

there, at the time of the famous city kings at Angkor during the period from the eighth to twelfth centuries AD. One of the famous temples at Angkor is dominated by giant sculptured heads of Bodhisattvas; these heads are supposed to have been modelled in the likeness of King Jayavarman VII who styled himself a Bodhisattva-King. Yet the shrines inside the temple are unambiguously Hindu, judging by the phallic pillars of stone at their centre!

It would be naive to think of the dynamic spiritual movement that is Buddhism taking place in a sort of cultural void. The Dharma is for all men, and the import of the Teaching transcends all historical, geographical and social considerations. The Buddha Himself seems always to have been ready to emphasise this when necessary. Yet He also realised that it was necessary to communicate His message through the medium of the contemporary culture of North East India. Similarly, in the course of its development further afield, Buddhism encountered all sorts of cultural and social characteristics which it had to make use of in order to communicate itself successfully. Though the Dharma was seen as a raft, to be dispensed with once the further shore had been reached, it had to be a raft that would sail; it had to be built with materials suitable to local conditions. Wherever the Dharma has taken root spiritually, It has always proved marvellously adaptable in this respect, and would surely have had great difficulty or would even have petrified, if It had tried to communicate to one man in the language of another. We have had evidence of this kind of mistake in the West in the last decade, with the efforts to transplant wholesale, with all their local cultural trappings, various forms of Far Eastern Buddhism. The Buddha was always very much against the institution of an official language for the Dharma (and Pali or Sanskrit is certainly not to be regarded as such), and insisted that his disciples convey the Dharma in the different local vernaculars.

During the lifetime of the Buddha, and for some time after, it must have been very difficult to distinguish the followers of the Enlightened One, the Sakyaputra Sramanas as they were called, from other groups of wandering mendicants of that time. The Buddha Himself no doubt stood out, apart from anything else on account of His striking physical appearance and extraordinary charisma, and so, to a lesser extent, must His Enlightened disciples. Yet the rest must have looked very much like any other group of homeless ascetics, all of them dressed in rags, depending for food on begging from village to village, and having no permanent roof over their heads, except during the rainy season. It was only when the 'Buddhist' wanderers started staying in one place the whole year round, living in communities, that Buddhism began to emerge as a distinctive movement. It might also have been difficult at first hand always to tell them apart

with respect to their teachings and practices. The practice of meditation was not peculiar to them, and they shared certain ethical views, such as the necessity of non-violence, with other contemporary groups. Thus even a cursory look at archaic Buddhism shows how it was not unrelated to the cultural climate it grew up in, or rather, out of. But the differences are much more important, of course, than the similarities to contemporary Brahminical beliefs and practices, for it is the differences that make Buddhism distinctive as a spiritual movement. Unlike the Hindus, the early Buddhists did not believe in a Creator God; in fact, the Buddha maintained that such a belief was an obstacle on the Path to Enlightenment. Nor did they practise austerities or set great store by the mechanical observance of rites and ceremonies. And the Buddha rejected outright the caste system, maintaining that one's spiritual progress is to be judged by one's acts, not by one's birth.

The development of Buddhism in India from these origins falls into three distinctive stages, corresponding with the development of what are known as the three Yanas: that is, with the development of the Hinayana or Small Vehicle from the Parinirvana of the Buddha until the end of the first century before Christ, with the development of the Mahayana or Great Vehicle from the first to the fifth century AD, and with the development of the Vajrayana or Diamond Vehicle from the fifth to the tenth century AD. Considerably more seems to be known about the first two stages of development than the third. This surely has more than a little to do with the esoteric character of the Vajrayana. Yet much more can be said about the Vajrayana after its transfer to Tibet.

Buddhism was beginning to emerge from its archaic origins by the end of the first hundred years after the Parinirvana, at the time of the Second Great Council of the Sangha, the Council of Vaishali. The early Sangha, having now lost its geographical unity, consisted of small communities scattered over quite a wide area. As a result, marked differences in monastic practice were beginning to emerge. The main proceedings of the Council seem to have related to rules of monastic behaviour, with the more conservative elements insisting on the upholding of rather stringent codes of behaviour. A schism took place, with a large body of monks seceding from the Sangha. The conservative section of the Council were the Sthaviravadins, while the secessionists came to be known as the Mahasanghikas (from Mahasangha, meaning 'great assembly') because they convened a large assembly of their own to uphold that their decision was in conformity with the Buddha's own teaching. Already in this division between the conservative and



liberal elements of the Sangha can be seen the seeds of a long-lasting divergence, which eventually developed into the Hinayana on the one hand, and the Mahayana on the other. In the course of the four hundred years following the Council, many sub-sects were formed out of the initial divergence, a famous set of 18 being often mentioned in this connection, though the total number of sub-sects was undoubtedly much larger.

'Hinayana' means 'little vehicle' and is so-called because the spiritual ideal it teaches is the attainment of Enlightenment for oneself alone. This spiritual ideal is embodied in the Arhant, one who has achieved the objective of the 'holy life' and brought an end to all craving. Arhantship can be attained in this very life, but only by those who have forfeited all to live the monastic life. The best the laity can do in spiritual terms is to accumulate merit by observing the precepts and supporting the monks. The teachings of the Hinayana are essentially ethical-cum-psychological, in the sense of the analysis and investigation of mental states.

A strong element in the total makeup of the Hinayana can be recognised in the teachings of the Sarvastivadins, a school which was a direct offshoot of the Sthaviravadins, and which flourished in the North-west of India in the middle of the third century after the Parinirvana. The name 'Sarvastivadins' comes from the words 'sarvam asti', meaning 'all things exist'. This refers to the basic principle of the school, namely, that the whole of reality is made up of 75 basic constituent 'dharma's' or elements. Yet the Sarvastivadins reacted against the dominance of the Arhant ideal and their direct descendants, the Sautantrikas, held that everyone can become a Buddha. This factor in the Sarvastivadin creed, the urge to amplify the spiritual ideal, anticipates a later development in the Mahayana. Most of the essential characteristics of the Hinayana can be found in the Theravada, a school which survives to the present day in its original form, and whose teachings reflect the earliest available recensions of the word of the Buddha, one version of which has been handed down in the form of the Pali Canon. Theravada is still practised in Ceylon and the Buddhist countries of Southeast Asia.

The Mahayana or 'Great Vehicle' is so-called because its goal is Enlightenment, not just for oneself alone, but for the sake of all beings whatsoever. Its spiritual ideal is embodied in the figure of the Bodhisattva, who vows to lead all beings to Nirvana by practising the Perfections through thousands of millions of lives. In contrast with the Hinayana, the Mahayana teachings are devotional and metaphysical in character. From the Mahayana point of view, the attainment of the Arhant is regarded as only a stage along the Path. The earlier Vehicle and its

teachings are regarded, not as wrong, but as inadequate. Also according to the Mahayanists, the so-called constituents of reality to which everything is reduced by the Hinayanists, are to be seen as merely mental constructs and, in the last analysis, unreal. The source of all objects of experience is the Void, the ineffable Sunyata, a non-dual Reality transcending all opposites. Though seeds of the Mahayana can be seen in earlier schools such as the Caityikas, who believed that great merit can be gained by the building and circumambulation of stupas, and by the offering of flowers at the stupas, and who also upheld the doctrine of the transference of merits, the Mahayana proper is said to have been well and truly launched by Nagarjuna in the second century AD.

The Mahayana is represented by two systems of thought or 'philosophical' schools, the Madhyamikas and the Yogacharins. Nagarjuna himself was responsible for the systematisation of the teachings of the Madhyamikas; his masterpiece is the *Madhyamika-Karika*. The emphasis of this school is on the spiritual faculty of Wisdom. The Yogachara teachings were inspired by Asanga in the fourth century AD. The Yogacharins were practitioners of yoga, in the sense of meditation, and regarded the spiritual faculty of meditation as the chief means to Enlightenment, in contrast to the dialectical methods of the Madhyamikas.

The importance placed on 'vijñāna' or consciousness, by the Yogachara, and the need to develop higher states of consciousness in order to achieve Wisdom, gradually led to several esoteric developments in Buddhism, fruits of the direct experience of very highly spiritually developed individuals. Mantras, or dharanis, and symbolic mandalas began to assume increasing importance in practice. The introduction of more esoteric elements also led to the need to restrict their practice to a small, inner group of initiates, and, in order to maintain the continuity, great reliance was placed on the relationship between Guru and Chela, or Master and disciple. Thus there eventually emerged in India the third Vehicle, that is, the Vajrayana or Diamond, Adamantine Vehicle, so-called because, like the unbreakable potent vajra, which means both thunderbolt and diamond, it breaks through all obstacles on the path to Enlightenment. As distinct from the other two yanas, the Vajrayana is yogic, esoteric-magical in character. The spiritual ideal is embodied in the figure of the Siddha, a master of various Tantric practices conducive to Enlightenment.

It is a common misunderstanding that Tantrism or Vajrayana Buddhism represents a decline from the Tantra of the Hindus from which it stemmed. But even as early as the Mahasanghikas, there was evidence of dharani or mantra recitation, and the specifically Buddhist Tantric system had crystallised into definite form by the end of the third century AD. A studied comparison of Hindu Tantra with the Buddhist Tantra apparently shows an

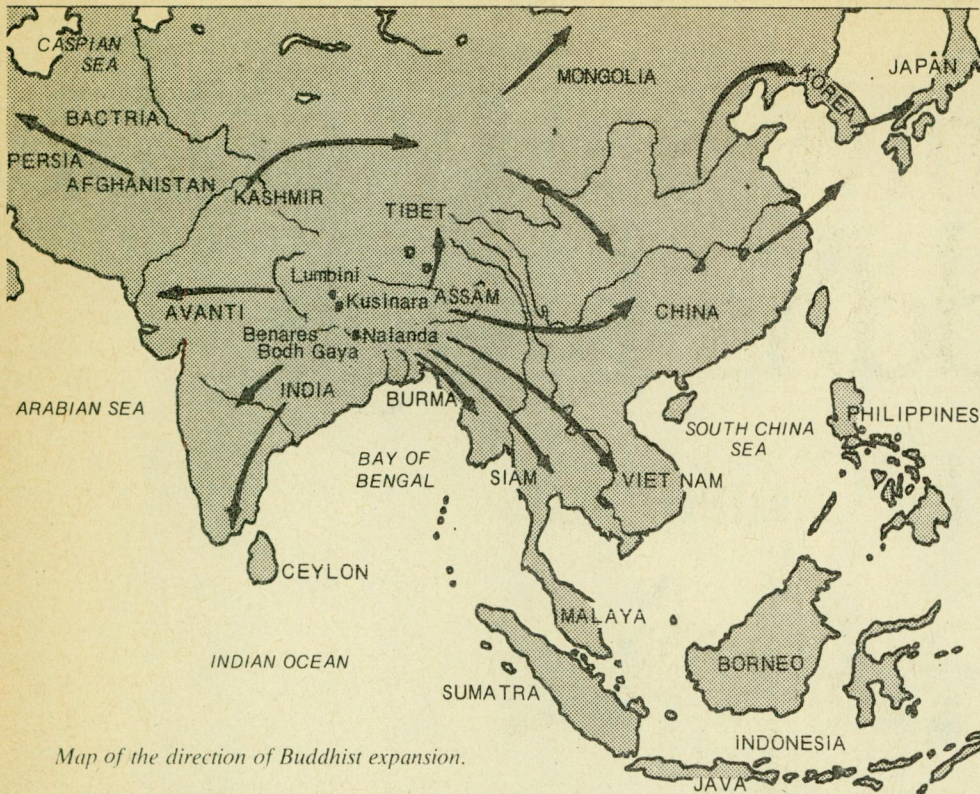
astonishing divergence of methods and aims as well as the spiritual and historical priority of the Buddhist Tantra.

Having taken a look at the development of the three yanas in India, it is now time to see where the teachings of the three main branches spread to from the subcontinent. In the case of the Hinayana, particularly in its Theravada form, Buddhism spread from India to Ceylon and, either directly or indirectly, to the countries of Southeast Asia. A prime mover in this spread of the Hinayana was the emperor Ashoka (274-232 BC), the first great royal patron of Buddhism. He was dramatically converted to Buddhism by his realisation of the sufferings caused by his war of conquest, and began actively to encourage his subjects throughout the empire to follow the teachings of the Buddha. He is famous for the 'Rock and Pillar Edicts', and was responsible for the calling of the Third Great Council at Paliputra. One of the results of this council was the despatch of missionaries to different countries, including Ceylon, Malaya, and Sumatra. The 13th Rock Edict also refers to Syria and North Africa! An interesting feature of the spread of the Hinayana to Ceylon and throughout the countries of Southeast Asia and in the Malay peninsula is that it seems to have taken root there in exactly the same form, as though, as a cultural as distinct from a spiritual phenomenon, Buddhism seems to have been accepted in these places without taking on any of their individual cultural characteristics. In the southern countries of Asia there never arose any distinctive differences in the form and practice of the Dharma; all those countries, with the exception of Vietnam, where the Mahayana exerted its influence from China, eventually accepted the principles of Theravada Buddhism. In fact so uniform did the Theravada become and so enslaved to its own rather arid conservatism were its adherents, that in Burma controversy raged for centuries over petty details of monastic dress.



Rigid conservatism is not a charge which could be levelled against the Mahayana, which eventually spread from India, via the trade routes through the deserts of Central Asia, to the whole of China, and from China to Korea and Japan. The new schools in China had their origins in India, but the Chinese approach to the texts which came their way seems to have led to genuine spiritual experiences which evolved in the cultural milieu of





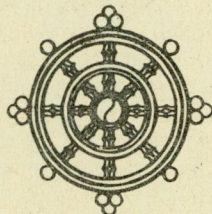
Map of the direction of Buddhist expansion.

China rather than of India. Thus the theories of Indian Mahayana Buddhism were interpreted in a distinctive Chinese fashion.

Long before the arrival of Buddhism, there had existed in China an ancient, indigenous highly developed culture, with Confucianism as the prevailing ethos and Taoism the dominating philosophical movement. From this point of view, the Mahayana can be seen as the mediator between two great cultures which, despite their geographical closeness, had developed independently of each other through the centuries. In view of the vigorous existing culture, the task of the Indian Buddhists in China was not so straightforward as that facing the early Hinayana missionaries in Ceylon. Perhaps the fact that the Mahayana succeeded in gaining a foothold in China in spite of the opposition of the Confucian nobility, who apparently regarded Buddhism as barbarous, is a measure of its own spiritual potency.

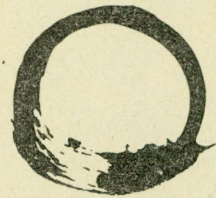
Buddhism had spread to China in the first century of the Christian era, and during the great classical period of the Sung and Tang dynasties from the sixth to the tenth centuries, it was a young flourishing movement, producing its own individual expression of the Teaching it received from India. One of the most famous schools was the Tien T'ai school, one of the main activities of which seems to have been the systematising of the material which poured in from India. Tendencies in the Tien T'ai eventually led to the formation of the Pure Land school and the Ch'an school, which in turn made their way to Japan and became highly evolved there as distinctive schools during the Kamakura period, in the form of the Jodo Shin school and the Zen school respectively, while the Tien T'ai appeared there as the Tendai.

As was the case in China, the Japanese refashioned the original schools in their own cultural image. While the Pure Land schools both in China and Japan became popular because of their emphasis on Faith rather than Wisdom as a prerequisite for Enlightenment, and on account of their appeal to the emotions rather than the intellect, the Zen school, by contrast, was based on the meditative orientation of the original Yogachara school, maintaining as it did that salvation or Enlightenment is gained, not so much by faith in the Buddha, but by one's efforts to realise the higher states of consciousness leading to Insight, that is, by working directly on one's own mind. Thus anyone who was attracted by the Dharma could, according to temperamental preference, choose either one of these totally different approaches to the same end, thanks to the spiritual resourcefulness of the Mahayana! It is impossible to get any genuine feel for the richness and vitality of these variegated blooms which flourished in China and Japan from the original seeds of the



Mahayana in India, without the study and contemplation of the rich sutra treasures which are their expression, namely *The White Lotus Sutra* favoured by the Tien T'ai and the Nichiren, the two *Sukhavati Vyuha Sutras* and the *Amitayur Dhyana Sutra*, upon which the teachings of the Pure Land school are based, and the *Lankavatara Sutra*, the basic scripture of Zen Buddhism. From such scriptures and from the distinctive spiritual vitality of the different

Mahayana schools, one gets the feeling of a great spiritual adventure, and one can hardly help comparing this with the unadventurousness of the Theravada. The relative lack of vitality in the Hinayana movement must surely reflect the too-introverted and spiritually individualistic ideal compared with the outgoing vigour of the Bodhisattva ideal. Yet it has also to be remembered that the Mahayana itself was insistent that no single school could claim exclusive possession of the means to Enlightenment, and that the Mahayana did not see itself as a departure from the original teachings of the Buddha but as an unfoldment or development from those teachings. The Mahayana schools had accepted all the teachings of the Hinayana and developed their own as well.



Keeping this in mind, we must see the Vajrayana as a further development of the Mahayana, because it incorporates the whole of the Hinayana and the Mahayana into its teachings. Some Tibetan monks still apparently refer to themselves as Triyana Buddhists! The Vajrayana spread from India to Tibet where it initially came up against vigorous opposition from the primitive Bon religion, an opposition which was just as vigorously overcome by the Vajric tactics of the great Tantric yogin, Guru Padmasambhava, who came to be revered in Tibet as highly as the Buddha Himself. By the eleventh century, Buddhism was established in Tibet once and for all (with one or two notable lapses in its later history), through the efforts of the great teacher Atisa, who stressed the importance of regular steps in the spiritual life, indicating that it was not possible to approach the heights of the Vajrayana until one has established the fundamental spiritual principles of the Hinayana and absorbed the essentials of the Mahayana. Thus he taught the importance of Going for Refuge and observing the ten precepts, as well as the development of the Bodhisattva Ideal, especially through the practice of Metta, the development towards all beings of a 'love like that of a mother for her only child'. Because such a great proportion of the population was engaged in full-time spiritual practice, which had a powerful effect on the life of all, and because the spiritual element in Tibetan life was foremost and so well integrated with cultural and social elements, Tibet in its heyday can be considered the most Buddhist of all countries.

In this way was the torch of the Dharma, set alight by the Buddha, kept blazing through the centuries. We in the West are now beginning to benefit from the radiance of its glow. We have the great good fortune to have access to the greatest spiritual heritage mankind has ever known.



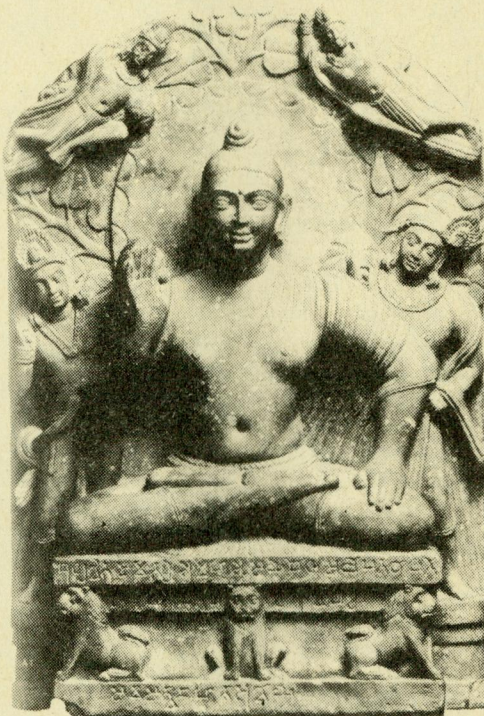
# The Universality of the Buddha Image

by Chintamani

A Buddha Image is a visual representation of humanity perfected, and thus transcended. Its form is that of man himself, in an attitude which suggests the means by which he may realize his true fulfillment. In this lies its universality; the figure of a man is the most primordial and universal symbol for humanity, and the way to man's fulfillment, the spiritual life, applies to *all*.

This universality exists in theory, though perhaps not always in practice. Most existing Buddha images look so foreign to many Westerners, and even strange to the point of being inhuman, that their symbolic value is obscured. Of course it would be a mistake, and perhaps one often made, to believe that it is only through the sanction of the 'Western mind' that something is universally relevant. Despite the great cultural, and even at times, spiritual heritage of the West, men in the East have soared to heights of revelation that are as sublime as it is possible for any man at any time to attain. Nevertheless, if a symbolic representation of a universal principle does not speak directly to all men, from whichever part of the world they may come, then there is something unsatisfactory in the manner in which it has been presented, and a review of the situation is needed. This is the case for the Buddha image in the West. Certain features which are purely the result of Eastern culture have obscured to many Westerners, the essentially trans-cultural spirit of the Dharma that it potentially embodies. In attempting to clarify the matter, it will first of all be useful to look at the basic elements of traditional images, and then see which are truly universal, and which merely cultural products.

Essentially a Buddha image represents the figure of a man, wearing a simple robe, either seated cross-legged, standing, or walking and gesturing with the hands, or, occasionally, lying down on the right side, with the right hand cushioning the head. The expression on the figure's face is serene, peaceful, and yet mysterious and potent, the mouth slightly smiling, and the eyes often



half-closed. There are also certain features traditionally represented which are not usually found on the human figure; most noticeably, a raised portion on the top of the skull, long ear lobes, and a curl of hair in the centre of the forehead. Closer observation will reveal that the arms are unnaturally long, the feet flat and un-arched, and, especially on Japanese examples, the fingers and toes webbed. There are other equally unusual anatomical details but there is no need specifically to mention them here.

Looking at these elements as a whole, the universal ones stand out as more or less obvious. The figure of a man speaks for itself, as, to a large extent, do the postures. Admittedly, some research into meditation practice is needed in order to fully appreciate the significance of the cross-legged posture, into Mudra, in order to clearly understand the conceptual meaning of the hand gestures, and also an acquaintance with the life of the Buddha in order to understand the significance of the recumbent posture associated with His Parinirvana. Nevertheless, sitting, standing, walking or lying down are essentially not alien to any man's experience. The robe too, although

obviously that of an ancient Indian spiritual seeker, is simple enough not to jar in the minds of most people. Men in most parts of the world have, at some point in their history, worn a rectangular piece of cloth as the most primitive kind of garment, and the image of this is embedded in most memories.

Obviously, then, it is the physique depicted in the figure that strikes the most alien note to Westerners. To begin with, the racial type is not European. It is, instead, one of the types that predominate in Central, South Eastern and Eastern Asia. This is natural enough, as the influence of the Dharma was widely felt in these areas. When a man of any race makes an image of a man, he does so according to his everyday experience of the appearance of the men amongst whom he lives. Ask him what another man looks like, and, except perhaps in the most multi-ethnic of societies, he'll probably picture someone of his own race. This is of no real importance. Humanity will never be united by producing a physical 'blend' of all the races, so we can accept the differences, enjoy them on their own level, and look for unifying principles on higher ones. Buddha images made in different parts of the world will, and in fact should look racially different from one another. Such racial differences, are still part of most people's experience of the world. However, the unusual anatomical characteristics mentioned previously are not. Indeed, the concepts they express are the products of Aryan Indian culture, so some further explanation is necessary.

The pre-Buddhist, Brahminical lore of ancient India, pre-occupied as it was with the interpretation of omens, sooth-saying, and so on, held that a great and



unusually well-endowed man displayed on his body certain distinctive marks. These, it was believed, were proof that he was a 'Superman' or *Maha Purusha* (Pali — *Maha Purisa*). The qualities of such a being were essentially that his faculties for learning and expounding (the Vedas) were highly developed, that he had a good memory, and generally was a talented, all-round expert within the sphere of traditional, Brahminical life. In other words, he was the ideal, if not the perfect man, as viewed by the Hindu scheme of things. That he was so, and that he therefore possessed distinctive, physical marks, was due to 'good Karma' in past lives.

It is significant, however, that Brahminical Karma was only 'good' if it consisted of upholding caste duties.

It was within this scheme of things that the Dharma had to be established. One of the Buddha's chief means of communication was the re-interpretation of existing Brahminical philosophical and spiritual terms, in order to show what true spirituality and ethically skilful conduct really consisted of. On a number of occasions He is asked what makes a true Brahmin, and what is the best way of observing Brahminical religious duties. In reply, He always lifts the frame of reference out of the realm of Vedic ritual sacrifice, fire worship, and so on, into that of skilful action, the cultivation of positive mental states, meditation and Insight into the Truth. The living of a life dedicated to such things, He says, is what makes a true Brahmin, a true spiritual aspirant, not heredity (one is not born a Brahmin) or the observance of caste rites and ceremonies. He redefines the *Maha Purusha* ideal in similar terms:

'It is by emancipation of mind that I call a man a superman. Without that emancipation there is no superman.'<sup>1</sup>

Elsewhere He gives four qualities by which a true *Maha Purusha* may be recognized, and which parallel the traditional Brahminically desirable qualities mentioned previously. The first one is that:

'He concerns himself with the advantage and the welfare of the great masses of people, many are the folk he has established in the Ariyan system — that is the beauty of righteousness as set forth in the Ariyan Path.' (the Noble Eightfold Path)<sup>2</sup>

In other words, only an Enlightened being, which, of course, anyone regardless of race, or caste, may become through individual effort, is a true *Maha Purusha*.

Nevertheless, Brahminical lore held that the *Maha Purusha* was supposed to display the aforementioned marks *at birth*, thus lending strength to the Brahminical claim that beings could possess hereditary superiority. Further clarification and redefinition was clearly necessary. In the *Lakkhana Suttanta*, the Buddha takes each one of the thirty-two signs, and shows how their presence is due to the results of good Karma in past lives (that is ethically skilful action in the truly Buddhist sense); in other words, to the actions of a responsible individual, rather than an upholder of tribal (group) lore. However, the emphasis is on praising



such good actions as conducive to spiritual growth, and the welfare of all, rather than looking for their results. Buddhism is not pre-occupied with surface appearances.

T.W. Rhys Davids, in his introduction to the translation of the *Suttanta* says:

'Our *Suttanta* says that — granted, for the purposes of this argument, that these are supermen recognizable by bodily marks that may be discerned at birth — then the superiority of these children is due entirely to good deeds done in a former birth, and can only be

<sup>1</sup> Sanyutta Nikaya V 158

<sup>2</sup> Anguttara Nikaya II 35



maintained in the present life by righteousness. The superman, by the theory, becomes either king or leader of a religious movement. In either case it is righteousness that produces and keeps alive the gain. The marks have the same origin, and the results would be the same without them.

It follows that the marks are incidental; they don't really matter. And as a matter of fact we never hear of them again, as a serious proposition, in all the immense literature of Buddhism throughout the centuries of its development.<sup>3</sup>

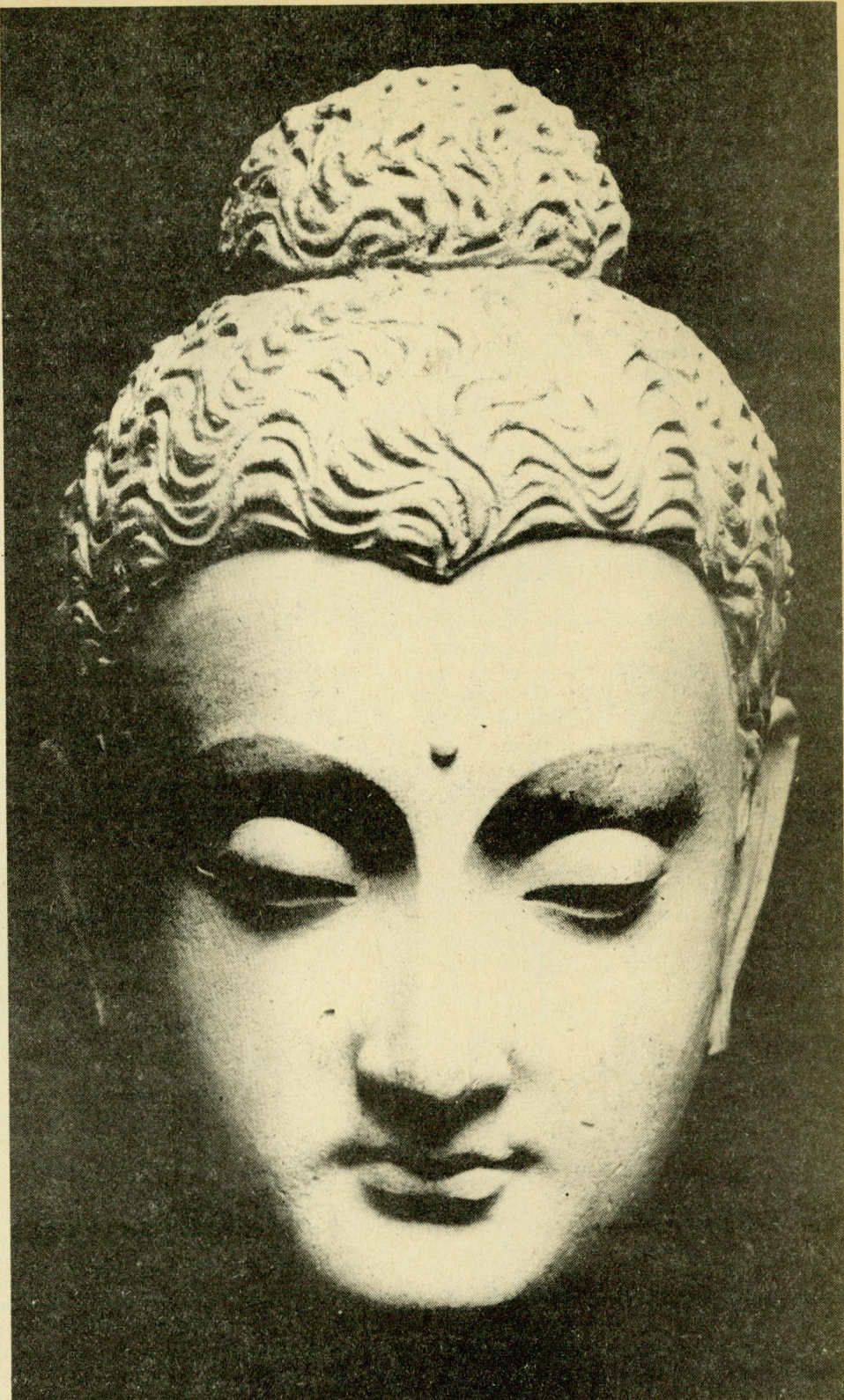
It seems that the Buddha was using a skilful means. Rather than attacking the indigenous religion of His day head on, and then condemning it as 'heathen', 'wrong', and 'evil' (as is the Christian missionary method) He re-interpreted it, gave it a new and deeper meaning, and thus brought about a true conversion. The Maha Purusha's marks were not denied, but neither were they emphasized as important *in themselves*, and it is probable that if serious attention and effort were given to living the sort of life that was held to result in their presence, they would eventually just be forgotten.

At any rate, the list of marks is, in many cases strange, and probably best seen symbolically. One of them, namely the proportion of the arms to the rest of the body is actually anatomically impossible. Nevertheless, the Buddha was shown to be supreme amongst men, using the full cultural vocabulary of His time, and His form was portrayed as mirroring His inner attainment.

Ideal man was seen as possessing ideal beauty. In this instance, such ideal beauty was seen in specific cultural terms, although the basic principle of it mirroring inner beauty is universally valid, as we shall see later on.

**T**he formalisation of the Buddha image was a comparatively late development. The first ones were made around the beginning of the Christian era, and display all thirty-two marks of a Maha Purusha. This is no doubt because the Dharma, which by that time existed in written form, had been consulted to find out how a Buddha's form should be portrayed. However, although they may make a bizarre impression on us today, they would not have done so to men of those times, even though the Buddha had passed away 500 years before. An Indian of the day would have seen an image of a man embodying perfection according to the most ancient and well-established of formulae, and these were terms he could immediately understand.

It is more than likely, however, that later artists, and even their monastic patrons, succumbed to the unfortunate tendency of regarding the traditional description of the Buddha's form as 'the truth' — the letter of



the law as unalterably correct for all time. Consequently they would have universalized certain terminologies which were, in fact ethnic, and thus only of relative value in communicating the Dharma. Perhaps it was this that gave rise to the tradition that all Buddha images subsequently made have displayed the marks of the Maha Purusha, as laid down by Brahminical lore. Indeed a canon of proportions was eventually established for the 'correct' visual representation of the Buddha, and this was carried from country to country along with the rest of the written Dharma. With slight variations it has remained the same to the present day, and so we have the unusual physique of the

Buddha image.

However, historical facts and 'tradition' should not lead us to inhibit our distinctly human faculties for inquiry, re-assessment, and creative innovation, which are not only of almost primary importance in the spiritual life, but which were also encouraged by the Buddha Himself. So, at this point we should re-consider such 'tradition', and, by implication, the basic issues that underlie the depiction of the Buddha's form.

It would be sad, and ultimately false, if the universality of the Dharma was only represented in the Buddha image by an unvarying conformity with the 'letter of the law'. It is all too easy, and a terrible mistake,

<sup>3</sup> Dialogues of the Buddha pt.III  
Introduction to the Lakkhana Suttanta.







its true fulfillment. This definition can be applied wherever men choose to make Buddha images, as the awareness of beauty is a faculty latent in all.

However, beauty is an enigmatic word, and along with a few others, such as love, one of the most abused. Throughout the history of humanity, conceptions of beauty have been so varied and diverse that 'it is in the eye of the beholder' is probably the safest statement that can be made about it. Nevertheless, to remain safe is often to remain the slave of the known, so it will further our aims if we consider beauty in more specific terms, and then see how they relate to the essential principles of making Buddha images.

For the purposes of this discussion, beauty (here, of the human form) will be regarded in two ways: namely beauty by association and beauty as sensuous appeal.

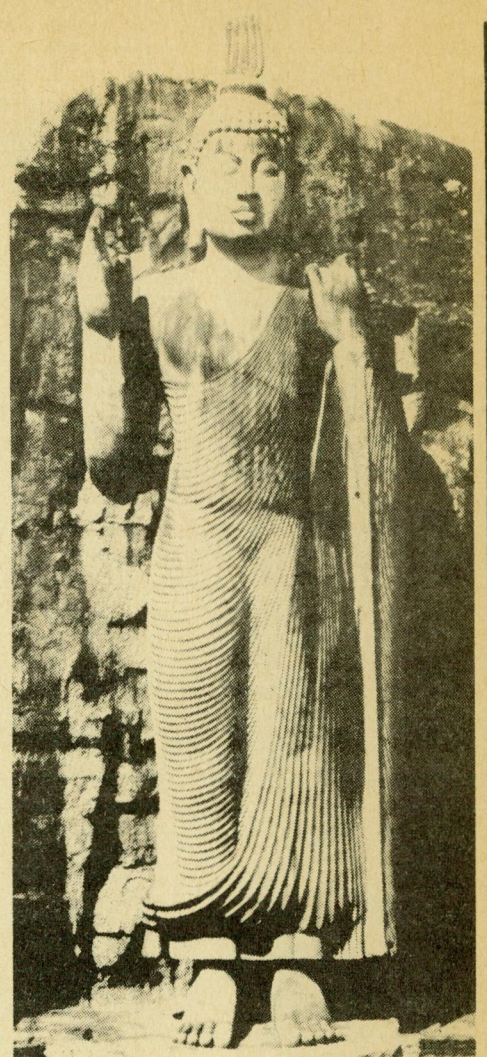
Beauty by association exists when the human form displays certain characteristics which, according to cultural tradition, stand for certain ethically-cum-socially desirable qualities. For instance, at one end of the scale we have the ideal of female beauty that

existed in prehistoric times, and in many tribal societies today: large breasts and hips, lots of flesh, and very little else (for example the famous 'Venus of Willendorf' stone age statuette, whose head is virtually non-existent). This showed that the woman in question was fertile, could produce lots of children, and so the continuation and prosperity of the tribe could be ensured. On a more socially advanced (?) level, we see the mediaeval European, upper-class female fashion for a totally white, anaemic complexion. This showed that her life was spent in the house, out of the glare of the sun which tanned only those who toiled in the fields, and that the woman in question was thus free of working-class drudgery, and of a 'purer' disposition.

Of course, the marks of the Maha Purusha are beauty by association. The exceptionally long arms, for instance, were the attribute of an Aryan hero, because they were proof that he could draw the bow in battle, or reach out and protect his people from danger.

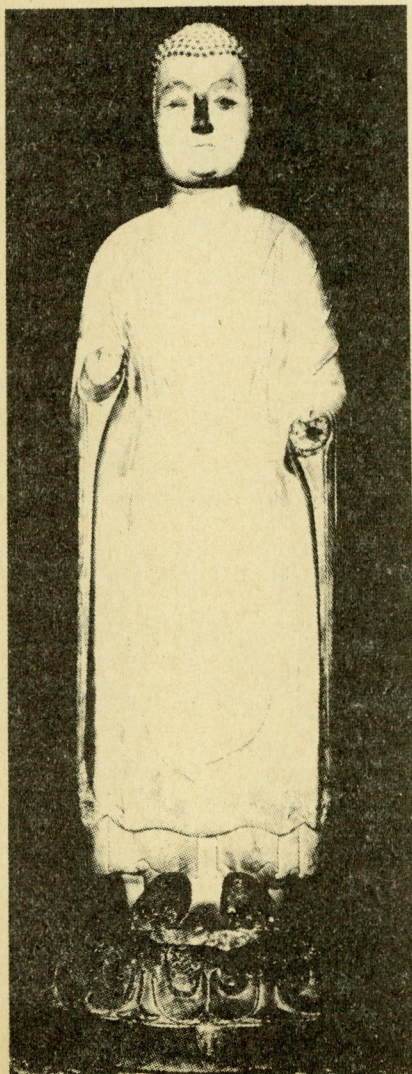
Beauty as sensuous appeal is beauty that exists solely according to the response of the senses, and is free of conceptual frameworks of reference. The appreciation of and creation of this kind of beauty shows a sensitivity which is arguably more evolved than that evinced by the aesthetic of beauty by association. In the human figure it depends, visually, on harmony of proportion; that is, harmony of proportion of the elements of human anatomy as they naturally exist, without any distortion in the name of conceptual requirements. Perhaps the finest example in the West of a tradition based on this principle is that of Ancient Greece. There, the human form was seen as a thing of potential beauty in itself, and the measure of that beauty was considered to be partly its health and the harmony of its proportion. The yardstick for this harmony, especially as represented in sculpture, changed many times during the course of Greek history. Geometrical principles were even applied to it by certain great sculptors, when formulating their particular 'canons' for representing ideal beauty. However, such ideals eventually fell into decadence, and were replaced, in the visual arts at least, by the grotesquery that was held to be beautiful by a degenerate society.

That such ideals of harmony were ever changing, and even that they fell into decadence, is evidence that beauty as sensuous appeal is nearer the heart of the matter than beauty by association. Beauty as sensuous appeal can only be perceived by the individual, and the degree to which he sees it is determined by the degree to which his sense perception has been refined. The degree to which that is refined, and in what overall context is, of course, up to the individual himself. So any decline of aesthetic standards within a society is due directly to the failure of men to cultivate themselves as individuals. In contrast, beauty by association exists only according to the instituted values of a society as a whole. It is thus a group (ie a sub-individual) value, and members of the group can be educated into it through an acquaintance with the relevant concepts.



Nevertheless despite its more highly evolved nature, there is an inherent futility in the cultivation of the awareness of beauty as sensuous appeal, and this is also its saving grace.

A human being can never be truly beautiful merely by virtue of his or her physical appearance. In fact the essential quality of humanity, namely its potential for spiritual growth, is ultimately not concerned with such things. As ethical and spiritual beings we have the ability to create a more lasting and transpersonal beauty out of our lives by acting skilfully, and with concern for others. We have surely all known people who, although apparently physically 'beautiful', have had that 'beauty' marred by an unpleasant, selfish nature. So can we really say that they were beautiful? Indeed, ethical beauty shines out, regardless of 'looks', and can transform so-called physical 'imperfections'. Actually, human beauty is very far-reaching in its implications - one cannot content oneself merely with the physical; to do so would indeed be futile. Plato has suggested in the *Symposium* that the quest for, and an acquaintance with ideal physical beauty leads to, and cannot exist without a quest for and an awareness of ideal





ethical beauty, and that this in turn cannot exist without spiritual beauty, and ultimately without the realization of the only true beauty, which for the purposes of this discussion we may call the Transcendental.

a step towards ultimate realization, then the principle of beauty as sensuous appeal can be applied to the creation of Buddha images.

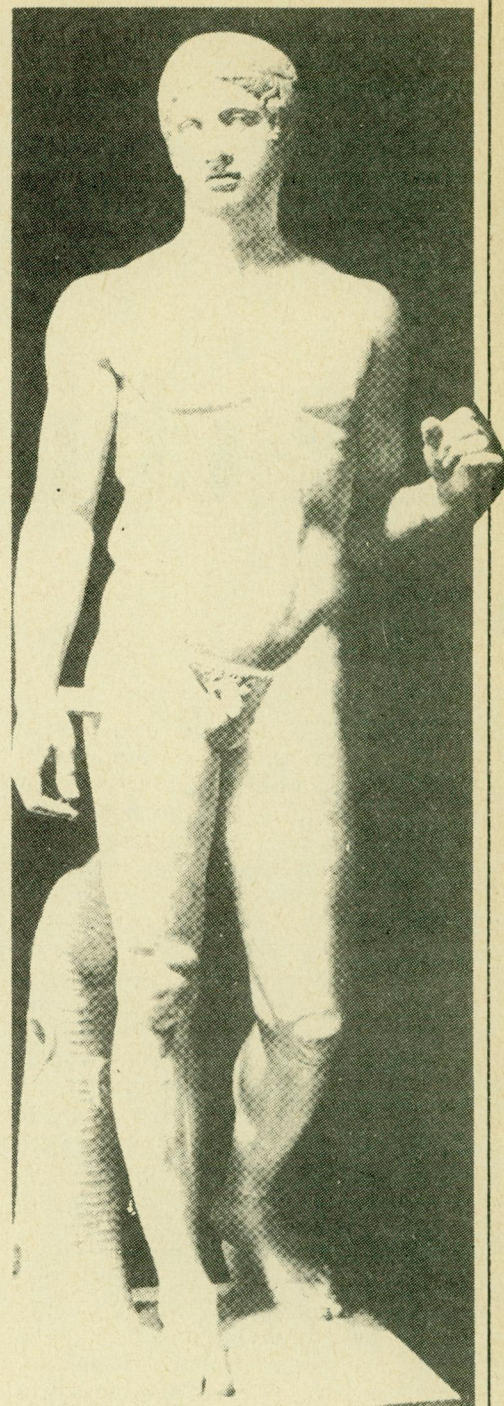
As Buddha images are to be experienced visually, their appeal should be directly sensuous and non-conceptual. They should call on the individual's capacity for refining his own visual perception, rather than encouraging a submission to long established ideas. Indeed, if one could conceptualize about a visual image, and *explain* it, then there would have been no need to have considered using visual terms in the first place. Images are to be seen, with all the degrees of subtlety that seeing implies, and only concepts thought about.

Of course, we must not totally de-value beauty by association. Many of the symbols that the Dharma uses fall into this category — one thinks for instance of the various mudras of the Dhyani Buddhas, the significance of which parallel the concepts of teaching, abundance, fearlessness, etc — and yet have benefitted many people throughout the world. However, we should realize that our immediate visual response to an object is primarily determined by the principles of beauty as sensuous appeal. The thinking process only comes into play later on.

As human beauty touches the emotions in the most direct of ways, so the beauty of a Buddha image should be the beauty of man to be seen, and thus felt. There should be no need to add certain signs and unusual anatomical characteristics with conceptual associations. The direct appeal of an image made in this spirit is of more use in communicating the Dharma than an assemblage of signs and marks, that despite the sublimity of their associations, may simply not look beautiful. The Dharma is universal, a figure of a man is universal, and the ability to perceive beauty and harmony through the senses is also universal.

If we choose not to concern ourselves with visual aesthetics, the matter can be put more simply. The Buddha was a man before He was an Aryan Indian, and His attainment concerns everybody. Essentially an image of Him is an image of man at his most beautiful, serene and dignified. In Ancient India this was expressed by using the signs of the traditional Maha Purusha. These formed part of a wide-ranging system of thought that was distinctively the product of that cultural environment. We have no such system pervading our lives in the West, and yet the universal Dharma is as accessible to us today, as it was to the people of India, two thousand years ago. It would therefore be pointless for us to adopt, wholesale, another culture in order to represent an ideal that goes beyond differences of time and place but which concerns us all. The Maha

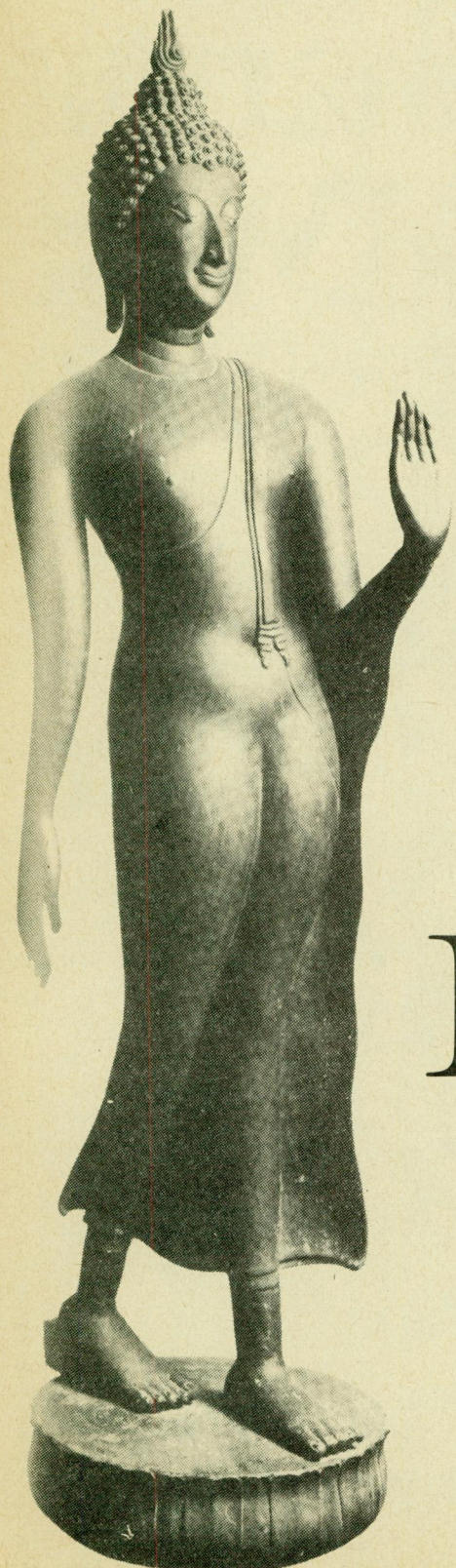
...Our Greek heritage



Purusha Lakkhana are therefore irrelevant to us.

The cultural and aesthetic aspect of our psyche has been deeply conditioned by the standards of beauty that were evolved in Ancient Greece, and later developed in the Renaissance. It is this heritage that must be 'converted' to serve the spiritual life, as was the heritage of ancient India. We will then be true to the essential principles of what ultimately makes the Buddha image universal.

However, it is salutary to remember that the Buddha image itself is ultimately unimportant. Its only use for us is as an indicator of how we should live in order to be fulfilled, and as there are many more such pointers in living human beings themselves, we can do without it if necessary.



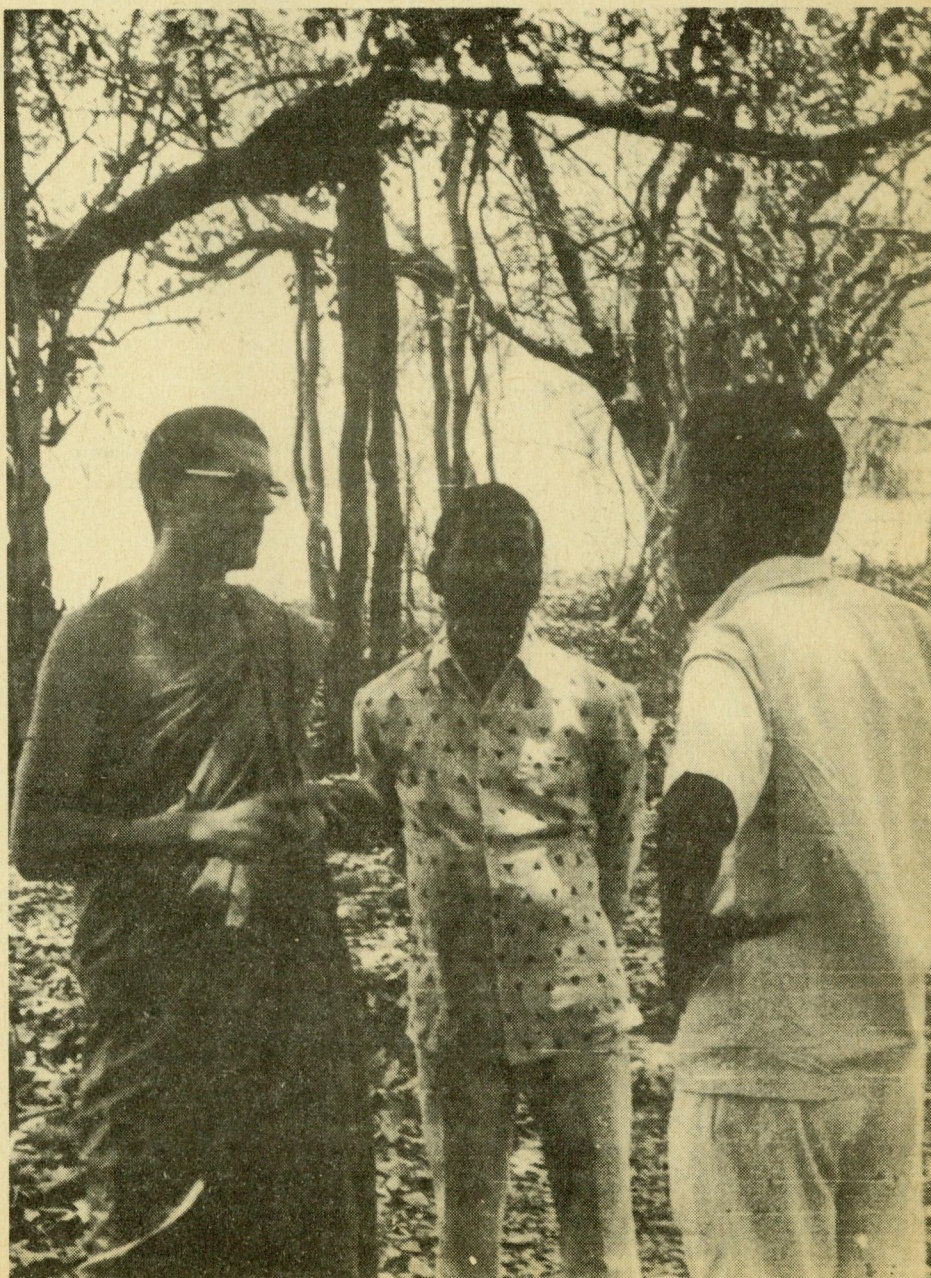


*Lokamitra and Padmavajra, two English-born Order members with some years experience with the Order in this country, are working to spread the Dharma in India, the home of the historical Buddha, Gotama himself. This unique situation raises some interesting questions, and provides us with an opportunity of examining the effects of different cultural and social backgrounds on the experience, interpretation, and communication of the Buddha's teaching. We asked the Order members what differences they had noticed in these respects since coming to Pune; this article has been constructed out of their replies.*

# Teaching the Dharma East and West

India today is still a traditional society. The social norms so concretely expressed in the caste system, which allots to every Indian at birth his duties, his responsibilities and allegiances, his status and even his means of livelihood, are almost universally applied, as they have been for centuries, even millenia. Social and religious mores are virtually coterminous, so that 'religious' value is placed upon social conventions, making it scarcely possible to break free from the group to which one is bound by birth. It is considered a contradiction in terms to be an Indian but not a Hindu. Hence, Buddhism, the Dharma, is seen by Hindus as simply another form of Hinduism — of which the varieties are extraordinarily diverse. Hindus consider the Buddha to have been an avatar of their god Vishnu; we see something of this attitude in the West among those who lump Christ, Mohammed, Krishna, (the) Buddha, et al into the same vaguely 'spiritual' mould.

All of this means that it is exceptionally hard for one born within this tradition to see or even conceive of himself or his society as anything susceptible of change; hardly anyone even guesses that we can choose to become individuals, rather than identifying ourselves with this or that group. The perception that we *can* make this choice is of course central to the Dharma as the Ven. Sangharakshita expounds it. In the West, our social economy is based upon competition between individual businesses; within the larger of these businesses there is competition for places at the top of the management structure; there is social competition for us to assert our individual status against that of our peers, and *en masse* for us to define the 'superiority' of our social group against others. Wealth, which is at least in principle accessible to all, is the means of our mobility in these areas. We are encouraged to make money, to accrue possessions, to gain positions of prestige and power — in short, to assert ourselves as individuals against other individuals, and



*'The Dharma . . . has already taken root in India'.*



also against rival groups, and against rivals within our own group. I hasten to add, this is not the sense of true individuality which the Ven. Sangharakshita exhorts us to create, for that is finally a spiritual matter, but the social custom of competition which is so rife in the West makes it much easier for us to accept the idea of ourselves as at least potentially free of social or religious groups. There is much greater flexibility for us in these areas, and the notion of individuality does not seem so foreign. In India, where the idea of changing one's social position is virtually sacrilegious, seeing oneself as something apart from, and independent of, the group is very much harder.

However, there is some virtue in the 'traditional' form of society. Lokamitra feels that it is due to strongly-held cultural values that most Indians are more socially reliable, less selfish, and even more psychologically secure than most Westerners. In particular, the institution of the extended family — children, parents, grand-parents, uncles, cousins, who live together and feel a strong bond with each other — provides them with a secure environment, where generosity is en-

intellectual lucidity. They are not used to, or not skilled in rational thinking or conceptualising. This has to be allowed for when communicating the Dharma to them; it is best to use very vivid and simple language, with copious images and similes, rather than resorting to a conceptual presentation, which is not a Maharastrian strongpoint (nor for that matter an English one!). The ability to think clearly is one that will have to be developed and encouraged if Indians are to become fully aware of the content of the Dharma. Though not enough in itself, some intellectual grasp of the central ideas in the Buddha's teaching is necessary before one can practise effectively, and disseminate the Dharma to others.

Lokamitra feels that the Maharastrians with whom he is in contact are at least in some respects more open to change than ever before. In recent years they have seen a good deal of social change — from being 'ex-Untouchables' to being non-caste Buddhists.

This may help them to accept the more radical transformations the Dharma implies. However, most Indians have such a pressing need for simple material improvements — better housing, education, having enough

Maharastrian Buddhists. He it was who pioneered the conversion of the 'ex-Untouchables' to Buddhism. 'In order to open people's ears to our work,' Padmavajra writes, 'we have to quote liberally from (Ambedkar's) works, and expand on his ideas'.

Buddhism for most Indians is very much an ethnic, not a universal religion, but it is in effect only 23 years old — dating from Bhante's and Dr Ambedkar's work in the 1950's. The danger is that, lacking a local spiritual tradition as such, the emerging Buddhist culture could easily revert to just another form of Hinduism. However, Lokamitra feels that at least the Maharastrians are stuck in a Hindu rut and not a pseudo-Buddhist one! That is to say, he is faced with combatting a far-enemy of the truth, in the shape of Hindu ideas, rather than a near-enemy, in the shape of subtle misinterpretations of right Buddhist views.

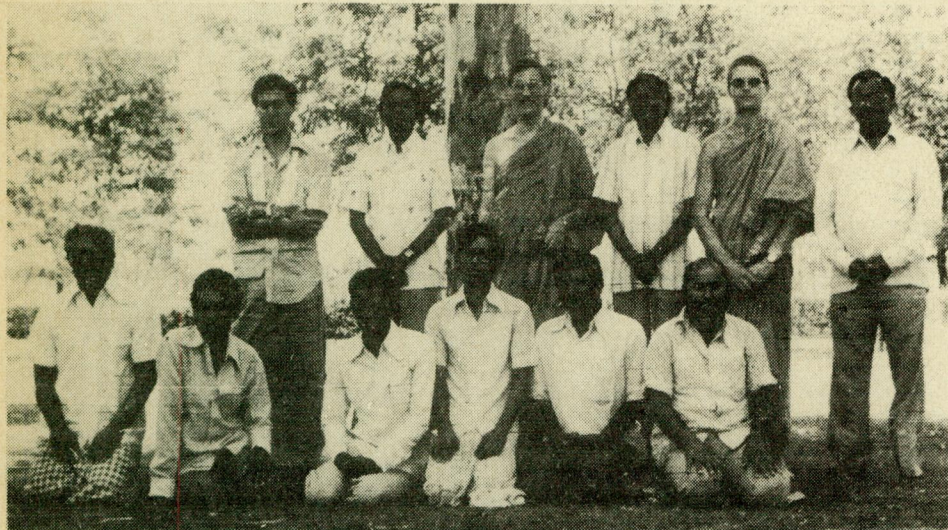
Both Order members feel that their presence in India is very important for the spreading of the Dharma in that country. They provide the Indians with the experience of a totally different social and cultural background, one which throws into relief their own conditioned attitudes. The Maharastrians are clearly impressed by the energy and level of commitment coming from what they had thought were 'lay-Buddhists' (Upasakas), which has demonstrated that the only real Buddhist is a practising Buddhist.

It is also in the FWBO's favour that Indians tend to listen more closely to what 'outsiders' have to say than they would to their own people. It will take some time, though, for Westerners properly to understand and communicate with the Indians in their own environment. Padmavajra claims to feel freer to be a Buddhist, and to express his Buddhist views in Pune than in London, but there is inevitably a cultural gap between English and Maharastrians which cannot be closed, 'short of committing cultural suicide'.

As for the future, both Order members are optimistic that the FWBO approach to the Dharma is ideally suited not only to the West, but to India also. The totality of the Dharma requires the total re-orientation of one's life in every way; it is not something that can be simply added on to a traditional Hindu lifestyle. It can therefore be the means for cutting away conditioned Hindu attitudes, for freeing Indians from their confining historico-social view of themselves and their self-imposed limitations. Furthermore, the FWBO is a dynamic and experimental movement, facing up to and relating to the present conditions of society, not to some remote and inappropriate past.

The Dharma, with the presence of committed Order members, has already taken root in India; yet it will only truly be established there when Indian Order members, from all the strata of society — Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras — are able to work and teach from their own vision and experience of the Dharma, without the need for recourse to the inspiration of Buddhists from the West.

Nigel Seller



Bhante, Lokamitra and Padmavajra, with Order members and mitras from Ahmedabad.

couraged. Indians seem to be much more emotionally free than the English, much more open in their communication, and much less inhibited, if at all, in their devotional practice.

Yet though we may admire this, it is not without its drawbacks. There is a tendency to offer devotion to the Buddha as if he were a Hindu god, rather than an Enlightened human, while their emotions, though free-flowing, are in Lokamitra's opinion, largely unrefined. He suggests the latter is due to the great dearth in India of high quality secular art and literature. Of the Maharastrians he writes, 'Education until very recently was banned to the majority of them.' Their environment is not aesthetically stimulating, and they lack the opportunities which we enjoy in the West for contact with the inspired works of great poets, artists, composers, dramatists, etc. so valuable as an indirect means of transforming and elevating our mental states.

Furthermore, what the Indians gain in emotional positivity, they may lose in

food to eat — that they understandably do not feel the Dharma is their paramount concern. But the introduction of Right Livelihood projects in India, such as have proved so beneficial in England, may at last provide a solution to their material as well as their spiritual dilemma. If people can work together and support themselves in a Dharmic way, what a strong foundation this will be for their practice, and how much material suffering can thereby be dispelled.

Another aspect of the Indian way of life which we may fail to appreciate in the West is that they are on the whole politically more involved. Not only are there caste, sub-caste, and family groups, there is also a plethora of political or quasi-political associations, to one or other of which most Indians belong. These associations take charge of running all local events, 'Dharmic and otherwise'. People generally follow their party-line without demur, participating in events if their association approves them, and boycotting them if it does not. Padmavajra relates that the figure of the late Dr Ambedkar still looms large for the



*Just as the Buddha's teachings have a relevance that goes beyond the confines of any one cultural context, so too does the individual Buddhist have to see beyond the assumptions bound up with his own cultural conditioning.*

*A short while ago, Upasaka Luvah found himself in Kathmandu, after a short visit to India. 'I travelled enormous distances amid the most appalling scenes of poverty, hardship, disease, and sheer absurdity . . . The experience certainly affected me deeply. Travel broadens the mind.'*

*Here follow some notes he made on his trip, extracts from a letter he wrote to the members of Golgonooza community, towards the end of his stay.*

## notes from a traveller

Midday is hot. Driven by mental fatigue to perform fabricated errands that pilot me among the narrow streets, I creep along in the shade, admiring for the hundredth time the pageant of temples and bazaars that they call Kathmandu (some say the dirtiest city in Asia). Cows and people and goats and chickens excreting in the sidestreets, garbage thrown out the front door and piled up on the pavements, strong smell of urine from the open drains, pollution of petrol and honking horns – but could I wish myself anywhere else? The atmosphere is of a perpetual carnival, every day is a religious festival, celebrated by beating drums and clashing cymbals. It feels good.

Environment is the key, and the complete absence of Christianity. Not having to work helps too, it is so cheap to live here. And the climate is never too hot or too cold, but always changing so as not to cloy. Space for action and reflection, to find a natural daily cycle which enjoys sunshine and fresh air equally with contemplation.

Kathmandu isn't exactly unwesternized, but because it is so small you can be right out of it in an hour and into some of the world's most glorious scenery. You can be up in the mountains in a day or two's walk. Of course you have to walk; difficulty of access ensures that there is one place in the world they will not be able to destroy with their machines. No internal combustion engines here. Everything that comes up the mountain has to be carried up on foot. There are no TVs or baths or black-topped highways (though you do see the occasional native staggering up a one-in-four slope with a wardrobe or a double-bed on his back). Frail emaciated young old men, women, girls and children caravan the ridges, carrying enormous baskets of firewood, sacks of rice or potatoes.

Can you even imagine a world without cars or TVs or washing machines? It's like going back a thousand years, to a mediaeval world, where everything is unchanged, totally untouched by the march of civilization. Imagine being back in the 15th

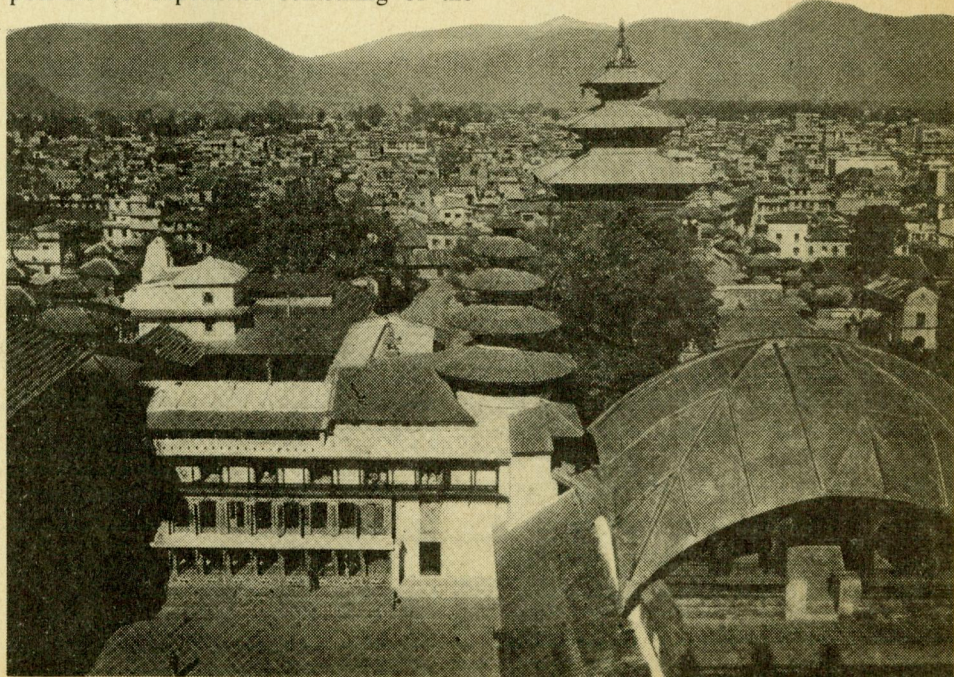
Century, before Copernicus and Gutenberg and Columbus, before the steam engine, before electricity. And suppose you had the opportunity of a great adventure, a chance to sail on one of the great voyages of discovery with Vasco de Gama or Magellan, or to trek across Asia with Marco Polo. For those men it was really possible to live life as an adventure, to experience the challenge of the unknown, to discover and explore new worlds.

The spirit of adventure has all but disappeared from modern life. For most of us adventure is something that happens on television or in the cinema, fantasy media which we need to escape from the boredom of everyday routine. Yet in the East it is still possible to experience something of the

heroic quality of adventure and discovery that must have inspired those early explorers.

Unreal city, pastiche of pagoda temples, pie shops, and Tibetan handicraft stalls. This whole place is a temple, even the houses are fretted with elaborate wooden pointed panels and carvings of scenes from Hindu mythology, weather-beaten and black with age. Crumbling brick and rotting wood are the very substance of the city, the temples venerated but unrenovated.

No trace of decay in their religion however, or their culture (which is the same thing) despite the influx of Western ideas. Unlike mediaeval Christianity, Hinduism is not threatened by the extension of





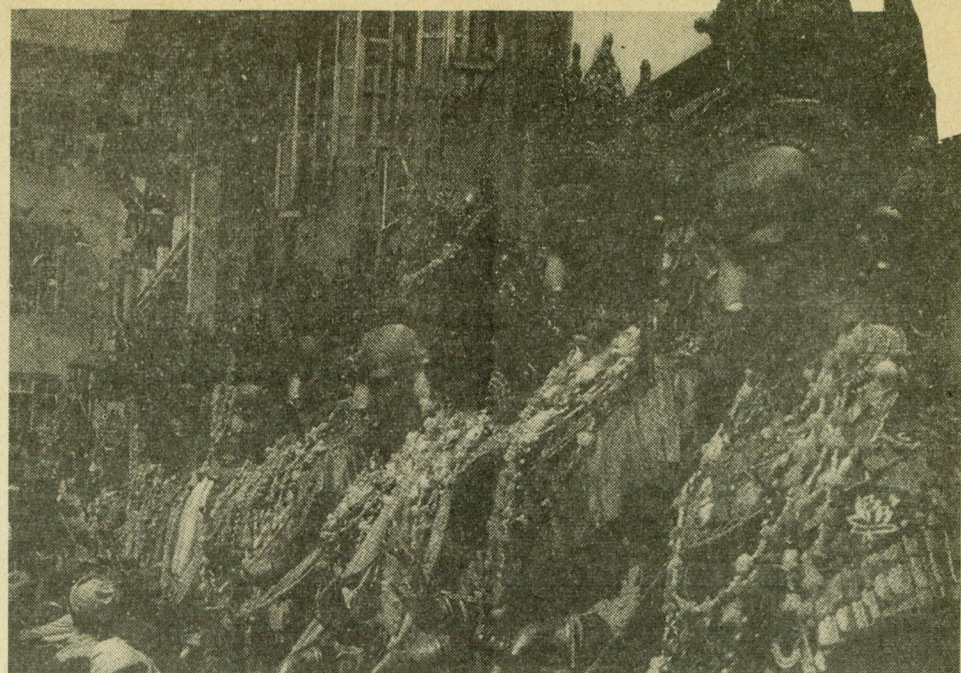
knowledge; it does not function dogmatically and so does not have to defend itself from alternative modes of experience. A first-hand experience of a living ethnic faith is a remarkable experience; life here is rich and colourful, and meaningful; the people are happy and friendly. Mediaeval Christianity must have possessed this kind of vitality and power; we have lost all the vitality of an integrated culture, but we have yet to rid ourselves of the residue of dogma and repression. Here you can positively feel the absence of Christian conditioning, of guilt and repression and holy gloom; just to be here is a liberating experience.

Conditionality; the Buddha's fundamental insight. Our actions bind us, our mental states petrify to inhibit our growth. We have to smash these psychic shackles to repossess our freedom; consciousness expands as we work free from our conditionings. But what are conditionings? Answer: everything is a conditioning. Everything.

Consciousness determines being. Our conception of the world is a reflection of our state of consciousness: the limitations we place on the world are the limitations of our consciousness. The old fear of falling off the



edge of the world was really a fear of the unconscious – whatever is concealed, dark, around the corner, unknown, to be feared. And you think you can escape from it by closing your mind to it. That is what the mediaeval theologians did to make their world 'safe', to neutralize the power of unintegrated psychic energies. The devil, evil, they existed, yes; but they could not be fully confronted. Hell had to be corked up like a fermenting spirit and hidden underneath the earth. The mediaeval world was enclosed in crystal spheres, very small, very cramped, very tidy, everything put in its place and kept there with a net of scholastic ignorance (what Blake calls the Net of Religion). It was safe but claustrophobic, a stuffy cupboard universe. (Contrast the sublime conceptions of Indian cosmology.) Man was prisoner in this world, dogmatic theology constricted his consciousness like a psychic tourniquet. The early navigators helped to weaken the power of dogma when they extended the horizons of the world and discovered realms unknown to the theologians. Then it was further weakened and finally destroyed by the discoveries of science, by Copernicus and Galileo,



navigators of a different sort who sailed the interstellar spaces against the wind of orthodoxy; and by Charles Darwin, who sailed round the world like Magellan on a charting mission, but is remembered because he charted time itself, and demonstrated that the world is a verb, not a noun.

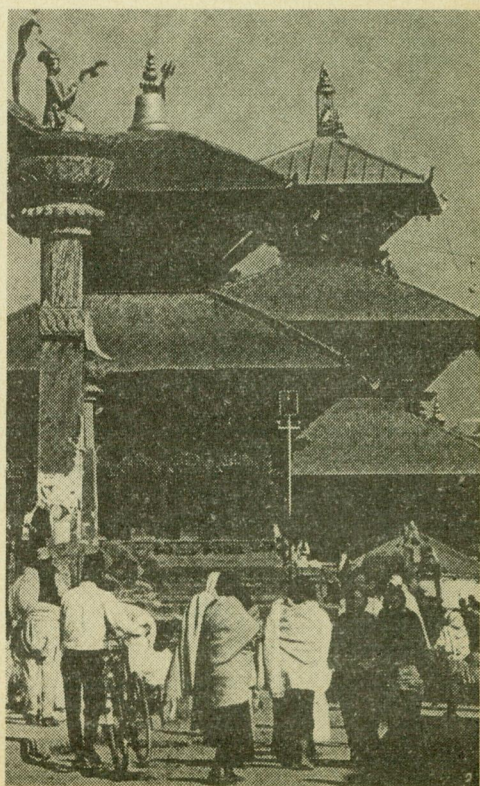
But if science helped to liberate us from the dogma of religion, it caught us in its own net, the dogma of reason, the net of materialism, from which it is just as difficult to escape. So the men I admire the most are the mental travellers, who sail the seven seas of the imagination to extend the horizons of consciousness; Giordano Bruno, who was burnt at the stake in 1600 because he professed a belief in the plurality of inhabited worlds; William Blake, who saw the infinite in all things, who spoke against 'single vision and Newton's sleep'; Friedrich Nietzsche, who saw through all the illusions and self-deceptions of the human mind. Where do you travel, you astronauts of the spirit?

The environs of Kathmandu are best reached by bicycle, which happens to be the fastest, cheapest, and most comfortable form of transport here. Today a short ride to Swayambhunath, the Stupa on the hill overlooking Kathmandu. (The name means 'the lord who is being in itself, the Buddha'.)

Leaving my bike at the bottom I climb the long stairs up the hill, past beggars and monkeys, past the three enormous yellow stone Buddhas, along files of stupas, up and up, through the archway gate and into the courtyard at the top. The scene is thronged with pilgrims and tourists, and feverish with activity. Tibetan monks circumambulate the stupa, Brahmins perform ceremonies on the pavement, oblivious to the dogs and children playing football and the general hubub. (Buddhism and Hinduism are not coexistent here, they fuse.) Deep horn notes resonate as into the arena come two trumpet-tusked porters as if to announce the arrival of some great emperor or general, or the commencement of a dramatic interlude – which does not materialize. Inconsequentially a flute and drum orchestra appears and immediately strikes up a merry tune, while

over the other side of the square a concert of cymbals and bells strikes out in an antagonistic rhythm. An ice-cream vendor with an entourage of flies squats down beside me. Flies everywhere. The Buddha entertains. He is everywhere in residence, equally in the temple sculptures of the five Dhyani Buddhas that rim the stupa, and in the bronze icons on sale in the various antique shops – but above all in the great gold spire of the stupa festooned with flags and streamers like a fun-fair helter-skelter, and the two piercing eyes painted at the peak of the stupa itself, enigmatically peering out over the Kathmandu valley. The fields below are combed and patched with a dozen shades of green and brown like a Tibetan carpet laid out in honour to the gods. Beyond the fields the Himalayan foothills, a curtain of misty-grey undulations drawn across the sky.

LUVAH









## Book Review

# Padmasambhava comes to the West

**THE LIFE AND LIBERATION OF PADMASAMBHAVA** (*Padma bKa'i Thang*). As Recorded by Yeshe Tsogyal, Rediscovered by Terchen Urgyan Lingpa, Translated into French as *Le Dict de Padma* by Gustave-Charles Toussaint, Translated into English by Kenneth Douglas and Gwendolyn Bays, Corrected With the Original Tibetan Manuscripts and with an Introduction by Tarthang Tulku. Dharma Publishing, Emeryville (California), 1978. Pp. xxxiv + 769, with 58 colour plates. Two volumes/\$50.00.

With his lotus-cap, his red cloak, and trident resting in the crook of his left arm, the figure of Padmasambhava is one of the most striking and distinctive in the whole range of Buddhism. Well do I remember the tremendous impression it made upon me when, in the early Fifties, I encountered it for the first time in the gloom of a temple in the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas. In English very little information about Guru Rimpoche, or the Precious Master, as the Tibetans generally call Padmasambhava, has been available. We had 'An Epitome of the Life and Teachings of Tibet's Great Guru Padma-Sambhava' in Evans-Wentz's *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation* (1954), and a chapter on Padmasambhava and Padmaism (sic) in Hoffmann's *The Religions of Tibet* (1961), as well as various short summaries of his career in books about Tibet and histories of Buddhism, and that was about all. Now, under the title of *The Life*

The image of Padmasambhava was painted by Chintamani, and given to Dharo Rinpoche on behalf of the Order.



and Liberation of Padmasambhava, Tarthang Tulku has brought out, in two bulky volumes, an English version of the French translation of the *Padma bKa'i Thang*, so that at last we are able to follow in detail the career of the extraordinary being who was mainly responsible for introducing Buddhism into Tibet and whose magical personality has dominated the spiritual lives, and fired the imaginations, of a large section of the Tibetan people ever since.



The *Padma bKa'i Thang* is a terma or 'treasure' text which we are told was taken from the heart of the fierce deity guarding the door of the Crystal Rock Cave by Urgyan Lingpa, its preordained revealer, in 1326, after it had lain concealed within the image for more than five centuries. The original authorship of the text is attributed to Yeshe Tsogyal, one of the twenty-five principal disciples of Padmasambhava. The work is divided into 108 Cantos, as the English translator calls them, the first fifty-three of which have been assigned to Part I of this edition under the heading 'India' and the remaining fifty-five to Part II under 'Tibet'. According to the English Translator's Preface, 'In many respects this work in two volumes is comparable to the Germanic sagas or the Greek and Roman epics.' (p.xx) So far as the Greek and Roman epics are concerned, the comparison is not really valid. Though the story line is reasonably clear and continuous the *Padma bKa'i Thang* is a somewhat chaotic work and rather lacking in formal literary structure of the more classical type. If it is comparable to anything within the Western epic genre it is, perhaps, rather to the Italian romantic epics and the Arthurian romances. At times, however, particularly in Part I, the Tibetan work seems to resemble nothing in Western literature so much as Blake's later 'Prophetic Books'. There is the same brilliant visual imagery, more Tibetan than Indian (the French Translator, Gustave-Charles Toussaint, does not believe that there was a Sanskrit original for the work as claimed), the same visionary atmosphere, and the same ability to project the 'collective archetypes of the collective unconscious', both the terrible and the fascinating, in forms of hallucinatory vividness. Prosodically speaking the text consists mainly of long sequences of nine-syllable lines, with both longer and shorter lines also sometimes occurring. Changes of pace and mood are frequent. In the vigorous words of the French translator, 'Various tones follow each other in the incantation. It passes and repasses from dithyramb to macabre nightmare, from evocatory vertigo to objurgation, from a vehement and sombre realism to didactic dryness, but also to fervour, to the epic, to prophecy.' (p.xxv)

**T**he central event in Padmasambhava's life is his visit to Tibet, where he performed the celebrated feat of subduing the local gods and demons and participated in the consecration of the great temple-monastery of Samye. This historic visit took place in the reign of king Trisong Detsen (755-797 CE) and modern scholarship therefore regards Padmasambhava's career as being confined within the limits of the 8th century. The *Padma bKa'i Thang* takes a different view. While giving a full description of Padmasambhava's activities in Tibet, it sees the Precious Master's career as extending both forward into the distant future and backward into the remote past and as covering a period of altogether nearly three thousand years. The story begins in the land of Uddiyana. Amitabha, the Buddha of Boundless Light, emanates a ray of crimson radiance that falls upon a lotus in the Dhanakosha Lake, whereupon there appears seated on the calyx of the flower an

eight year old child. This miraculous child, who is Padmasambhava, is adopted by Indrabhuti, the childless king of Uddiyana, and brought up as heir to the throne. Though married to a beautiful and virtuous princess he is mindful of his spiritual mission and wishing to renounce the kingdom gets himself exiled and, like the Buddha, leaves the palace on horseback. After performing austerities and mastering all manner of arts and sciences he receives ordination as a monk from Ananda, the disciple of the Buddha and his constant companion during the last years of his life. Ananda tells Padmasambhava of the Buddha's predictions, from which we learn that Padmasambhava was born 42 years after the Parinirvana. Chronology is further dislocated the fact that according to Tibetan tradition, the Buddha was born, not in 563 BCE (the generally accepted date) but several centuries earlier. Having received ordination Padmasambhava visits Kashmir, Nepal, Zahor, Khotan and other places and stays in the eight great cremation grounds expounding the Dharma to the dakinis. He then goes to China, and learns astrological calculations from Manjushri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom. In Zahor he meets the spiritually-minded princess Mandarava and accepts her as his disciple, whereupon her father, angry that the princess has consorted with a man, tries to burn him alive. Dakinis extinguish the flames of the pyre, and after seven days it is transformed into a lake of water and Padmasambhava appears in the form of an eight year old boy seated on a lotus and converts the king – an incident that is repeated, with variations, two or three times later in the story. Centuries passing, the Precious Master establishes the Dharma in Baiddha, Nepal, Serling (Sumatra?), Assam, Tukhara, and Persia, and his career becomes interwoven with the lives of such celebrated personages of Buddhist history as king Asoka – at whose prayer the genies build ten million stupas in a single night – and the teachers Nagarjuna and Aryadeva. There are also references, apparently anachronistic, to the persecution of Buddhists in Bengal and to the destruction of the great monastery of Vikramasila by the Hulagu Khan of Persia and of the shrines of Bodhgaya by the tirthikas or non-Buddhists under king Nagavishnu. Eventually, Padmasambhava receives king Trisong Detsen's invitation and travels to Tibet via Nepal, subduing gods and demons as he goes and forcing them to surrender their life-principle and swear an oath to protect the Dharma.



According to the *Padma bKa'i Thang's* reckoning Padmasambhava spent 111 years in Tibet. Samye being completed, he and the 'Bodhisattva Abbot' Santarakshita perform the consecration ceremony to the accompaniment of many marvels, the king promulgates the code of laws which henceforth governs the social and religious life of Tibet, and the work of translating the Buddhist scriptures into the Tibetan language begins. Young Tibetans are trained as translators and, in the case of the most intrepid, go to India to study the Dharma. Indian monk-scholars are invited to Tibet. The most celebrated names in this connection are those of Vairotsana, who studies with twenty-five great Indian pandits, and Vimalamitra, who on his arrival in Tibet shows wonders, the story of each of them being related at some length over a number of cantos. Trisong Detsen having abolished the sanguinary Bon rites, the work of translation is brought to a successful conclusion, and despite strong opposition from the Bonists – due to whose machinations Vairotsana is banished and Vimalamitra slandered – the Dharma is at last established in Tibet. Secular works are also translated. The establishment of the Dharma is followed by the revision of the translations of the scriptures, after which the king recognizes the services of the translators and pandits with lavish gifts and most of them go home. In connection with these latter events, as well as with the death of princess Pale Lotus, the king's daughter, Padmasambhava predicts the destruction of the monasteries and the slaughter of the monks and describes how, over a period of five thousand years, the teaching of the Buddha will grow and decline



until the coming of the next Buddha, Maitreya. He also describes whereabouts in Tibet the *termas* or 'treasures' of texts and other objects which he has hidden for the benefit of future generations will be found, as well as the 'signs of the earth' and the times when these treasures will appear and who will discover them. The predictions having been made, king Trisong Detsen dies and Padmasambhava thinks of leaving Tibet but is persuaded to stay for three more years and makes more predictions and gives many teachings. In particular he addresses to the new king and to all the people of Tibet a lengthy exhortation which takes the form of an appallingly realistic description of the sufferings of the six realms of existence and of birth, old age, disease and death. His mission in Tibet accomplished, the Precious Master mounts a marvellous winged horse, blue in colour, and accompanied by 'heroes of the four orders' and enveloped in rainbow-hued light leaves through the heavens for the land of the Rakshasas or cannibal demons – where, enthroned on the Copper-Coloured Mountain, he is still living and teaching.

No bare summary of the *Padma bKa'i Thang* can possibly do justice to the richness and diversity of its contents. Interwoven with the life of Padmasambhava, which of course is the principal theme, there are biographies of subordinate characters, descriptions of non-human beings, summaries of medical and astrological lore (in the latter the twelve *nidanas* and the months of the year are correlated with the Twelve Actions of the Buddha!), sublime spiritual teachings, ecstatic songs of praise, a guide book to Samye, catalogues of texts translated, and much else besides. As Tarthang Tulku writes in his Introduction, [The *Padma bKa'i Thang*] 'is indeed a treasure, having the complexity and brilliance of a finely cut crystal, its facets the 108 cantos.' (p. xxviii) Not that the crystal is perfectly symmetrical in shape, or that its facets are all equally well cut or of the same degree of brilliance! Nevertheless there is no doubt that, like the rainbow light that plays within the crystal, it is the magical figure of Padmasambhava that dominates the entire work, especially the central group of cantos, and it is the events described in these cantos, ie his visit to Tibet and his subjugation of the local gods and demons, that set the tone of the whole extraordinary narrative. In the earlier, Indian part of his three thousand year career Padmasambhava converts dakinis, kings, butchers, black magicians, and tirthikas, while one of the last things he does before leaving Tibet is to make a contract with the great demon king Pekar. Reading *The Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava* one gets the impression not only of a vivid and powerful spiritual 'personality' heroically battling with the forces of evil but also of a stream of impersonal spiritual energy which is coterminous with historical Buddhism itself and which, intervening in the course of events age after age, and assuming a variety of forms, brings under its control all the swirling emotional-psychic energies which at one or another level of mundane existence obstruct the liberating influence of the Dharma. This impression is heightened by the fact that Padmasambhava is actually involved in some of the most important events of Buddhist history, as well as by the fact that, at various stages of his career, he is known by different names. He has, we are told, eight secret names, eight borrowed names, eight present names, twenty magic names 'which vary at will,' and so on. One indeed gets the impression that, perhaps extrapolating from Padmasambhava's exploits in Tibet, the text sees not only the history of Buddhism but the whole course of mundane existence in terms of a conflict between the forces of light and the forces of darkness – a conflict in which the forces of light are concerned not simply to conquer but to transmute and transform.

The most striking illustration of this almost Gnostic world-view occurs towards the beginning of the *Padma bKa'i Thang*, in the cantos describing the series of the births of the Rudra Tarpa Nagpo, or Black Salvation, and his subjugation by the Horse and the Swine, ie by the teacher Tubka Shunukyuwa, himself a form of

Padmasambhava, and his disciple Den Pag, in the form of the horse-faced Vajrasattva and the swine-faced Vajrapani. The Rudra is a fallen monk, once a disciple of Tubka, who after myriads of existences in various evil and hideous forms is eventually reborn as a monster with three heads, six hands, four feet, two wings and nine eyes. Feeding on the corpse of his mother, a prostitute who had been impregnated by three demons, he grows to enormous size and becomes the ruler of the demon kings who have seized control of the earth. Mad with pride, he fancies that there is none greater than he. The Horse and the Swine subjugate him, penetrating him through the rectum and the urethra and coming out of the top of his head, where they join each other. Tarpa Nagpo becomes the Dharma protector Mahakala, and is predicted to Buddhahood. He reappears later in



the work, towards the end of the canto on 'The Discourse of the Council of the Treasure, of the Law of the Treasure, of the Revealer of the Treasure' (Canto 53), where it is said, 'Although subdued, Rudra Tarpa Nagpo rises up again,' as though he represented, in his unregenerate form, a force which has to be subdued over and over again. In a remarkable passage the *termas* or 'treasures' are described as being hidden in various parts of his cosmic body, as if to suggest that the antidote to egotism is to be found in egotism itself – bodhi in the defilements, the Unconditioned in the conditioned. There is even a suggestion, elsewhere in the work, that the forces of light are actually strengthened by their conflict with the forces of darkness, and that one should, therefore, seek to learn from painful situations rather than run away from them. 'Hell is the lama of all the Buddhas' declares the Precious Master, when asked by Prince Lhaje to exert his mercy and cut off the whole misery of the cycle of transmigration for himself and his parents.

Like much Tibetan Buddhist literature, the *Padma bKa'i Thang* is pervaded by a keen sense of the impermanence of all worldly things and a strong 'yearning faith' in The Three Jewels, commitment to which makes it possible for one not only to transcend the human predicament but also to become a stream of 'impersonal' spiritual energy working for the emancipation of all living beings. In addition to its vivid portrayal of Padmasambhava himself, and its powerful dramatization of the conflict between the forces of light and the forces of darkness, the work also contains many important spiritual teachings, some of them being of a highly esoteric nature. Partly because they are not always explained in full, partly because of the literary rather than scholarly nature of the French translation, these are often difficult, even impossible, to understand. The general import of the work is nonetheless in no doubt whatever. Reading *The Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava* is a major imaginative and spiritual experience. This is due, principally, to the fact that 'the poetic beauty and symbolic strength of the Tibetan original' have been carried over from the French into the English translation, so that we can read this great work of literature in its present version not only for information but also for inspiration. Enjoyment and inspiration are alike enhanced by the reproductions of *thankas* which illustrate the material within the text, as well as by the care and devotion with which Tarthang Tulku and his co-workers at Dharma Publishing have produced these two splendid volumes. Holding them in our hands, we cannot but agree with Tarthang Tulku that Padmasambhava's teachings have now come to the West. We cannot but feel that Padmasambhava himself has now come to the West.

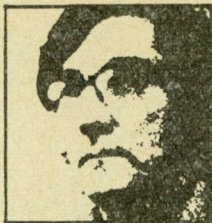
SANGHARAKSHITA



## Bhanté Goes East

cont:

India  
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The rains have started in Pune. After four months of very hot, dry weather with the sky an immaculate blue, the clouds have come, bringing with them the cool, refreshing rain. Looking out from our vihara I can see a brown patch of wasteland becoming greener and greener. The buffaloes seem to like the change in the weather. Most of the year they look as though they are only capable of lying down all day; now that the rains have started they run about butting one another and roll around in the mud. It's a bit like an English spring at this time of the year. Everything is growing again. At the end of June everything was brown and withered, but now plants, trees, grass, flowers, they are all coming to life thanks to the rain.

I can appreciate even more now the Parable of the Rain Cloud from the *Saddharma Pundarika Sutra* in which the Buddha likens the Dharma to the rain that falls at the end of the long hot dry season.

When I rain down the rain of the Dharma,  
Then all this world is refreshed.  
Each one according to his power takes to heart

This well-preached Dharma, one in taste.  
As when it rains the shrubs and grasses,  
The bushes and the smaller plants,  
The trees and also the great woods  
Are all made splendid in the ten regions:  
So the nature of Dharma always exists for  
the weal of the world.  
And then, refreshed, just like the plants,  
The world will burst forth into blossoms.

Our activities since the last Newsletter have been overshadowed by Bhante's second visit. He arrived at the end of May in Pune, where he spent five days, the highlight of his stay here being the ordination of nine of our Maharashtrian friends.

The ordinations took place on a four-day retreat held, like the one on his previous visit, at Sinhagad ('The Lion Fort'). This is a mountain about 15 miles from Pune which boasts the remains of an old fortress of Shivaji, the Maratha king who spent his days battling with the Muslims who ruled Maharashtra.

The retreat was restricted to those being ordained and existing Order members, and so was quite intense. Our daily programme included seven hours of meditation devoted to the mindfulness of breathing, metta bhavana, the relinquishing of the six elements, and the just sitting practice. On two of the days of the retreat our afternoon meditation session was disturbed by a pre-monsoon storm that broke over the mountain. Lightning flashed, the thunder boomed and rumbled, and the clouds unleashed a barrage of huge white hailstones that crashed down on

the tin roof of our bungalow. By the time the meditation was over all was calm again and stepping out onto the verandah we could see arching out of the valley below a brilliant rainbow that disappeared into the clouds above.

On the final morning of the retreat the public ordination ceremonies took place (the two previous evenings being devoted to the private ordinations). About 40 people made the difficult journey from Pune to attend the ceremonies. Bhante explained in detail and with humour each stage of the ceremony concluding with what most people find the most interesting part – the giving of the new names. Mr. M. Vanshiv was renamed Dharmaditya ('Sun of the Dharma'); Mr. B.K. Bhalerao, Buddhapriya ('He who loves the Buddha'); Mr. S.S. Gaikwad, Silananda ('He who gets joy from sila'); Mr. S.B. Mohile received the name Munindra ('Lord of the silent ones'); Mrs. K.D. Maheshkar, Dharmalochana ('The lady who possesses the eye of the Dharma'); Mr. M.M. Manwatkar, Sudarshana ('He who sees clearly'); Mr. M.K. Kunte was called Chandrabodhi ('Moon-like Bodhi'); Mr. B.K. Gangawane: Vimalakirti ('The Pure famed'); and Mr. A.V. Inamdar was called Dharmodaya ('Dawn of the Dharma').

After announcing the names and explaining the meaning of each one Bhante chanted the traditional Pali blessing and everybody expressed their approval and joy at the occasion with three loud shouts of 'Sadhu'.



Question and answer session.

The Order is now established in Pune and this means that we can remind so many more people about the Dharma. Many more people will be able to practise and enjoy the fruits that the Dharma can bring.

Although Bhante only stayed for a few days in Pune, most of which were spent on retreat, he did have time for one more activity. This was a question and answer meeting for mitras and regular friends. One of the main points to arise from the meeting had to do with the efforts of Hindus to break up the Buddhist movement in India. During the early stages of the conversion movement in Maharashtra, Hindus would often ask the newly converted Buddhists what sort of Buddhist they were, Hinayana or Mahayana? Dr. Ambedkar was inspired by both vehicles – he followed, we can say, the Buddhayana. The

Hindus by asking such questions hoped to confuse and thus divide the Buddhist community. This still goes on today, but in a slightly different way. Caste Hindus often insist on calling Indian Buddhists 'new Buddhists' or 'neo-Buddhists'. In so doing they hope to alienate them from the rest of the Buddhist tradition. Bhante advised us to consider ourselves as Buddhists; not any particular kind of Buddhist, but just Buddhists.

After his stay in Pune, Bhante along with Lokamitra, travelled the 400 miles by train to Ahmedabad in neighbouring Gujarat state. Our visit coincided with the hottest time of the year. The mercury hovered around the 45 C mark, making any kind of activity at any time of the day difficult and unpleasant. Even the nights were hot and it was impossible to sleep inside because the floors and the walls were still hot from the day.

Maybe it was the heat after the comparative cool of Pune that caused Bhante's illness there. The day after his arrival in Ahmedabad he went down with a very high fever and became very weak. He was so ill he was unable to give the two public lectures arranged previously. Lokamitra at very short notice had to fill the gap. The first lecture he was forced to give completely spontaneously. In spite of this (or maybe because of it) his talk was simple, direct and, most important of all, inspiring. He spoke on an old favourite: the Four Sights of Prince Siddhartha that beckoned him to leave home to seek the Truth. Lokamitra made it clear that the Four Sights don't have to be seen as historical fact, indeed, in some of the oldest parts of the Pali Canon, in the *Sutta Nipata*, the Four Sights are described as a dream of the future Buddha.

Lokamitra brought home to us the relevance of such an experience to our lives in the 20th century.

In the second lecture Lokamitra discussed the whole question of the effect that the practising Buddhist has upon the society in which he lives. During this lecture, unfortunately, the power failed – the lights went out, the fans stopped, the microphone stopped functioning. The hall became very dark and oven-like. After the confusion had died down candles were brought, and Lokamitra continued speaking. After about 15 minutes the power returned. But not for long. Just as everybody was beginning to enjoy the cool air now that the fans were operating – the power once again stopped. But Lokamitra was not to be put off, and he finished his talk in candlelight.



In spite of Bhante's sickness, the heat, and the power failure, our trip to Ahmedabad wasn't so disastrous. Six new Order members from Pune, as well as myself and Ratnaketu from New Zealand, went as well, and this represented something of a breakthrough in communication here. It is very difficult to bring together Buddhists from different parts of Pune; it is even harder to bring them together from different parts of Maharashtra, and here we were with Buddhists from Maharashtra and Gujarat coming together. If the Mahasangha is to live up to its name and its ideals then it has to break through all social, national and political distinctions. Our Gujarati friends were perfect hosts. They gave us comfortable places to stay, beautiful food and helped us in every way possible. Thus communication was initiated between the Buddhists of both states.

Mention of these barriers reminds me of another interesting part of our stay. In Ahmedabad there are some 5,000 Maharashtrian Buddhists. Although they have lived now in Ahmedabad for several generations they are very much a separate community from the Gujaratis. They are all Buddhists, or most of them are, but the interesting thing is they are very unwilling to have contact with the Gujarati Buddhists. One of our Pune Order members discovered that this was because these Maharashtrians felt that the Gujarati Buddhists (although, like them, originally from the Untouchable community) were inferior to them, therefore contact was not possible in spite of repeated attempts by Upasaka Bakula to establish communication. The main reason why Dr. Ambedkar converted to Buddhism was to free himself and his people from the yoke of the caste, and here we were discovering the bad old habits again. We can't be too hard on such people however: the problem is there because of the lack of proper guidance, as much as for any other reason. Taking full advantage of the six Maharashtrian Order members who were with us, we arranged a meeting for the Maharashtrian Buddhists in their locality. Although the meeting was small by Indian standards (there were about 50 people present) it was an enthusiastic one. Lokamitra, Dharmalochana and Vimalakirti each gave a short talk, and they all emphasised the importance of overcoming petty differences and the old caste taboos. Our work in Ahmedabad in the future will not be confined to the Gujaratis but to the Maharashtrians there as well.

Our visit to Ahmedabad concluded with a retreat, and as a climax to the retreat were three mitra ceremonies and one upasaka ordination. This was Bhante's only public appearance in Ahmedabad, but it was worth waiting for, and dissolved any of the disappointment that our Gujarati friends felt about him not being able to lecture. Although still weak, and suffering from a fever, Bhante explained in great detail the path of regular steps. He said one shouldn't be in a hurry to be a monk; one shouldn't even be in a hurry to be an upasaka. Most Indian Buddhists consider themselves to be upasakas already, so you can appreciate that statements like this are quite revolutionary. Bhante then described how, before one is ordained into the Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha (Western Buddhist Order), most people become mitras, during which time they can gradually deepen their commitment to the Three Jewels. After his talk came the ceremonies themselves and the ordination. Again Bhante explained everything in great detail. The mitra ordained was Ratnakar Kosambi and Bhante announced that as Ratnakar already had a perfectly good Buddhist name he had decided not to rename him. Ratnakar means 'Jewel Ocean'. Bhante explained that the 'Jewel Ocean' is the Dharma. The Dharma contains such priceless jewels as

the Noble Eightfold Path, and the Seven Factors of Enlightenment.

The evening after the retreat, Bhante, Lokamitra and Ratnaketu left for Bombay, and the next night Bhante and Ratnaketu climbed aboard the plane for the UK.

Bhante's visit has had a great effect. We can't gauge the total effect now because, as the Order out here develops, the effect will be greater and greater. Already though the Sangha feeling is strong among the new Order members, and we've got the feeling the Dharma can spread far and wide.



*A picnic to celebrate Wesak.*

Although Bhante's visit has been the most important and the most memorable event since the last Newsletter, I mustn't forget to mention some of our activities before his arrival and after his departure.

In this period we celebrated two festivals, *Ambedkar Jayanti* (the celebration of the birth of Dr. Ambedkar) and *Wesak*.

*Ambedkar Jayanti* is the big day of the year for Maharashtrian Buddhists; it even overshadows *Wesak*. The Buddhists here have very strong feelings for Dr. Ambedkar, they are deeply grateful to him for all he did to uplift them and to free them from the bonds of caste. If it wasn't for him they would not have come into contact with the Dharma. The day is so important to them that the Maharashtra State government has made the day a public holiday. All over Pune people celebrate. In every Buddhist locality there is some sort of programme — puja, lectures, and readings from Dr. Ambedkar's books. We celebrated the day as well. In the morning Lokamitra and myself were invited to two different localities to give talks, but it was in the evening that the main celebration took place. This was held in Ambedkar Udyan, a small garden in the middle of the city with a large statue of Dr. Ambedkar. On this day just about every Buddhist in Pune and its surrounding district comes to make offerings to the statue. We decided to take advantage of such a gathering with Lokamitra giving a lecture. But this proved very difficult. Literally thousands of people had come to make offerings. The statue of Ambedkar could not be seen for the garlands that the devotees had placed on it. On the steps below the statue a small fire was burning. On closer investigation I noticed that this was where people were offering candles and incense. Thousands of people pushed their way to the statue to offer something; children were crying and numerous processions circled the gardens, chanting and

drumming. Everywhere there was confusion, noise, and people — there couldn't be worse conditions to give a talk. We managed to make some space and Lokamitra began. In spite of the conditions, something got through. In fact, since that day, I have met many people who have told me how much they enjoyed the lecture. Lokamitra spoke about Dr. Ambedkar's life, his approach to Buddhism and how we can continue what he started — today.

*Wesak*, was, by comparison with Ambedkar Jayanti, a much quieter festival. Early in the morning we celebrated in the most fitting manner

with meditation and puja for Order members and mitras, beneath the spreading branches of banyan trees in the grounds of Pune University. After chanting the Refuge precepts and *Triratna Vandana* we had a period of the metta bhavana followed by some walking and chanting, the visualisation of Shakyamuni and a puja. In the evening we had a public celebration. Lokamitra received over twenty requests to lecture from different parts of Pune. Obviously it was impossible to go to them all, so he contented himself with giving four talks in the evening in different localities. The talks were well attended, there being upwards of three hundred people at each talk. Lokamitra gave a different talk in each locality, but in each one he made the point that usually people look for lasting happiness in things which cannot give lasting happiness. The only place to look for undying satisfaction and happiness was Buddhahood.

As well as the two festivals before Bhante came, we had a regular programme of meditation classes and courses. The course that attracted most interest was taken by Lokamitra and was called 'Has Buddhism failed? Did Dr. Ambedkar make a mistake? A provocative title. Since we have been here we have met a number of people, especially among the young and educated, who are beginning to think in this way. The course lasted for six weeks, and explored the different ways in which the vision of Buddhism can work now and have a beneficial effect on our lives, and on the world.

Since Bhante left we have been holding more classes than ever before. This is possible because we now have more Order members. Every week there are three beginners' meditation classes, four courses, and a mitra group. Lokamitra is taking three courses — one on the Noble Eightfold Path, one on *Mind — Reactive and Creative* and another course on 'Can Buddhism work?'. I am taking a course on medi-



tation and practical Buddhism in a town about 16 miles from Pune, where it looks as though we will have to have a centre in the not too distant future.

All the classes are well attended and many more people seem to like what we are doing. At last Buddhism has come alive for them.

The main thing that is getting in the way of our doing more, and being more effective, is the lack of a suitable centre and community, but things are developing in this direction; by the beginning of next year we hope to have something. My imagination becomes quite wild when I think of the possibilities when we have a good centre. Already in under a year a lot has been achieved – the future looks even better.

Padmavajra

## New Zealand



Without a doubt the most significant event for the movement here in the last three months was the visit by the Ven. Sangharakshita to New Zealand, from the 15th March to the 25th May. Although just over two months, the visit was too brief for all concerned. It was a very full time for Bhante himself, spending as he did time at all of the three centres, Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. This contact contrasts significantly with the contact that Bhante had on his last visit over four years ago in the summer of 1974/75 when he had more contact with the public through taking classes and through leading the National Retreat at Waikanae. On this last visit however Bhante spent a large part of his time with Order members and mitras. This contact was partly informal, in private interviews, shared meals and outings, and partly formal, in the four question-and-answer meetings at each of the three centres (two were held in Auckland), and in the three weekend Study Seminars. Also of course there was the seven-day Ordination Retreat which was held at Camp Sladdin just outside Auckland from the 10th to the 17th April.

This retreat, which Bhante joined about half-way through, was the setting for the five ordinations into the Western Buddhist Order. The private ordinations were held in the context of the *metta bhavana* practice on the evening of Sunday 15th April and the public ordinations took place the following morning. Up until Sunday evening the weather had been rather wet, with heavy downpours of rain combined with a nearby river that was steadily flooding itself over the paddocks around the camp. However Monday morning of the 16th dawned dry and clear with a brilliant blue sky. Encircled by Purna, Megha, Achala, Sadhumati, Udaya and Priyananda, the five new ordainees publicly took the Refugees and ten precepts from Bhante, received their kesas and were welcomed into the Order. Of the five, three are men – Vipula, Dharmadhara and Ratnaketu – and two are women – Aniketa and Suvajri.

Immediately after the retreat the Ven. Sangharakshita, Purna, Achala and Dharmadhara drove south in the Rover car which had been especially bought and renovated for Bhante's short tour around the country. The first stop was Wellington where Bhante had already spent six days just three weeks previously. This first visit was significant in that the Wellington FWBO Centre was the only one that Bhante had not visited. On that visit he had given a public question-and-answer meeting and had led a

weekend study retreat (on Conditions of the Stability of the Order, translated by F.L. Woodward). The second visit to the city was only for one night on the way through to the South Island. After the ferry trip across the Cook Strait to Picton, Purna and Bhante drove down the Kaikoura Coast to Christchurch where they spent the better part of two weeks. Bhante stayed at the Christchurch Community and, in the residential Centre there, had yet another question-and-answer meeting (the sixth of the seven of his overseas tour). As elsewhere in New Zealand, Bhante had contact mainly with the Order members and mitras. There was time also for a short trip to Dunedin.

The return trip to Auckland involved a two-day tour of the isolated West Coast and of the Marlborough area. Then there was the ferry crossing to Wellington, a one-night stay there and the day's drive back to Auckland, where Bhante and Purna arrived on the 4th of May.

The next three weeks the Ven. Sangharakshita spent in Auckland, staying again at the Suvarnaketu Community, spending much of the time seeing friends and preparing the three public talks on *A New Buddhist Movement: the Meaning of FWBO*. (A report of these talks is contained elsewhere in this Newsletter). Bhante also led the second of the two Auckland weekend Study Seminars on *The Sutra of Forty-two Sections* (translated by John Blofeld). On the 25th May, just two days after the last talk, Bhante was being farewelled at the new Auckland International Airport, and he and Ratnaketu were on their way to Bombay. Of course the Ven.

Sangharakshita's visit was too short, yet the whole movement in New Zealand has benefited greatly from the inspiration and encouragement which he has brought. We keenly look forward to another visit.

Significant as Bhante's visit was, three other events have occurred recently which, in their own way, mark milestones for the Auckland Centre and Community. In particular, firstly, was the dedication of the new shrine and Buddha rupa at the Centre, Suvarnadhatu, on the Buddha Day celebration on the 12th May. This is significant in that the plaster rupa was made by a local artisan, Upasika Suvajri. And this celebration saw also the opening of a new extension of the Centre – that is, the freshly painted, carpeted and decorated reception rooms adjoining the large shrine-room on the second floor of the building.

The second milestone was also laid in the acquisition of a wood-turning business by the Golden Light Co-Operative. This business, which was donated by an Auckland mitra, is housed in a small factory about two miles from the Community, in the central residential-cum-industrial area of the city. The factory includes two lathes used for the wood-turning (of mainly table legs, chair legs and stair railings) and complete equipment for wood-joinery.

And the third milestone consisted in the renting of the retreat cottage at Otorohanga, about three hours' drive from Auckland. This small country house will be used for weekend study retreats, for longer group retreats and for solitaires.

Priyananda

## A NEW BUDDHIST MOVEMENT: The meaning of FWBO.

### Three talks by Ven. S. Sangharakshita

1. Wednesday May 9th  
"The Individual and the World Today."

2. Wednesday May 16th  
"Western Buddhists and Eastern Buddhism."

3. Wednesday May 23rd  
"Commitment and Spiritual Community."

8pm. Ellen Melville Hall (Pioneer Women's), Freyberg Place (off High St.)  
No Admission Charge.

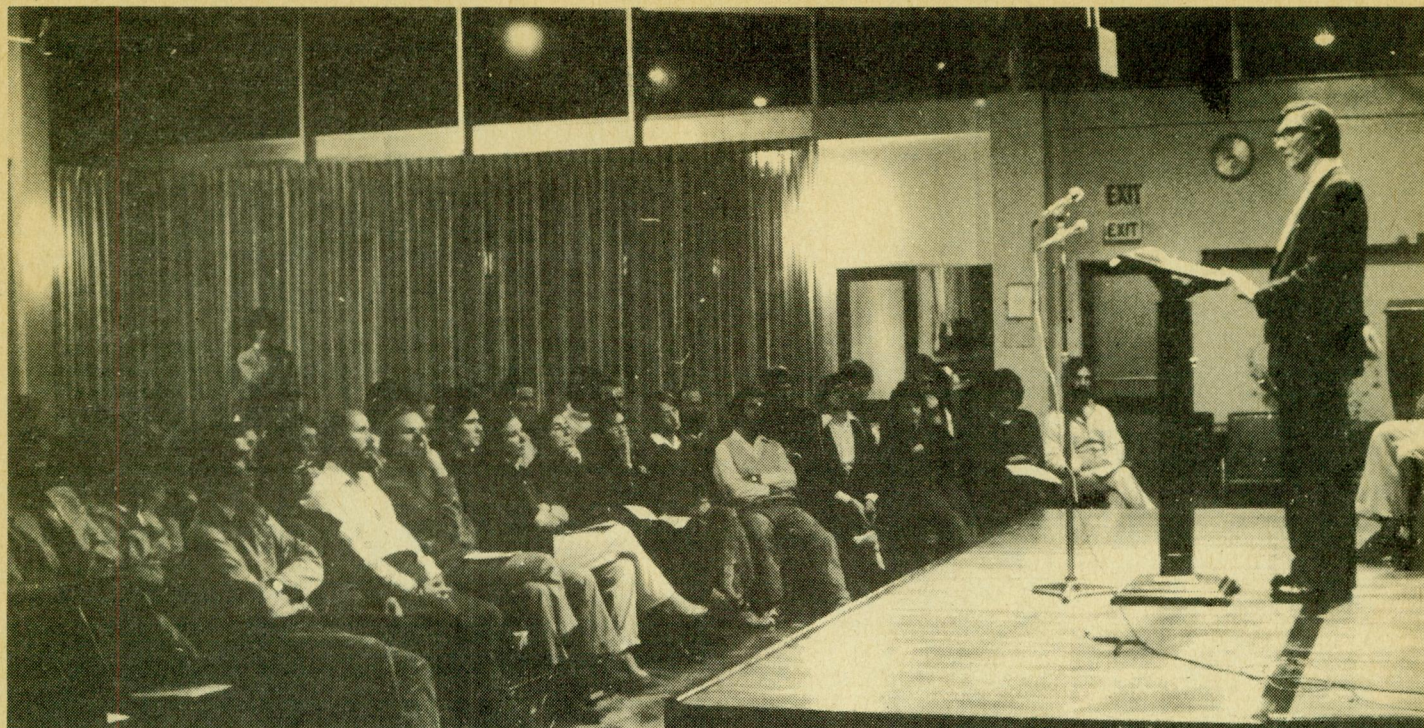
Friends of the Western Buddhist Order

Inured as we are to the advertising ploy of changing the packaging on an old product and calling it 'new', we could perhaps be excused for thinking that posters advertising 'A New Buddhist Movement: The Meaning of FWBO' meant yet another addition to the array of spiritual groups and Buddhist organisations available in most Western cities today. For any such cynics it must have been something of a pleasant surprise then to be exposed to some understanding of a movement that though based on 2500 years of Buddhist tradition, was in fact genuinely new;

new both in its comparatively recent founding and in its difference from existing Buddhist groups. Something new which wasn't in fact yet another organisation or society but a *movement*, which, as the Ven. Sangharakshita remarked, can only be described as a sort of 'current' or 'stream' of positive emotional energy, leading from higher to ever higher levels of consciousness. A current or a stream which like electricity can take hold of us and give us a shock and even eventually radically transform our lives, not only individually but also collectively. This current is what is called the FWBO, and as we were warned, if you touch the FWBO you will certainly get a shock.

Over three successive Wednesday even-





*'I had the feeling that a bomb had gone off, but nobody knew how to respond'.*

ings on May 9th, 16th, and 23rd, the Ven. Sangharakshita delivered a series of three public talks on the theme of 'A New Buddhist Movement: The Meaning of FWBO' in Auckland, New Zealand under the auspices of FWBO (Auckland). In the course of the three talks, appropriately delivered in the Pioneer Women's Hall, Bhante explored the new spiritual movement known as the FWBO, and conveyed some understanding of the nature of the movement through an examination of the meaning of the name 'Friends of the Western Buddhist Order' itself.

In the first talk *'The Individual and the World Today'* Bhante examined in what sense the FWBO was a *Western Movement*. It is Western not just because it started in the West, in London, but because it arose under the conditions of modern Western civilization, a civilization that is today virtually world-wide, a civilization in which unfortunately there has arisen a serious imbalance between the Individual and the group. The biggest problem in human and spiritual terms that the world faces today is the problem of the survival of the Individual against group pressure. Buddhism, being concerned with nothing really but the individual human being and his or her development as an Individual, can help restore that balance and give the Individual in the modern Western world his due. The FWBO is *Western*, then, in the sense that it is a movement of Buddhist origin concerned with the protection of the Individual from the group.

Agreed that this serious imbalance between the Individual and the group exists and that it can only be corrected by spiritual means, the Ven. Sangharakshita, in his characteristic style, then posed the hypothetical questions: 'Why bring in Buddhism? Why could we not do it with the help of Christianity which is, after all, the traditional religion of the West?' As he pointed out, Christianity could not help us very much in this direction because Christianity as it has developed in the West over the centuries is very much on the side of the group and has little or no respect for the Individual — a lack of respect amply shown by its history of persecution, inquisitions, crusades and religious wars against those who think differently. In any case in Christianity, as in all theistic religions, the Individual is overshadowed by God, by an omnipresent, even oppressive, personality of God, and the Individual feels crushed by that. Bhante added the gem: 'More

psychologically, more existentially, God is the most powerful member of the biggest conceivable group'.

Strong stuff for a place that prides itself on being 'Godsown'. I confess I was looking for a few reactions during this part of the talk, as I glanced around the sea of a hundred or so assorted people who had made the effort to be here on this rather rainy autumn night in Auckland. Shocked indignation followed by a walk-out? Maybe a few looks of relief and the joy of an oppression gone? No, nothing. I had the feeling that a bomb had gone off but nobody knew how to respond, or that it wasn't 'fitting' to show any response. Maybe they just missed the point or maybe social decorum decreed that one keep one's emotional responses to certain 'safe', not to say, alienated, minimal levels. Now I know why somebody initiated a 'Come Alive New Zealand' campaign a few years back.

The night of the second talk turned out finer, both as regards weather and audience. It seemed a different audience, though there were quite a few Friends that had been before. It was certainly a more relaxed audience than that of the first talk. The Ven. Sangharakshita delivered his second talk on *'Western Buddhists and Eastern Buddhism'* and examined in what sense the FWBO was a *Buddhist movement*. The FWBO is Buddhist in the sense that it concerns itself with the spiritual development of the Individual but it is not Buddhist in the sense that it follows Eastern Buddhist culture, however great or beautiful that may be. Bhante defined Buddhism, as the Buddha himself had defined it in response to a question from Maha-Pajapati, his aunt and foster mother, as whatever helped the Individual to grow or progress in both his inner and outer life. Buddhism, the Dharma, was sharply distinguished from its various eastern cultural forms. The statement was made that 'What Western Buddhists in practice encounter is not Buddhism. In fact we could say that many Western Buddhists never encounter Buddhism at all. What they in fact encounter is a particular school or sub-school of Buddhism associated with a particular national or regional culture'. The FWBO does not identify itself exclusively with any one form of Buddhism. It appreciates and seeks to learn from them all, whether Theravada, Mahayana, Zen or Tibetan Buddhism. It takes from the different schools anything it finds contributes to the development of the Individual in the West.

It takes a fair degree of awareness and understanding to appreciate a good talk and it amazed me, on replaying recordings of the talks afterwards, how much I had missed while hearing them the first time — not only in terms of actual content and the significance of what was said, but also in failing to appreciate such things as how well constructed the talks were and the amount of careful preparation that must have gone into them. Looking at the slightly depleted audience on the third night I couldn't help reflecting that though perhaps sympathetic, the audiences seemed remarkably unresponsive. I suspect the value of the talks lies, not so much in the effect on the live audience but in the recordings of them being played again and again in Centres, communities and homes throughout the movement, so that in time the full impact of them will be appreciated.

In the third talk, *'Commitment and Spiritual Community'*, the Ven. Sangharakshita looked at in what sense the FWBO is an *Order* and in what sense also it is a movement of *Friends*. Taking as his point of departure the reasons that led him to starting an Order and a movement of Friends rather than yet another Buddhist organisation of the usual type, he had clearly seen that a Buddhist spiritual movement could only be run by those who were actually committed to Buddhism, not by those who had merely an intellectual interest in it. One can join an organisation by paying the required subscription but one can be received into the Order only by way of ordination, that is to say by committing oneself wholeheartedly to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. But a Buddhist organisation run by committed Buddhists is no longer an organisation in the ordinary sense of the term. It would be a spiritual movement, in fact a spiritual community, that is to say, 'an association of committed individuals freely working together for a common spiritual end'. The basis of commitment and spiritual community, or in more traditional Buddhist language, Going for Refuge and Sangha, was the basis on which the FWBO, our new Buddhist movement, was founded.

As the Ven. Sangharakshita stressed in his conclusion to the talks, the talks could only give a glimpse of FWBO. If you want to know more you will have to experience it personally. You will have to experience it from within.

Purna.



# The Vinehall 'Event'

'So long as the brethren shall assemble repeatedly and in large numbers, the prosperity of the brethren may be looked for and not their decay.' So said the Buddha in the last months before his Parinirvana (his 'final' entry into Nirvana at death). When many people come together on the basis of a common concern for human development, a powerful atmosphere is generated. This is not the Nuremberg rally effect of *participation mystique*, of losing oneself in the cosy safety of vast numbers. Rather it is, that what is common, that unites us, becomes more apparent than the differences of temperament, culture, or activity by which it is usually obscured.

This year, in April, 50 male mitras and 20 Upasakas came together in Vinehall, a Prep. school near Robertsbridge in Sussex — for ten days. This gathering has become known as the 'Vinehall Event'; it was not a retreat, nor a convention, simply an event. Just bringing all those people together, from different centres and different countries, with the common focus of self-transformation, produced immediately a happy and open atmosphere. Everyone was talking to someone, really talking, not just mouthing pleasantries or swapping business information. The long benches in the dining-room would have to be forcibly cleared, by the washing-up gangs, of groups of people talking long past the end of the meal. In the intervals between activities, the grounds would be full of pairs of friends pacing the boundaries and talking.

For three hours every morning, we broke up into study groups of about ten people and, led by an Order Member, would read and discuss Buddhist texts, usually those which Bhante has already studied with Order members and mitras on study seminars, such as *The Udana* and *Mind in Buddhist Psychology*, and *Dhyana for Beginners*. In the course of the event the study became more relaxed, as the participants got to know each other and as the atmosphere of the event got stronger; it bit deeper, causing more controversy and discussion, yet bringing into focus an expanded vision. Splitting into seven groups in this way, so different from a retreat where everyone does everything together, added to the richness and diversity of the Event. The participants in each group would end the morning with a particular feeling; sometimes they would still be trying to resolve some point not quite rounded off, or would be fired by new

ous wrong views of our own time: egalitarianism, New Ageism, pseudo-liberalism. In other talks there was a similar critique offered of those views and forces which hinder the individual in his development. Subhuti enumerated the fallacies which underlie much political thinking, Nagabodhi mentioned the dangers of establishmentarian Buddhism as seen in many British

on the Buddha from an archetypal and from the absolute point of view, on meditation and morality, and on ordination. Abhaya talked on 'the Mitra and his place in the cosmic drama', an exercise in mind-blowing which involved a stretching of physical perspectives as well as an expansion of spiritual horizons. Nagabodhi gave the last talk, on 'The FWBO in the year 2000'. His



A break in the programme.

vistas opened up in discussion, sometimes members of one group would be quite quiet, either in a reflective mood, or stretched by the text into numbed silence or else because, perhaps, it had been a quiet morning.

Every evening there were talks, either by one speaker or by three in a symposium. This was the high point of each day, eagerly awaited and enthusiastically received. The twelve talks were of a high standard, marked by originality and strength of expression. Many times over, the bull (or rather a number of bulls) was taken by the horns. A theme which came up again and again was that of blasphemy; one talk being devoted to this issue and two or three others making references to it. Since the Event followed closely on the publication of Ven. Sangharakshita's 'Buddhism and Blasphemy', many people were still in the process of digesting its message. Controversy raged over the issue of what is referred to in the pamphlet as 'therapeutic blasphemy': can it be consciously contrived? does someone have to be offended for it to be effective? Issues raised in talks and study stirred people up as they tried to absorb and apply what was discussed.

In his talk, Sagaramati gave a brief exposition of the *Brahmajala Sutta* in which the Buddha catalogues and trounces the many species of intellectual confusion current in his time. Sagaramati then proceeded to detail and dismiss some of the more obvi-

ous groups. Devamitra discussed the dangers of getting buried in a 'back to the country' fantasy, Manjuvajra talked of the trap of hedonism. A clear and confident line was drawn in many areas between what is and what is not helpful to human development. This job, so often shirked as 'unbuddhist' or intolerant, is of the greatest importance. There is so much that is superficially helpful, yet is at bottom antagonistic, to the developing individual. All this tangle of *miccha-ditthi* or wrong views must be closely looked at and shown up for what it is. A chronic reluctance to disagree, a desire not to face up to unpleasant facts and to remain always in polite agreement, is cowardly and depotentiating. A vigorous and unsparing critique is stimulating and clears the mental ground of the tangled weeds of muddled thinking. Though individual members of the audience might wince as one or other speaker wielded the surgeon's knife, the overall effect was invigorating and inspiring. Mangala made it clear in his talk, 'Buddhism and its enemies', that the enemies of Buddhism are simply those factors, internal and external, which stand in the way of the individual's development. Knowing your enemy is the first step to being free of him.

This forthrightness was not purely negative; the major tone of the talks was indeed one of rejoicing. From a more traditional point of view, Jyotipala gave a moving account of the life of the Buddha. Others talked

vision of a greatly expanded movement left us with the clear understanding that its realisation depended, to a great extent, on those present in the room.

There was, then, in the talks, the study, and in private discussion, a confident assertion of the spiritual vision which we are individually trying to realise and, at the same time, a clear and reasoned appraisal of the various *miccha-ditthi* — wrong views or rationalised attitudes — by which one who is trying to grow may be beset.

Naturally, the study and talks were set in a daily programme of morning and afternoon meditation. Each day finished with a Puja before the large golden Rupa which Chintamani had made for the Order Convention the previous year.

There were sessions of yoga and of communication exercises. Many took advantage of the school's indoor swimming pool. Every day one study group was responsible for cooking or washing up. Since the first part of every morning was in silence, it was truly impressive the way in which each team wordlessly co-ordinated itself to distribute and wash up the breakfast.

The whole Event was an extraordinary blend of lightness and ease combined with intensity and inspiration. It is likely that such Events will in future be a regular feature of the FWBO calendar. All who attended this one left for their different centres and communities refreshed and inspired.

Subhuti



# A Womens Mitra Retreat

The ten day mitra retreat held at Mandarava this May was attended by 19 people from England, Holland, and even one from New Zealand. This fairly cosmopolitan mixture, as well as meaning that people's horizons were broadened by meeting so many people from different situations, also proved again that within the Friends, all Friends and mitras have, in a way, one 'taste'. This was best shown when Eve, who had arrived in England from New Zealand only the previous evening, seemed like an old friend as soon as she stumbled, jet-lagged, into the retreat.

Any visit to Mandarava is an adventure in itself. It is a small-holding, in a small village in Norfolk. To reach the house you have to cross a bridge over a 'moat' and from that point on, although the house is in sight of other houses in the village, you are in a different world. The house itself is a rather small clay-lump and daub and wattle building. On retreats people are also accommodated in two old-fashioned converted railway wagons in the grounds, in a converted 'chicken hut' which sleeps one and is always much sought after, and in three caravans parked in the far field. The place has a somewhat primitive feeling and retreats there have a sort of 'camping-out' atmosphere, which has a charm of its own. The shrine room is in a converted barn just across from the house and is very beautiful with old-fashioned windows, beams, and a large shrine, usually decorated with wild flowers and grasses.

The main activity of the retreat, apart from meditation, yoga, work and taped lectures, was a two-hour study period each morning of *Mitrata* 21 on 'Morality and Kalyana Mitrata'. This article proved a very useful medium for study as each paragraph provoked a lot of discussion.

Nagabodhi begins the second paragraph of his article by saying 'Perhaps the first and most important thing that has to be said is that according to Buddhist teaching, there is no . . . God'. This point provoked intense discussion, and even outburst. It seemed as if the ideas expressed in *Buddhism and Blasphemy* and in Bhante's last public lecture 'Authority and the Individual in the New Society', had deeply affected people — who had since discovered for themselves the extent of their own Christian conditioning — especially those amongst us who were brought up as Catholics. In the discussion people expressed — some of them very strongly — just how deeply they felt this conditioning went, and how much it seemed to stand in the way of their growth as True Individuals. Consequently, throughout the retreat, many people were moved, stimulated, provoked, and even felt compelled to do something about this and to try and shake off the grip of this conditioning in various ways — in some cases, through cathartic blasphemy. Some of the discussion



*Fighting back the jungle.*



*Waiting for the Wesak play to begin.*

on this topic also centred around the particular effects of Christian conditioning on women.

We discovered by studying this essay how many of us, even though we may not have been brought up in a specifically Christian way, nevertheless suffer from what Wayland Young has called in his book *'Eros Denied'* the 'Cheshire Scowl'. What this means is that even though we

may no longer feel ourselves to be Christians, many of our attitudes are still founded upon a remnant, or hangover, of our Christian conditioning: attitudes such as fear and guilt, desire for approval, authoritarianism, a tendency to involve ourselves in power struggles, and so on. All these attitudes are antipathetic to real spiritual friendship, which is based on free

exchange, freedom, openness and metta.

The study proved stimulating throughout, as it was directly relevant to everyone present and provided a really direct means of coming to an understanding of True Individuality, and the quality of communication between such individuals.

Many people expressed during the first few days of the retreat how difficult they were finding the experience. The meditation, study, the fact that it was a longish retreat, and the presence of so many other mitras and of Order Members seemed to show many people that their previous involvement in their spiritual lives had been somewhat superficial, even though many of them live and work full-time in spiritual communities. Retreats are invaluable for showing you where you really are, as opposed to where you think you are, and for giving you an opportunity to deepen your involvement and commitment.

Buddha Day occurred almost in the middle of the retreat and we celebrated all day with meditation, a relevant lecture, decorating the shrine room, and an impromptu mime in the afternoon to the narration of relevant sections from Sir Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia*. The puja in the evening was one of the best that I have ever attended. The long and vigorous chanting during the making of personal offerings moved the whole retreat into a different dimension, and people seemed to feel and express genuinely spiritual emotions.

After Buddha Day the retreat seemed to undergo a change in atmosphere. The arrival of some sunshine added to the relaxed feeling of the retreat while, helped by the introduction of some silence, the meditation seemed to be beginning to 'bite'. On some occasions you could almost feel the hindrances as tangible presences in the shrine room, and the atmosphere seemed to be one of struggle. People shuffled, coughed and fidgeted as they tried to cope with negative emotions and everything else that Mara often begins to throw up at this stage in the proceedings to distract worthy meditators.

On other occasions the shrine room had that particular stillness and vibrancy only created by a roomful of people all deeply involved and absorbed in the meditation practice.

On reflection this retreat was quite special. Many people took dramatic steps forward, particularly with respect to throwing off the chains of restrictive Christian conditioning, and were able to see from a new perspective that we can grow as individuals, we can take responsibility for ourselves; we can stand as free human beings with, as Bhante says in one of the Brighton lectures which we played on the retreat, our 'fate in our own hands'.

Dhammadinna

Hilary Blackstone

Anne Murphy



# A Buddhist Conference in Paris



*Subhuti looks on, but M. le President keeps the joke to himself.*

The European Buddhist Union is the brain-child of a benign and well-intentioned Frenchman by the name of Paul Arnold: M. le Judge Paul Arnold, to be precise. He and a small organising committee of (just) one 'representative' Buddhist from each of the European countries, plus a few French sympathisers, and backed by a fairly impressive, if sometimes intriguing, list of patrons, convened a conference for European Buddhists this June, in Paris.

Back at the LBC our ears were already cocked in the direction of France, subsequent to our hearing of the representationalist mythology pervading the organising committee. So when the invitation to attend the conference arrived, three of us, Manjuvajra, Subhuti, and myself asked for, and received financial backing from the LBC for a long weekend in the city of boulevard cafes and rubber-wheeled tube trains.

'Let's get all the Buddhists together', someone must have said, 'get them to meet each other. Let's see if we can really hammer out what Buddhism is going to be like in Europe.' Well, something like that, I suppose. To be honest, it was hard to fathom quite what had been expected of the conference – other

than that it should bring us all together. For, to be sure, sitting at a desk, surrounded by headsets and microphones, in one of the ten majestic 'salons', in the mighty UNESCO building, in the fashionable 7th Arrondissement, it was hard not to make the assumption that we had been invited along to achieve something of a more substantial nature than mere friendly contact.

During the four days that the conference lasted, around 200 people attended some, if not all, of the plenary sessions. A strange kind of routine: rolls and coffee for breakfast with the tourists in a down market hotel near the Gare Du Nord, a ride on the metro, surrounded by workaday Parisians, to spend the day as part of a heterodox community of Bhikkhus, Anagarikas, Upasakas and Upasikas of all denominations, academics, and amateurs – of about 16 nationalities. (As well as Europeans, there were bhikkhus from Thailand, Tibet, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and elsewhere.)

The organisers had invited the submission of papers, and had then drawn up a rough and ready agenda, giving each day over to the broad and general discussion of a broad and general topic. Even to say

'broad and general' is misleading. Each talk bore so little thematic relation to those which came before and after it, that I would be misleading you even to suggest what those topics might indeed have been. Some talks were simple straightforward accounts of the work being done by a particular group or society. Others consisted of psychological, spiritual, sociological, or historical speculations as to the relevance of Buddhist teachings to Western consciousness. In one talk a professor outlined the political, economic and diplomatic manoeuvres essential to the proper establishment of a *sila sima*, without which the Sangha could not really arrive. A Zen Roshi denounced the majority of Buddhist teachers in the West as lacking the essential element of 'self realisation', without which, he claimed, no one should have the right to teach the Dharma. Many simply gave what can only be referred to as 'Dharma raps': well intentioned but woolly meanderings on Sunyata, inner peace and Western spiritual bankruptcy.

Nor was the pace exactly cracking. Facilities for simultaneous interpretation being prohibitively expensive, we had to do with retrospective translation. A twenty

minute talk, given in French, would then be translated, with painstaking attention to detail, first into English, and then into German. Questions and answers followed – again punctuated by halts for translation. A laborious and frustrating business, to be sure, but clearly indispensable. Incredibly, however, this procedure provoked an almost uninterrupted stream of hostility from some participants. The 'German edition' never quite attained to its secure place on the agenda. As the German speakers were in the minority there was a continuing debate as to whether their numbers justified the time that was being spent on them. Were we, I wondered, simply witnessing the emergence of some plain old nationalistic conditioning? In the end the Germans themselves took responsibility for the matter, letting us know whether they wanted a translation anyway – though on what basis they made their decisions I never asked any of them: I don't speak German.

Was it the all night journey, interrupted by changes of boat, train, and culture, by queues for customs clearance and money exchange, concluding with the spectacular shattering of my spectacles on a UNESCO washroom floor, that gave to the whole event its mildly delirious and dream-like quality? How is it that the event, so staid, so polite and regimented, as it most certainly was, whirls still in my mind like one of those dreams you have after too much cheese? Images well up ... An Austrian professor declaims, in a hyperbolic French that would have done fair justice to a Racinean tragedy, on the need for leadership in Western Buddhism, while the ever urbane M. le President tugs imploringly at his arm, his shoulder, his wrist, begging him to stop before the bhikkhus have to go without their noon-time repast. One day we are told that talks will have to be restricted to five minutes each, in order to make way for a 'really important' address. The big moment arrives (not before the speaker from the Manjusri Institute, among others, has suffered under the 5 minute guillotine) and onto the podium floats a Vietnamese professor, looking for all the world like a clone of Fu Manchu – complete with long tapering beard. He addresses us for *forty minutes* on a system of medicine he has developed based on the principles of Yin and Yang. To my horror the president himself plies this irrelevant man with question after question, even though the assembled Buddhists have had to suffer two hours of this Taoist clap-trap in three languages.

The first day ends with the presentation of a 300 word resolution which outlines various points on which we might like to vote our agreement. Although the text contains passages on which there is clearly some disagreement, and although some sentences are phrased in alternative ways ('We do/do not believe that Buddhism is



...') there seems to be a tremendous, irrational pressure coming from the high table, simply to get the thing voted through, *in toto*. All over the hall, lights are popping up on microphone stands as more and more people join the Babel of voices. Hands shoot up and down as 'votes' are cast in favour of suggestions, proposals and counter-resolutions that the chairman has not yet even heard. Eventually, the sorry affair is terminated by the arrival of six o'clock, their universal concurrence to postpone any further talk of resolutions until the final day, and the president's face displays an innocent delight in the fact that we have managed to agree at least on something.

It is to be hoped that, if they learned anything at all from the conference, the organisers may have realised that 'harmony' is not to be confused with bland agreement. Throughout the proceedings we were reminded continually that, as Buddhists, we had an almost sacred duty to meet in harmony, in a spirit of patient forbearance. From the way this was put to us, one gathered the impression that somewhere 'out there', 'they' were waiting, itching to rub their hands with delight at any symptom of our disarray. Any sign of disagreement during question times, any truly searching questions, any real dialogue, in fact, would soon have hands waving in the air in nervous trepidation. Once, even, the big guns were called in: a *one minute* session of meditation to quell a threatening storm. So why this tremendous fear of difference? Could it be that for some of the participants, the purpose of our gathering had been to confirm and strengthen our position as a new and significant group — among groups — in the Western religio-social arena? What a distorting, gutless, truly metta-less vision of the Sangha all this talk of 'harmony' seemed to convey!

For our part, Manjuvajra, Subhuti and I were, I have to report, a little more remiss than most in our loyalty to this code of harmony. Eagerly and energetically questioning speakers, arguing persistently against any attempt to pass resolutions of a 'representative' nature, taking issue without hesitation with those who seemed to be distorting the Dharma, we must have created quite an impact. Some no doubt found those three young Englishmen sitting in the middle of the front row just a little *de trop*, but an increasing number of those who were there warmed noticeably to our presence, and to the spirited manner in which we communicated, and I think it would be true to say that, on balance, we made a great many friends.

By the time Manjuvajra rose to give his talk, on the third day, the ground had been well prepared. Already the FWBC had received enthusiastic mention in a few other talks — in one instance being cited as a 'model' for European Buddhist

movements. The way in which we had been questioning other speakers had, moreover, done much to prepare people for our approach to the Dharma.

He began his talk by reminding the audience of the absolute centrality of Going for Refuge; the total commitment by a free individual of all his energies to the attainment of Enlightenment. How he applies that commitment, what precepts he observes, what lifestyle he follows have an important, but secondary place. A desire to import and embrace something of the merely superficial monastic formalism of the Eastern kind, that had been showing itself in some of the talks that we had heard, prompted Manjuvajra to make this point particularly strongly. He went on to outline the approach towards life and spiritual practice that is being pioneered in the FWBO. Describing our centres and classes, the single-sex communities, and the Right Livelihood co-operative projects, he demonstrated how these things added up to a New Society, an environment geared not only to introducing people to the Dharma, but which gave to those who want it the opportunity to commit themselves wholeheartedly to its practice.

The talk was warmly applauded, though lack of time unfortunately prevented its translation. Not everyone was so enthusiastic, however. Manjuvajra's remarks about the spiritually cramping effects of family life, and his mention of single-sex communities in particular, seemed to have been stiff medicine for some listeners; you could almost feel an icy chill of hostility hovering in the air as he spoke. And yet these same people had so loudly applauded somebody else's plea that the *Vinaya* should be observed as strictly in the West as it has been in the East. Now this seemed a little paradoxical. Could it be, then, that those who were most passionately calling for the introduction of a strictly traditional Bhikkhu Sangha were, in fact, those who most passionately wanted to remain laymen? It is hard not to come to that conclusion. Where there is no sharply defined Bhikkhu Sangha, there can be no sharply defined laity. It is as if the introduction of the distinction will let people off the hook, allowing them to be 'good Buddhists': giving dana, going to the Vihara occasionally, kowtowing to robes, but without feeling that they themselves have to change. That, after all can be left to the bhikkhus.

During the four days of the conference we talked to a great many people. Again and again we faced the difficulty in communicating that, while we were not bhikkhus, we were, nevertheless, not really *upasakas* in the normal sense of the term. We were full-timers, wholeheartedly involved in our spiritual practice and our Dharma work, but needing freedom from rigid monastic rules, and external trappings, in order best to remain so in a

Western context. We did, however, enjoy some very friendly contact with members of a new Order being established in France and Switzerland. Recognising the risks inherent in donning the bhikkhu's robe, they have chosen to take the anagarika ordination (though I suspect that they may not all find it easy to observe the precept relating to chastity). The Order was only a month old when we met. I wish them luck.

The conference's last day was marred by the reintroduction of those confounded resolutions. In their way they were innocuous enough: 'Buddhism is an age-old tradition, it is *not* a cult'. 'Buddhists are wholly against the practice of vivisection!' etc. etc. But the fact was that we had not gone to Paris to pass resolutions. We did not want to see ourselves as being some representative 'voice' of Western Buddhism. Well, some of us didn't. Of course there were those who did not agree, anyway, with some parts of the resolution itself. So for three hours the voices boomed, the hands shot up and down, some tempers became a little frayed, until the resolution was axed. To those whose minds reached out beyond the hall to the awaiting press reporters (not that I saw any of them), or, indeed, to the pages of history books, the harmless little communiqué to which we did eventually give our blessing, must have been something of a let down.

No. In Paris we did not hammer out the future of Western Buddhism.

We did not agree with each other on every issue. We did not form ourselves into a powerful and cohesive group ready to do battle with our opponents. But we did have a really stimulating evening with a young Swiss Jodo Shin Shu monk, in a Pizza house off the Boulevard St. Michelle. We did have several riotous sessions over lunch with some members of the Buddhist Society. We did enjoy some lively and valuable communication with the French anagarikas, in a cafe in sight of the Eiffel Tower. We exchanged literally hundreds of smiles if not hugs with Buddhists whose languages we were unable to speak.

As we left the conference building I found myself in a warm embrace with a portly, white-haired anagarika from Geneva. Throughout the conference he had sat at the end of the high table, silently beaming smiles of encouragement to us where we sat beneath him. From the very beginning it had been clear to us that here was a kindred spirit, someone who was not being fooled by the formality, the ambassadors, the professors, the 'harmony'. But we had never exchanged a single word: only looks. As we drew apart, I made to introduce myself, wanting to let him know how much I had appreciated his presence up there. 'You know,' he said, stopping me before I had even begun, 'we have done so much more with our eyes than we could ever have done with words.'

With a friendly wink he was gone.

Nagabodhi

## GLASTONBURY FAYRE



'Oranges', Peace and Pizzas, *et. Man.*

As I arrived at Glastonbury Fayre, I was immediately approached by a wandering eccentric, daubed with paint, and wearing a loincloth. Strangely, in his left hand he bore a red plastic bowl filled with water. I think I said hello. 'The blessings of

Avalon be with you,' he intoned, sprinkling me with a libation. 'Thank you ...' I replied, and wandered off to dry my spectacles.

This kind of thing, I suspect, only happens at Glastonbury, a place of magical pretensions, pregnant with



Arthurian romance and the spectre of the fabulous Holy Grail. Not to mention the flying saucers. Into this festive and fairy-tale atmosphere I swam, through crowds of New Age gypsies with their train of painted children, fat gangs of greasy bikers, self-conscious punks festooned with zips and buckles a la mode; the New Wave, the Old Wave, the Next Wave — anyone who was anyone was gaily caparisoned. There was music of course, some of it enjoyable, and mingling in the crowds were clowns and street theatres. It was often hard to tell who was acting and who was acting natural.

There were stalls and marquees of all sorts, offering Tarot readings, astrological forecasts, acupuncture, oriental massage, Save the Whales, or magic fudge. Tents and campfires spread across the valley for

miles, like some great army pitched before a battle. And chief among these tents, these stalls and marquees, standing strategically at the crest of a hill, was that place known as 'Oranges', also known as the great FWBO mobile kitchen.

They were doing tremendous business, dealing out slabs of pizza and wads of curry to an eager public.

The brilliant blue vajra banner billowed over the heads of perhaps a dozen Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, working energetically and with great cheerfulness in the hot sun.

But it wasn't only vegetarian meals we were serving. Next to the food tent, along two sides of a square, was hung the red and yellow logo of the FWBO, and with it an exhibition of photographs of our centres,

co-operatives, and retreats. In this Dharma corner of the great samsaric fair, I set up a modest bookstall, piled it high with copies of Bhante's books, and assumed a salesmanlike cross-legged position. Unfortunately, few customers were willing to buy, but many were intrigued, and wanted to know more about our movement and its activities. At least one has since come along to the London Buddhist Centre, and was clearly impressed. Several people asked whether we had a centre in the West country, in Bristol or in Bath — perhaps this would be a fruitful project for the future.

On the whole, the Fayre was a great success — at least to the extent that one could get out of it what one wanted to get out of it; I found no unpleasantness, not counting the more vicious type of

music, and plenty of fun. Despite the somewhat crazy views of some of the patrons, and the rather depressing neo-conservatism of the ageing hippies, the general mood was buoyant and happy. Around the 'Oranges' tent in particular, a very strong and positive atmosphere prevailed, evidenced by the fact that many people, having bought their meal, sat down and ate it on the spot, rather than take it back to their own tent, as happened elsewhere. Not only were we serving the best food, but our stall really was the brightest and most striking, and the most impressive out of all those I saw. The mobile kitchen is clearly making friends as well as money.

Nigel Seller

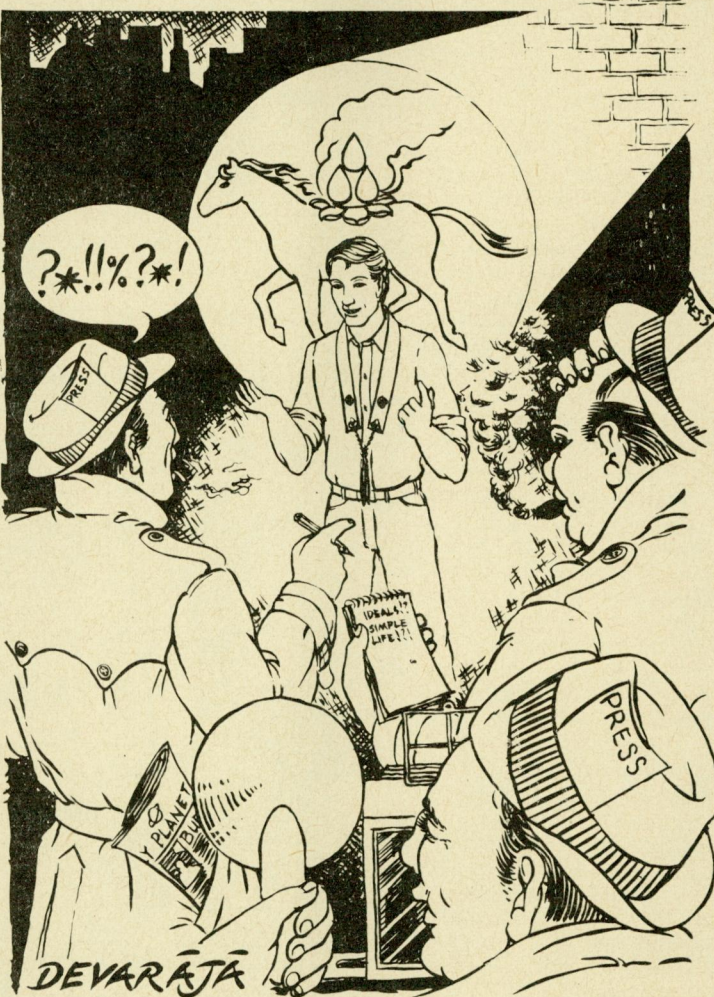
## FWBO and the Media

As the FWBO becomes more widespread, and better known, it is hardly surprising that the movement should begin to attract an increasing amount of interest from the media. The past few months seem, in fact, to have brought a fair sized eruption of 'FWBO coverage'.

A recent edition of the scholarly Christian journal *Concilium* — *Religion in the Seventies*, contained an article by the Ven. Sangharakshita. Entitled, 'Dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity', the article appeared in an issue devoted to the theme of Buddhism and Christianity. Bhante begins his essay with the point that dialogue has to be distinguished from discussion, debate, diplomacy, and of course, from monologue. He also insists that true dialogue is possible only between those who really live and practise their faith. Too often we hear of a dialogue being carried out by people whose interest in the religion that they 'represent' is merely academic, or political. Participants in dialogue must realise that they are creating a common language as they go along; there can be no resort to an already existing catalogue of religious terms.

Even a safe-seeming term like 'spiritual experience' may embrace a minefield of radically different experiences. Suggesting that the starting-point for real dialogue should be some modest, every-day aspect of the spiritual life, he concludes, 'If this is done, and if on both sides there is sufficient openness and sufficient awareness of their own limitations, then there may be some hope that a truly fruitful dialogue will begin'. Hopefully, we will be able to include some extracts from this article in future issues of the Newsletter.

Indeed, you could say that we have been beaten to the post, since



Bhante's article has already been serialised in *Der Kreis*, the Newsletter of the German Buddhist movement, the Arya Maitreya Mandala. We have already had some contact with this movement, who seem to be very interested in the work of the FWBO. In a recent edition of their Newsletter was an article by Lokamitra about the FWBO and its work.

Lokamitra is, of course, now in Pune, India, where among other things, he edits a magazine called *Buddhayaana*. Written in Marathi, the local dialect, *Buddhayaana* contains news reports, articles, and extracts from the Ven. Sangharakshita's lectures. It already has a circulation of over 2000 — clearly indicating the phenomenal growth of the movement out

there.

A recent edition of the Finnish magazine *Sokaren* contained an interview with Bhante about the FWBO. Conducted by Mr. J. O. Mallender, the interview ranged over many important topics, and gave a broad yet surprisingly deep picture of the 'Friends'. Replying to a comment that the FWBO does not seem to offer much in the way of 'goods' — methods, or techniques, Bhante said, 'The whole thing is a method'. But there is no method in a sense — if you think of a method as some sort of technique or trick to achieve something without yourself really changing.'

Of course, Bhante's essay, *Buddhism and Blasphemy*, published recently by Windhorse Publications, continues to attract a good deal of attention. Favourable reviews have appeared in *The Middle Way*, the *Freethinker*, and *The New Humanist*, while Kovida's review, in the last issue of the Newsletter, has itself stimulated quite a lot of correspondence. No doubt we are going to have to look quite fully at the whole issue of Christian conditioning again some day in this Newsletter.

Meanwhile, down under, in New Zealand, Purna and Dharmadhara were recently interviewed for 'Pacific Radio'. After a forty minute conversation, the 'lines' were opened for listeners to 'phone in with their own questions. I hear that the session went well. The BBC World Service has also transmitted a short feature on the London Buddhist Centre, consisting largely of interviews with the people who live and work there. But perhaps the most unlikely piece of media coverage yet received by the FWBO was a cover story in the magazine *Building Refurbishment*. Apparently they were extremely impressed by the



tasteful way in which we have converted an old fire station into a Buddhist community and public centre. The magazine's front cover showed the Centre in glorious colour, really looking its best.

The FWBO has also received mention in a few books. In his autobiography, *Both Sides of the Circle*, Christmas Humphreys describes the 'Friends' as 'the first substantial Buddhist organisation to be born beyond the orbit of the Buddhist Society'. He has, he says, given his full support to our Order, the members of which he sees as 'wearing the yellow robe internally'.

So far, two writers have devoted an entire chapter of their respective works to the FWBO. In his book, *Travels in Inner Space* (Victor Gollanz, 1977), John St John describes the role played by our movement in his 'exploration of encounter groups, meditation, and altered states of consciousness'.

Somewhere between his investigations of 'Psychosynthesis' and C. Maxwell Cade's 'laboratory methods of altering consciousness', he came along to Pundarika, the old centre in Archway; he is, in fact, still a frequent visitor at the LBC. At the end of his very absorbing and entertaining book he confesses: 'By nature as well as background I suspect that I am doomed to remain an ever-enquiring dilettante', thus displaying an honesty and humility all too rare in this field of reportage.

He does not claim to be an expert, offering definitive accounts of the various groups with which he has contact. He is content simply to record his observations, experiences, and his own — confessedly subjective — reactions to them.

He came along to our Centre because he wanted to learn meditation, and in his account he describes the two main practices that he was taught there, the mindfulness of breathing, and the *metta bhavana*. He goes on to give a fairly traditional account of the dhyana states, and then touches on insight as a further development, to be expected from regular practice. A short biography of the Ven. Sangharakshita is followed by an account of the way in which some of the more involved Order members, mitras and Friends live, the various disciplines they try to observe, culminating in a few words about the significance of becoming a mitra, and of Ordination itself. After a couple of biographical sketches, one of Lokamitra, and another of a 'typical' Friend, he concludes his chapter with an evocation of the Seven-Fold Puja.

This book was published only two years ago, but already it reads a little like history. At the time when John St John first came along to Pundarika most of the local communities were housed in 'squats' — unwanted buildings awaiting demolition or restoration. Many of the people he met would no doubt have been refugees from, if not veterans of, the 'hippy scene'. In those days, the difference between the

experiences afforded by LSD and meditation was a fairly recurrent discussion point for some Friends. Psychobabble — the idiom of fashionable psychotherapy with its talk of 'hang ups', 'ego trips', etc, was more in evidence then than it is, say, today at the LBC. But all the same, the picture of the 'Friends' to be found in these pages, is sympathetic, human, and certainly recognisable. I did feel that the place of insight in spiritual development was treated a little simplistically, to give one the impression that it is to be approached as a sort of 'advanced course' which follows after one has completed training on the nursery slopes of the dhyanas, but this is hardly surprising in a book so impregnated with the theme of 'experience' — even if not experience for its own sake. All in all, this chapter came as a very welcome 'first' for the 'Friends'.

Ian P. Oliver's book, *Buddhism in Britain* (Rifler and Co, 1979) is the first attempt that anyone has made to provide us with a history and up-to-date description of the Buddhist movement in Britain. Beginning with some background material on the work of the Pali Text Society, and the 'early pioneers', the book is then divided into chapters, each dealing with a particular style of Buddhism currently to be found here. There are chapters on the Buddhist Society, the various Theravada organisations, 'Tibet in Britain', Throssel Hole Priory, and The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order — 'a new concept in Buddhism'.

Mr. Oliver should be congratulated for his courage in attempting this venture. It is, perhaps not until one has read his book that one realises just how vast, diverse, and potentially confusing is the subject that he has chosen to treat, and no doubt the failings of this work, one or two of which need to be pointed out, arise directly out of this point. Mr Oliver attacks his subject with a relish and enthusiasm that has unfortunately induced him to over-reach his literary abilities. One is, for example irritated by the grammatical eccentricities that seem to abound. But more important are the book's structural problems. Mr Oliver seems determined to give us as much as he can: description, history, Dharma, reportage, but he lacks the grace of style with which to bring all these elements together in a truly satisfying way.

But I feel that the book's problem is not just one of style. Clearly the author has taken a good look at, and allowed himself to be thoroughly impressed by, the surface of things. But he seems to lack that element of personal *commitment* that might have given greater depth, and hence unity, to his vision. It is to Mr Oliver's credit that he takes no sides, shows no subjective preferences, but there are times when one almost wishes that he might. He comes across as a sort of 'innocent in Buddhaland', ever eager to be impressed and won



### R.D. Wilson Knight at Aryatara

*The distinguished Shakespearean scholar, R.D. Wilson Knight recently spent two days at Aryatara. Members of the Shakespeare study group — a regular feature of the Aryatara weekly programme — plus a few guests, were treated to a question and answer session which covered, in particular, the themes of Shakespeare and theatrical production.*

*The last evening of his stay was devoted to a lecture/recital, entitled: 'Shakespeare's Dramatic Challenge'. On a stage specially built in the shrine-room, the 8 year old professor, sometimes in full costume, enacted roles as diverse as those of Caliban, Hamlet, and Othello, to illustrate his comments on the shifting 'stature' of the dramatic hero.*

*The weekend was a considerable success, and rumour has it that Professor Wilson Knight is now thinking of writing a book on Shakespeare and Buddhism.'*

over, whether by the 'feel' of a certain shrine-room, or the succulence of a vegetarian meal, or by the fact that one group of people get up at a certain time in the morning, while another have all kinds of important people coming to visit them, and so on. But somewhere in all the detail, in all the painstaking research that has gone on, something has got lost. Why are all these groups and movements doing what they are doing? Certainly they are working hard to establish themselves, but why are they doing that? What does Buddhism have to offer Britain today? Certainly we are treated to snippets of Dharma, we do read parts of a speech made by the Dalai Lama on the subject, but what the book lacks is some *simple* unifying vision of what the Dharma is, and against which we might be able to assess the relevance and effectiveness of the different groups under scrutiny.

Perhaps this is why that aspect of our own movement which receives the most attention is our concern with Right Livelihood. Clearly Mr Oliver sees this, rather than any other single aspect of our approach to the Dharma, as being the most distinguishing feature of the FWBO. His chapter on the 'Friends' contains a short biography of the Ven. Sangharakshita and a history of the movement up until the time when he went off for a year's retreat, in 1973. Rightly attempting to convey something of the importance with which Going for Refuge, individual commitment to the spiritual ideal, is regarded in the Friends, and the consequent lack of 'spiritual distinction between the monk, in the

old-fashioned sense, and the layman as such', he talks a little about the way in which Order members apply their commitment. The rest of the chapter is devoted to a brief account of the history and present activities of each of our major centres, and a short section on the women's communities.

So far as it goes, the chapter offers a fairly accurate idea of what is going on in the FWBO. Certainly we are treated with the same enthusiasm and respect shown to the other movements. The emphasis on the business end of our ventures does convey a movement that is perhaps more 'practical' than 'spiritual'; it is we who receive accolades such as: 'Order members are observing strict (sic) Right Livelihood', as opposed to, 'To say more about its beauty, might detract from a phenomenon that surpasses words' (said of the Manjushri Institute).

Again, so far as it goes, this is a helpful little book, despite its inadequacies. The non-Buddhist might find himself put off by the plethora of superlatives, and by the uncritically congratulatory tone of the work, but those of us who are part of the British Buddhist movement might do worse than get to know something about our own growing 'local tradition'. And the FWBO? Well clearly the time is fast approaching when we shall need a book that really does communicate, in depth and detail, just what we really are. A certain Order member — who would probably prefer to remain nameless — has recently had it suggested to him that he start thinking about it...

Nagabodhi



# Adding Spirit to Mind & Body

To enter Olympia when the Festival for Mind-Body-Spirit is in full swing must be quite an overpowering experience for someone who does not know what to expect. On the seventh day of the festival I felt it necessary to take some fresh air, in order to clear my head before taking a meditation session in one of the 'workshops', and so went outside for a walk. Oddly enough I found the roar of the traffic quite reassuring after the atmosphere of the festival. It may have been harsh and abrasive, but at least it felt real: at least it had a sense of direction: the occupants of each vehicle presumably knew where they were going, and that barring accidents, they were going to get there: there was a purpose in their activity no matter how small, insignificant or mundane it might be. I wandered through the streets of West Kensington for a while enjoying the comparative peace before returning to the arena. As I re-entered Olympia I received quite a shock. I had been used to arriving at about 10.30 in the morning, before the public were allowed in, and remaining there until it was time to leave in the evening. I had never considered the impact that the festival must have on those stepping over its threshold in the middle of the day. Working in its midst I had not noticed the intense pitch that was generated as the beast stirred to life. Now, as I walked through the doors, it was like walking into the psychic equivalent of a nuclear explosion. Immediately I was pounded by a barrage of stimulus: the constant, repetitive 'music' of the 'Rainbow Dome'; the perpetual blaring audiovisual equipment coming from countless directions; the sound of amplified music resonating from the demonstration area; 'Can I have your attention please...' - seemingly endless announcements over the PA system mercilessly cutting across the general concatenation and, underneath it all, monotonously, was the continuous drone of human voices echoing everywhere. The initial impression was one of noise and confusion. People were thoroughly stirred up, but to no purpose. You could almost see the adrenalin wreaking havoc in their veins as they were consumed in a maze of seductive distractions. With their minds suffering from psychic fall-out, no wonder so many looked drained by the time they left. Let's hope their body and 'spirit' remained intact. This was, after all, the 'Festival for Mind-Body-Spirit', previously known as the 'Festival for

Mind and Body'. The addition of the 'spirit' was provided by the generous pen strokes of Sir George Trevelyan.

For the second year running the FWBO joined approximately 170 exhibitors at the festival. Our stand, which was twice the size of the one we occupied last year, featured the London Buddhist Centre and was well located. Each morning at 9.30 a van load of Order members and mitras would leave Bethnal Green for Olympia, to work on the stand, not to return until about 10.30 in the evening. A core team of about four or five Order members were present for most of the festival.

As well as the 170 stands on the floor of the hall and distributed along the balcony there was a demonstration area, a lecture theatre, the 'Sanctuary' and two 'workshops' all with a continuous programme of events. On the opening Saturday we had the use of the 'Sanctuary' for a meditation session which was conducted by Nagabodhi. The focal point of the 'Sanctuary' was an altar on which was placed a picture of Christ, a picture of Krishna, an ankha, a chalice and an image of the Buddha. Chairs were organised in a semi-circle radiating out from the altar with a large open space, which was clearly normally used as a dance floor, in the middle. There was no natural light in the room which was sombre and gloomy. Nagabodhi and I surveyed the scene before us. What on earth could we do about that altar? Fortunately there was a large projector screen standing behind it purpose built for our requirements, and so just before our session began we placed it in front of the altar. Although we were probably in the quietest room in the whole complex Nagabodhi almost had to shout in order to be heard while introducing the mindfulness of breathing to the 60 people who turned up.

We were also allocated the use of the 'workshops' for three 90 minute periods during the course of the festival. On each of these occasions between a dozen and 20 people crammed into a tiny room at the front of the building for a meditation session. Two of the sessions were taken by Subhuti and one by myself. Once more we found ourselves combatting noise, though on this occasion it was not that which was generated by the Festival, but the noise of the traffic in Hammersmith Road. In spite of this handicap, however, at least some of those who came along responded positively.

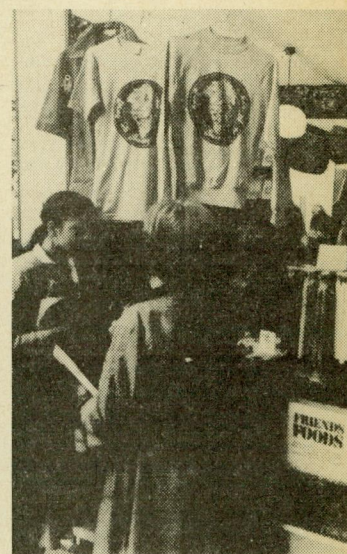
Our contribution to the activities

taking place on the demonstration area consisted of two one-hour sessions of communication exercises. The first session was conducted by Subhuti and about 20 Order members and mitras took part with members of the public. However, wherever two non-Friends were sitting together the exercises did not seem to work and the audience that gathered round was clearly puzzled as to what was going on. For the second session, therefore, which was conducted by Nagabodhi, Subhuti and myself gave an ongoing demonstration with the use of the microphone. To add a little humour, and to make more of a spectacle of the event, we also demonstrated a number of common

and our attachment to our own personalities.' With so many God salesmen present, ranging from the Krishna Consciousness movement to the Roman Catholic church in cunning disguise, it was clearly necessary to make our position on the myth of God quite clear. Some people were quite shocked. One elderly man in particular insisted that it could not be the Buddha's teaching because he knew a number of Buddhists and they believed in God. Some of the Krishna devotees made a deliberate point each time they walked past of displaying their contempt and made sneering comments. Others responded more positively either by copying the words down or simply



Giving the Dharma . . .



. . . But selling the Tee-shirts.

faults, while Nagabodhi gave a commentary. Although this helped to gain momentarily the interest of the onlookers it seems clear that communication is not a spectator sport.

While these events helped to increase the strength of our presence at the festival the main impact was of course provided by our exhibition stand. This consisted of a shop, an information desk and an area where people could sit down and pursue discussion. Each day, scattered about the stand, there would be anywhere between eight and sixteen Order members and mitras engaging the public. During the course of the festival 20,000 leaflets were handed out and the shop turned over almost £2,000. Of the various items we had for sale the plaster cast human skulls manufactured in Norwich by Aloka provoked most comment. It seemed that in at least this one item we had cornered the market.

One of the most comment-worthy features of the FWBO stand was a panel which had the following words inscribed upon it: 'Belief in God is a hindrance to psychological and spiritual development. Why? The Buddha taught that belief in a personal God and an immortal soul were rationalizations of desires, of our craving for love and protection,

expressing their relief that the festival was not entirely about God in one thin disguise or another.

For all its faults and undesirable features the festival does at least afford a unique opportunity for contacting a large number of people in a very direct way. 100,000 visitors passed through the turnstiles this year. Enquirers at the stand ranged from the seriously interested, to the curious, to the crankish. 'How many Buddhist monks are there in this country?', I was eagerly asked on one occasion by a young man in search of a robe. I passed him on to the Manjushri Institute as I thought they might be more familiar with the statistics. Then there was the Christian nun who wanted to buy a cassette of Bhante's lecture *The Meaning of Spiritual Community*. However, most of the people who we talked to were approached directly by Order members distributing leaflets. But, of course, not everybody wanted one - 'No thanks, I've got Jesus.' 'Jesus is the answer', proclaims her badge. Ah yes, but what is the question?

'Say, which way is it to Crank's Restaurant?' The abrasive nasal drawl of an American female. I don't think they're here this year', I reply. 'I think they are. I guess they're upstairs.' Turning to her husband, 'Come on let's go upstairs'. Her ear-



battered husband sullenly asks 'What do you wanna go upstairs for? The cranks are all down here.' A grin creeps across my face. 'Don't you think so?', he asks, acknowledging an ally in me. 'I sure do!' To tell the truth the cranks were everywhere — not just downstairs, but upstairs too: on the stands and wandering around them. A festival of cranks, a festival for cranks with the Big Crank in the sky

fruits of his labour have been communicated to us via the English medium Clifford G. Enticknap in the form of what has been acclaimed by the Foundation as Handel's 'second Messiah'. The title of the work is *Beyond the Veil*, but do not be misled. Anyone expecting a musical romp through the harem will be bitterly disappointed. The piece troubles itself over some of the most pressing spiritual issues of our time.

people to be more open, trusting and communicative. But once the party was over and they slouched back to their stand, usually in couples, they did not seem particularly interested in communicating with anyone.

Another group exhibiting its spiritual wares was the rather sinister Emin Foundation. They had the use of the demonstration area for their choir and their theatre group. The Emin Theatre were described

its execution. The dances performed by the women seemed to be based on the myth of female softness and mysteriousness. The whole performance was weak, amateurish, mechanical, alienated and degrading.

According to a representative of the Emin, whom I met, there are four or five 'energy bands' and the performance I had witnessed sought to explore and express the 'red band', which consists of the forces of aggression; it is militaristic and machine-like. I commented that the effect on the performers seemed to make them harsh, rigid and zombie-like. He agreed, but explained that that is the nature of 'red band' energy. He could see no harm in exploring the 'red band', but explained that the other 'bands' should be explored as well. What happens to the performers? Apparently they surrender themselves to a higher power: they enter higher states of consciousness. This was the view of at least one member of the Emin Faculty, but it is not my own.

It was interesting to note the different approaches employed by the various exhibitors operating from their stands. Some offered on-the-spot talks — the Emin were particularly successful in this; others relied heavily on audio-visual equipment to draw people into their stand, but the majority seemed simply to sit on their stand and wait for people to come to them. This was the case with 'Prosveta' who occupied a stand directly opposite our own. Representatives of 'Prosveta' sat round a circular table, around which were distributed five or six chairs, with, for the most of the time, nobody to talk to. Placed in the middle of the table was a photograph of Master Omraam Mikhael Aivanhov — an elderly man with long white hair and an even longer white beard — his very appearance would almost be enough to seduce you into thinking he must be a guru. How different from the approach we adopted! I couldn't help thinking that they must have thought our rather direct approach grossly unspiritual.

As must be evident it is very difficult to say much that is positive about the festival. Most of the exhibitors were utterly insipid or just downright crankish, although there were exceptions. Unfortunately the exceptions were very few and far between. There were excellent demonstrations of folk dancing, Tai Chi Chuan, Frisbee and the martial arts. Perhaps that's as much as one can say in favour of the event.

Mercifully, this year the festival organisers did not clutter the official catalogue with a host of articles expressing the 'oneness' of everything. Perhaps they felt that it was no longer necessary and that the fact that so many groups had come together under one roof was a living testimony to the truth of the 'New Age' and their universalist philosophy. Yet it doesn't take a very perceptive eye to realise that a group like the Emin Foundation has



Communication exercises — seen from the grandstand.

as the ultimate object of veneration. If you went to stand E5 you could hear all about 'The World Teacher' who 'is now emerging into public work' and there you would see a group mostly of old ladies, sitting enwrapped in some kind of 'spiritual' state as they listen to a recorded message from 'The Christ'. Apparently 'The Christ' has been with us since July 1977. His faltering tremolo voice and authoritarian tone speaks in a riddle of images, which, no doubt, are full of meaning for the initiated. He is, of course, *Maitreya* the Christ. Poor fools! If only they knew! The only real way to salvation is the constant repetition of the Hare Krishna mantra...

One of the unique opportunities offered by this year's festival — and surely the organisers must have been proud to pull off such a scoop — was the chance to hear for the very first time in public a recorded excerpt of the *latest* oratorio by that great master of Baroque music, George Friederich Handel. You may have been under the mistaken impression, as I was, that Handel has been dead for the past 200 years or so, but apparently this is only partially true. He is, according to 'The Handelian Foundation', very much alive in spirit, or, rather, in the 'spirit world' where he is composing away as merrily as ever. What is more, the most recent

In an attempt to assess the possible impact of the new work, the Foundation, in one of its publicity handouts, speculates, 'Will it help to prove that interplanetary parliament is situated on Saturn, and that it is a natural law that the flying saucers really do exist and that Jesus and Buddah (sic) were from Venus, and that the star of Bethlehem was a wonderful interplanetary space-craft manipulating the higher laws of Karma so the incarnation of Jesus could take place on the material vibration of our own planet Terra (Earth)?'

In many ways the demonstration area was the main focus of the festival. There was always something going on there and you did not have to pay anything extra to watch. The demonstrations presented included yoga, dance, Tai Chi Chuan, music, theatre and chanting. Most of the demonstrations were given by festival exhibitors. For instance, there was a demonstration, by the Kalptaru Rajneesh Meditation Centre, of 'opening-up'. Amongst other techniques demonstrated in this session included something remarkably similar to ring-a-ring-a-roses. Rajneesh and his followers seem to have achieved great success in reducing the spiritual life to a series of party games. Presumably the purpose of the 'opening-up' exercises was to help

as, 'a skilled and versatile group of many musicians, dancers and actors expressing the Foundation's research into the esoteric arts through sacred dancing and drama. Before their performance on the Thursday evening three 'jesters' wandered about the festival rather self-consciously and unsuccessfully trying to generate comedy. As soon as the 'Cedar Dance Theatre' had concluded their performance the Emin took the floor, and, after much testing of mikes and drums the performance began. The troupe consisted of about 20 or 30 men and women. The men were dressed entirely in black and the women in green. All the men had close-cropped hair and wore a uniformly harsh expression on their dead faces. They looked like a group of humanoid automatons as they beat their drums with much aggression and little skill. The performance consisted of a number of dances interspersed with pseudo-mystical cant — a sort of esoteric commentary on the action. The performers were grimly controlled by the director whose arm gestures expressed the subtlety and delicacy of an irritable policeman on points duty. One of the dances performed by the men was a variation on the goosetstep, but which lacked the fluidity and control that the Nazis were able to achieve in



very little, if anything, in common with, for example, the Rajneesh movement. Their values are utterly different. All that they have in common is that they are both groups. They offer group membership to those who are willing to conform to their particular group norms. In the case of Rajneesh, all that seems to be expected of you is that you should wear orange clothes and go gaga over 'Bhagwan'. In the case of the Emin, 'there is no requirement placed upon those who would wish to join beyond the acceptance to up-

hold the standards of decency and common sense.' Significantly *all* the male members of the Emin Foundation present at the festival wore a suit and tie, just as the 'sanyassins' *all* wore orange and tended to be as slovenly in their appearance as the Emin were smart in theirs. This is the main thing that the festival has to offer: the possibility of joining a group in which you can lose your identity and thereby convince yourself that you have gained one. But all that is gained is a group identity. Most people do not want to

identify simply with themselves. That is far too frightening a prospect. Such was the 1979 Festival for Mind-Body-Spirit. The question which inevitably raises itself is, is it possible amidst such confusion to present the FWBO, with any degree of clarity, as a genuine and workable alternative not only to the world outside, but to the madness of the Festival? Obviously it is not easy. The extent to which we were successful this year is difficult to assess. If we assess it in terms of the number of people who subsequently

turn up at centres as a result of our presence at the festival then the result is not very impressive, even though we clearly achieved a greater impact and success in this respect than in the previous year. If however, we gauge our success in terms of simply getting the FWBO more widely known, in a general sense, then to some extent we have achieved this, but perhaps it is questionable whether the festival is the most effective or desirable medium.

Devamitra

## UK Centre News

Readers of the Newsletter may have noticed that the amount of material appearing in each successive issue continues to increase. Not only are we finding more and more to relate on the subject matter of each issue, but also there is simply more news to report as the movement expands, especially in the East. In order to provide a rather more global perspective, then, and at the same time to streamline a little the style of these pages, an experi-

mental change is here introduced. News from our centres and branches in Britain, instead of being presented as a series of separate reports, is summarised below from the letters of our contributors. However, do not fear that the individual flavour of the various FWBO communities is thereby in danger of being submerged. On the contrary, we will be featuring in greater depth each of them in turn, beginning this issue with Aryatara (q.v.).

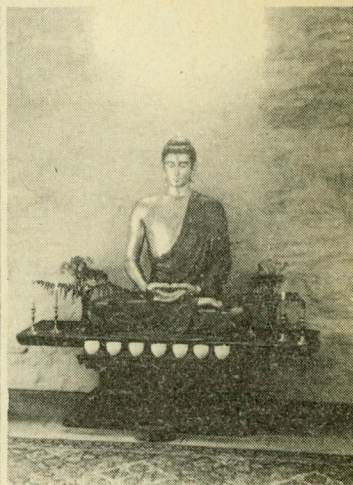
has opened a bulk store in Globe Road, while 'Friends Trading' has moved into the sleek and brightly-painted premises opposite. A vegetarian cafe/restaurant has been opened next door to the centre itself. This enterprising move will serve the functions of feeding the workers from the LBC's co-operative businesses, supplying a meeting-place for the FWBO and the public, and providing right livelihood for several Friends. It is already becoming known as a favourite haunt of Buddhists and other radicals.

Brighton Buddhist Centre have succeeded in purchasing 18/19 George Street, the premises of Windhorse Bookshop, which previously were only rented, and which used to be the site of the centre itself, while Vajrasana have sold the spacious Brunsfield flat for a good price, and have moved to a simple rented basement flat elsewhere in Edinburgh.

Heruka have made formal application for the change of use of the premises at 329 Sauchiehall Street. This has to be accepted by the powers that be before the building can be put to use as the new FWBO Glasgow centre. The site would be a considerable prize, being in the centre of such an energetic city.

Gdrhakuta, too, has moved, into a newly bought house in Withington, in a tree-lined yet central part of Manchester. The new house contains eight rooms and a basement; it is hoped that this increased space will allow for a larger community above a public centre. At present six Order members are living there, a powerful addition to the previous community.

Work is progressing also at Tyn-y-ddol in Wales, where, as readers of the last Newsletter are aware, the first FWBO meditation centre is being created. The building community have established workshops and living space. One barn has been converted into a dormitory, sleeping eight, so that the work team can expand; another barn is now the shrine-room and heart of the centre, brightly-lit, spacious and simply decorated, providing the ideal environment for meditation. The other barns are being transformed into guest accommodation, but building permission is needed before altera-

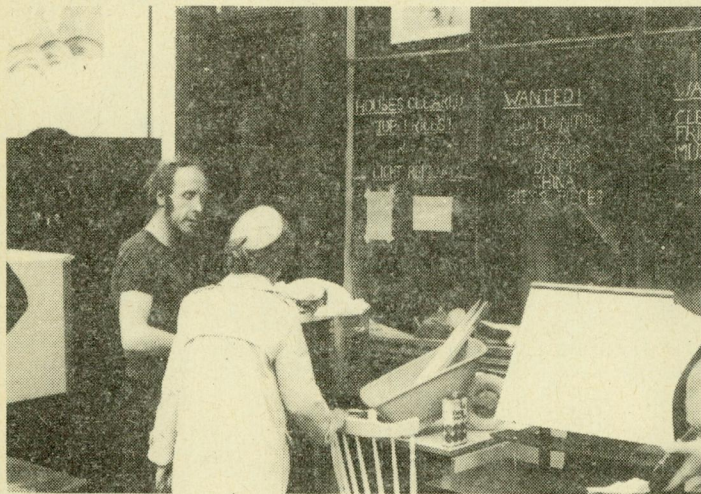


The shrine at Tyn-y-ddol.

tions can be made to the house itself. If sufficient volunteers can be found, and if the £8,000 required can be obtained, Tyn-y-ddol could be completed and ready to open up as a centre by the end of the year.

Yet the FWBO centres and branches do not consist merely of a number of buildings in various states of renovation, but of the individuals who live and work there. The activities of the movement are necessarily most patently expressed through our businesses, shops, restaurants, etc, but it is worth stressing the fact that these enterprises stem from the spiritual vision which motivates and inspires all those involved. Whether our businesses succeed or fail, and in whatever buildings available, our primary concern is the practice and study of the Dharma. At our various centres, study groups and seminars are regularly held to promote and deepen our understanding of the doctrine and scriptures of the Buddhist tradition. Classes are currently being held on the *Bodhicaryavatara*, the *Mangala Sutta*, Aspects of Buddhist Psychology, the Wheel of Life, and Practical Buddhism. As ever, courses are held in meditation, and tapes are played and discussed of Bhante's lectures. Those attending the LBC were particularly fortunate to participate recently in two question and answer sessions given by Bhante himself, at which his apt and lucid answers inspired both joy and respect among those present.

When inspiration and vision arise in sufficient degree, there is I sup-



Duncan makes a deal at 'Friends Trading'.

Perhaps the most obvious sort of 'news' concerns that most visible sign of energy bringing about change, the renovating or building of new premises from which to spread the Dharma. Since the last Newsletter no fewer than three of our British centres have changed their address, two others are hoping soon to move, and a further three are expanding or improving their current properties.

The West London Centre has moved to Marylebone, a rather more lively and even affluent part of town, notable for its railway station and the

London Planetarium. Of the building in question, however, only half is available for the use of Ratnadvipa members, so this move is expected to be a temporary one. Amaravati also are looking for a place in the area; recently the members of the women's community have been attending and assisting at classes and activities at West London. It will be interesting to see what are the results of this contact. Meanwhile in Bethnal Green, the London Buddhist Centre is demonstrably transforming the surrounding environment: 'Friends Foods', the wholefood shop,



pose only one way we can respond, and that is by expressing our own commitment to what has inspired us. Four mitras have recently made that expression in public and private ordinations at a retreat at Padmaloka. Peter Minter from Vajradhatu, and Dave Sampson, Vaughan Baguley, and Andy Skilton from Aryatara, have all become members of the Western Buddhist Order. They are now respectively to be known as Vajramati, Viramati, Dhammamati, and Sthiramati. Since 'mati' means 'mind', or 'attitude', these names can be translated as 'Diamond-mind', 'Energy-mind', 'Mind of truth', and 'Balanced mind'. May each live up to his new name.



*Purification for Vajramati.*

Despite local financial difficulties, our co-operatives continue to expand in size and in the range of their activities. Two fields where our right livelihood projects are most popular are the foods business and the publishing business. There is news on both these fronts.

Amaravati have just begun a vegetarian catering business, called 'Bananas'. This enables them to use the slogan, 'Have you gone Bananas?', which in terms of advertising is probably an invaluable asset. The Norwich mobile kitchen, on the other hand, known as 'Oranges', have never been heard to use a similar selling device. However, their hard work over the summer has certainly borne fruits (sic). With a core of six dedicated cooks, and up to ten irregular volunteers, they have been working at various fairs and festivals to raise £2,500 for FWBO Pune (see Glastonbury report), and at the same time to experience a different sort of community.

Up to now, the FWBO has had its own bookshops, its own printing presses, its own photographers, writers, editors, proofreaders, illustrators and designers — in short persons skilled in all the various functions necessary for the production and dissemination of our publications, except one. With the inception of Amaravati's new typesetting business, that gap has been filled. Initially, the business will be operating from Bethnal Green, home of Windhorse Publications, with a number of persons working a day or two each per week. It is thought that no-one can be reasonably expected to bear more typing

than that without respite.

At the same time, Sukhavati's new and bigger printing press means that Windhorse Press are now able to do more varied and complex work, while Heruka have also invested in their own offset litho machine, as well as a silk-screen table. Glasgow Print Studio can no longer contain Heruka's operation, so that the four full-time printers involved must find alternative premises elsewhere in the city.

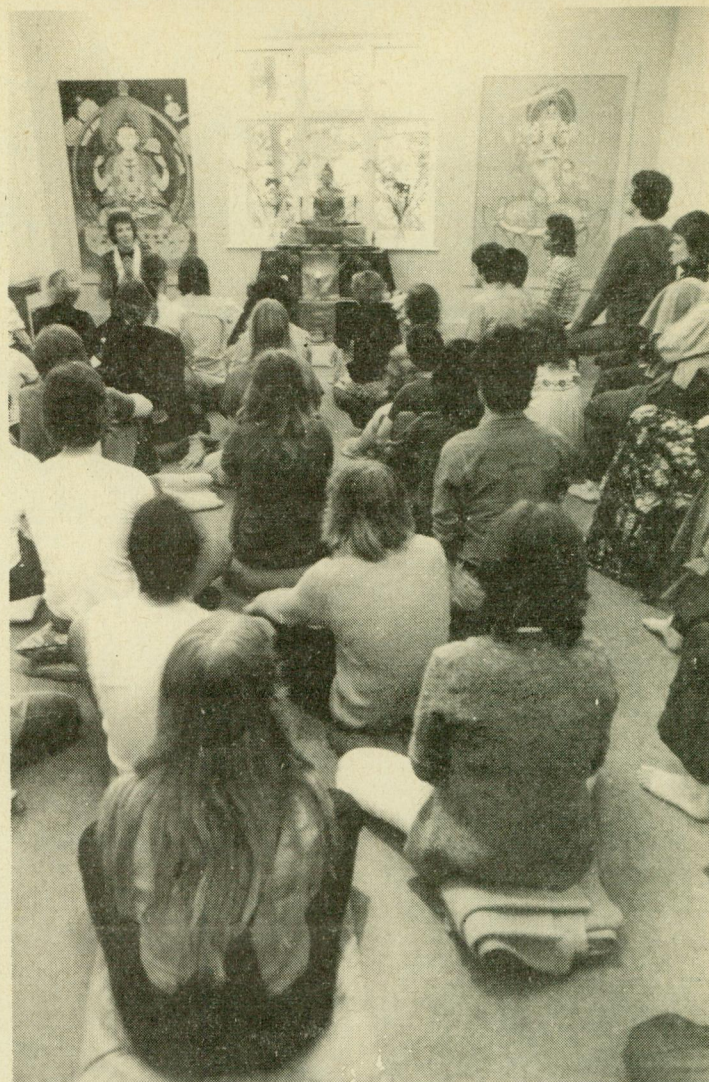
As above, so below; just as 'Friends Gardening' has proved successful north of the border, now 'Bel Air Gardening', another new FWBO venture, is entering the growing market in Brighton, providing a further avenue for the living of right livelihood there. Windhorse Bookshop and Sunrise Restaurant, FWBO Brighton's other businesses, are also thriving.

Another famous and perennial aspect of our centres and branches is the more or less ingenious efforts they make at raising funds for current and future projects. At the moment, funds are urgently needed to complete the building of Tyn-y-ddol, to support Lokamitra's untiring work in India, to purchase a retreat centre for the LBC, to sponsor the visit of Indian Order members to the 1980 FWBO convention, and of course to finance the work of Windhorse Publications, especially in producing the new edition of Ven. Sangharakshita's *Survey of Buddhism*. To these various ends, sponsored walks, mountain-climbs, and even hitchhikes have been organised. FWBO Brighton have held a poetry and music recital, and the Friends have been present in strength at a number of 'Festivals' — notably the 'Festival of Mind, Body, and Spirit' at Olympia, in London, an event which is described by Devamitra elsewhere. The presence at such festivals of a number of cranks fortunately does not preclude the FWBO from making its own positive impact, nor from reaping the appropriate benefits, either in terms of contacts made or monies raised.

It may seem at times as though the financial needs of the movement will stretch our ability to earn beyond its limits, but it is heartening to see how much committed individuals have achieved, and aspire to achieve in the future. With the emergence of each new project, our vision of the scope and possibilities for the expression of the Dharma increases, as does our perception of our own individual capacities to realise this vision. A general view of the present situation throughout this country at present provides a picture of the energetic expansion of a movement meeting and overcoming ever greater tasks. The Friends here in London are especially looking forward to a further injection of inspiration when Bhante gives his forth-coming lecture series on the *Vimalakirti Nirdesa Sutra*.

Nigel Seller

# The Rise and Rise of ARYATARA



*A few years ago this was just a dream.*

If you're not middle-class, middle-aged, or middle-minded, then you probably wouldn't think of staying very long in the suburban area of Purley.

It lies just outside of London proper, on the way to the South-coast town of Brighton, a hinterland of urban sprawl and office blocks. It is where aging ladies in sharp tweed suits, with lacquered grey heads and snappy poodles stroll the afternoon streets; where one buys a semi-detached house, has a sprinkler valve to water the lawn, and enjoys the bar-room facilities of the local Conservative club. On initial impression, Purley looks 'nice', 'comfortable', and rather bloodless.

— But wait. What's this? An advert, bright, colourful, boldly designed, fly-posted on a wall, announces classes in meditation at 'Aryatara' in Plough Lane. It doesn't show a white-robed, sickly-smiling foreign gentleman, just a man sitting quietly, his legs folded, calm-looking. Intrigued, some of

the locals take a chance and turn up on Wednesday at 7.30 p.m., arriving sometimes at the door of the Centre looking as they might when reporting to a hospital for a serious operation. They are greeted by young men and women who seem to radiate a friendliness, a positivity that soon makes them feel as if that operation will no longer be necessary. Thus they make their first contact with FWBO Surrey, at Aryatara.

The building, known since 1974 as Aryatara, is a three-story detached house, set in a moderate sized garden. It was first leased to the FWBO under the name of Sarum House in 1968. The original plan for the place was to create a mixed community consisting, for the most part, of Buddhists — with different approaches to the practice of the Dharma. Some members were followers of Zen, others of the Theravada, and yet others of the Tibetan tradition. This farrago inevitably led to friction; at one point shrines would be dismantled and



rebuilt several times a day so that different people could perform their particular pujas. Eventually Upasaka Chanda, a taxi driver from East London, and one of the founder members of the community, took a firm hand in the matter, asking some people to leave. Sarum House now settled down to become the first established community within the FWBO.

During the next few years nothing much happened. Life at Sarum House ambled along in a rather sedentary fashion; people came and went — occasionally the worse for wear and tear. The house gained a bit of reputation for being a sleepy backwater: pleasant but passive. But the mid-Seventies saw a few ripples of change beginning to blow across the calm, if not quite stagnant pond. As the FWBO gathered momentum in other areas, notably in London, Brighton, and Glasgow, Aryatara, as it was now called, began also to awaken. Classes were held, and a few mitras even began to emerge.

At this point Nagabodhi arrived upon the scene. He had been working in Archway on FWBO Publications, and leading some classes at Pundarika. One of the first things that he did on arriving and getting the feel of Aryatara was to look up the lease, to see how much notice the landlord would require should we wish to close the place down! Classes were still fairly empty, with just one or two elderly people coming along once a week. But after some reflection he decided that the place could be turned into a real centre, and so he asked Padmaraja to come and join him in the venture. They knew each other well, having worked together before in the BBC film-cutting rooms. Padmaraja had already lived at Aryatara, leaving about a year and a half previously to work as Convenor of Mitras, and editor of Mitrata, in Archway. Later, Nagabodhi also asked Jyotipala to come up from Brighton and later still Vessantara moved in, also from Brighton. These four became the firm nucleus of the Aryatara team. The initial task was to build up the classes, to make Aryatara into a living public centre, and after a while things did begin to move, with attendances for the beginners' classes and the regulars' evening moving into double figures.

It was now possible to organise sponsored walks and jumble sales, partly to bring people into more dynamic contact with each other, and partly to raise funds to keep the Centre going. In the country at large, inflation was beginning to have a very noticeable effect on prices. Until that point, most of the community members were dependent on the dole, or social security payments for their income, and this was having an adverse effect on things, being an invitation to complacency, not to mention sloth and torpor. The old idea that work was in some way 'unspiritual' still

pervaded people's consciousness; the Windhorse Press that, until around that time, had been housed in the garage, was seen by many community members as an unwelcome distraction to the somewhat nebulous ideal of 'community life' to which they were attached. But this kind of thinking was fast be-



Tea-break at a Beginners' Class.

coming a threat to the very existence of the community, at the very moment when its potential was being recognised.

Around this time, then, various Right Livelihood projects were considered. Some community members took on gardening jobs, a little

.....  
It was decided to buy in large stocks of toothpaste, shampoo, soap, etc....  
Steve has taken on more gardening work and has signed off the dole.

Committee minutes: 9.6.77

.....  
later on a van was bought, and a light removals business started. Jyotipala, a painter by trade, initiated a painting and decorating business. Padmaraja took on a full-time contract in a film-cutting room; a new commitment to the spiritual community was dawning, and with it a new economic basis the common purse. All money earned was paid into the common account, from which all bills were paid. Community members received £5.00 per week pocket money, and had a little put aside for them, to pay for retreats. This way, they gradually began to acquire capital for expansion into new and more substantial areas of business. Steve Pedder (now Sumana) who had seen what community groups were doing to support themselves in America, added enthusiasm to the notion of starting a wholefood shop and vegetarian cafe in Croydon. The search and negotiation for property lasted about a year. Although the wait was frustrating, it did allow time for everyone involved with the Centre to assimilate and integrate the ideas of work and

Right Livelihood fully into their vision of spiritual life.

This was a time of transformation. It seemed almost magical. There was verve in the air. The more energy that went into the work and into the Centre, the more people were attracted. Classes got better each week. Attendances

at the beginners' class rose from 15, to 20, to 25... When the lease on the two shops in St Michael's Road, Croydon, was finally signed, sealed and delivered, and work began to convert them for use, the energy release was explosive. In bitterly cold weather one mitra worked outdoors on the tiles and gutters from 8 a.m. until 6 p.m., non-stop for twenty-two days! With no extra publicity going out, a startled community would find itself welcoming 40 then 50 people to the beginners' meditation class each week.

There had always been a wide cross-section of people attending the classes, but with the attention given to the newcomers by Nagabodhi and Padmaraja, fresh sources of energy were being tapped. Beneath the bourgeois surface of Purley was being discovered

.....  
Nagabodhi and Vessantara have had a most successful interview with the Bank Manager, who is prepared to loan us at least £5,000.... Steve has seen Mr Hatfield from the Council. He is convinced that we can do Saint Michaels Road, but his superiors still need to be convinced.

Committee minutes: 7.11.77

The St Michaels Road shops are launched. We signed the lease last Friday, and began work at once.... Jory was congratulated for his work in providing light and heat on the day we moved in. Jory, Steve, and Jyotipala are now living there.

Committee minutes: 9.2.78

.....  
a fountain of youth. Many young people were looking for something

to put their energy into, something which would allow them to move from the narrow horizons of their families, and the society in which they found themselves, and which could give them instead an ideal — both practical and personal, through which to evolve as creative individuals, taking responsibility for their own lives. All the hard work, the trials and tribulations were beginning to pay off. People who were attracted by the energy of the work-site would go along to classes, while people who started off in the classes would go and help out with the building work. A positive healthy 'group' was forming.

All this was taking place under the watchful eye of the Order chapter, but it would be quite wrong to think there was an Order 'up there'

.....  
The Co-op has more or less reached saturation point as a means whereby beginners can become involved; it is a training situation which is being upgraded all the time, becoming more professional: working for the Dharma, and the arising of the Bodhicitta. Beginners need a situation which does not overburden their commitment. To this end we are going to reintroduce Jumble sales and Bazaars. Apart from raising money, and being really enjoyable, they are an excellent situation for enabling people to get to know each other, before moving on to the regulars' class, and can accommodate all levels of commitment.

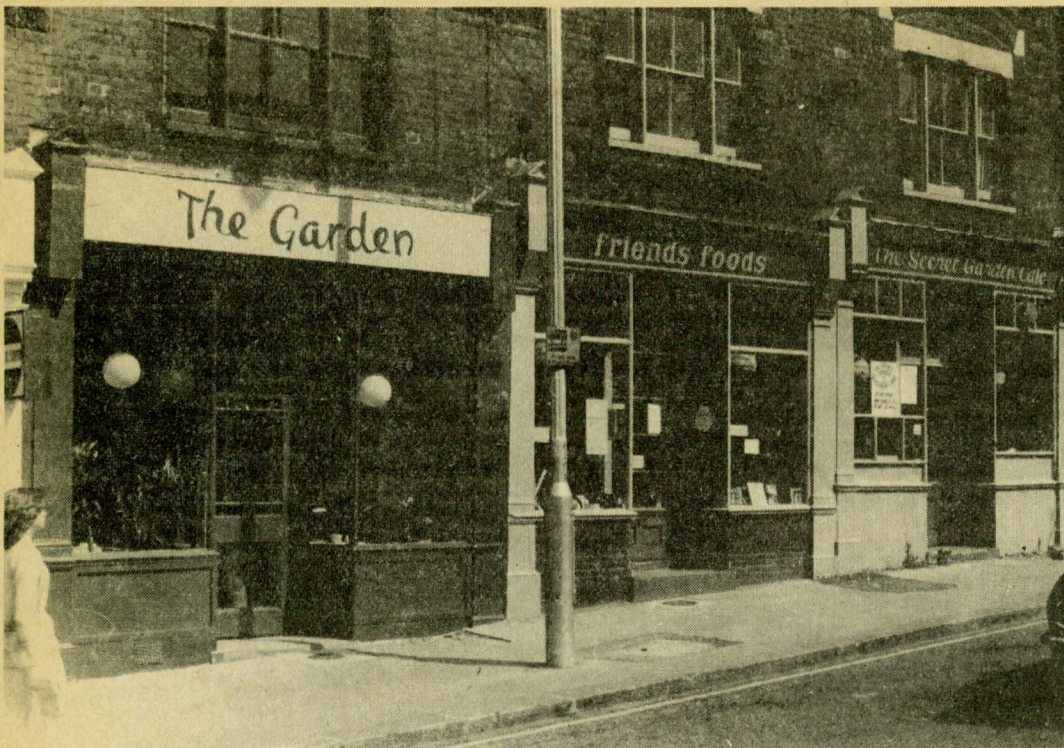
Committee minutes: 28.3.79

.....  
making the decisions while everyone else simply obeyed without knowing why. House-meetings, attended by all of the community members, evolved into 'committee' meetings, naturally attended by everyone involved in the life of the Centre and the businesses; to be involved with Aryatara was to be totally involved: in planning, decision-making, in overall commitment. This was not so much a consciously contrived tactic as a spontaneous manifestation of the general enthusiasm for everything that was going on at the Centre.

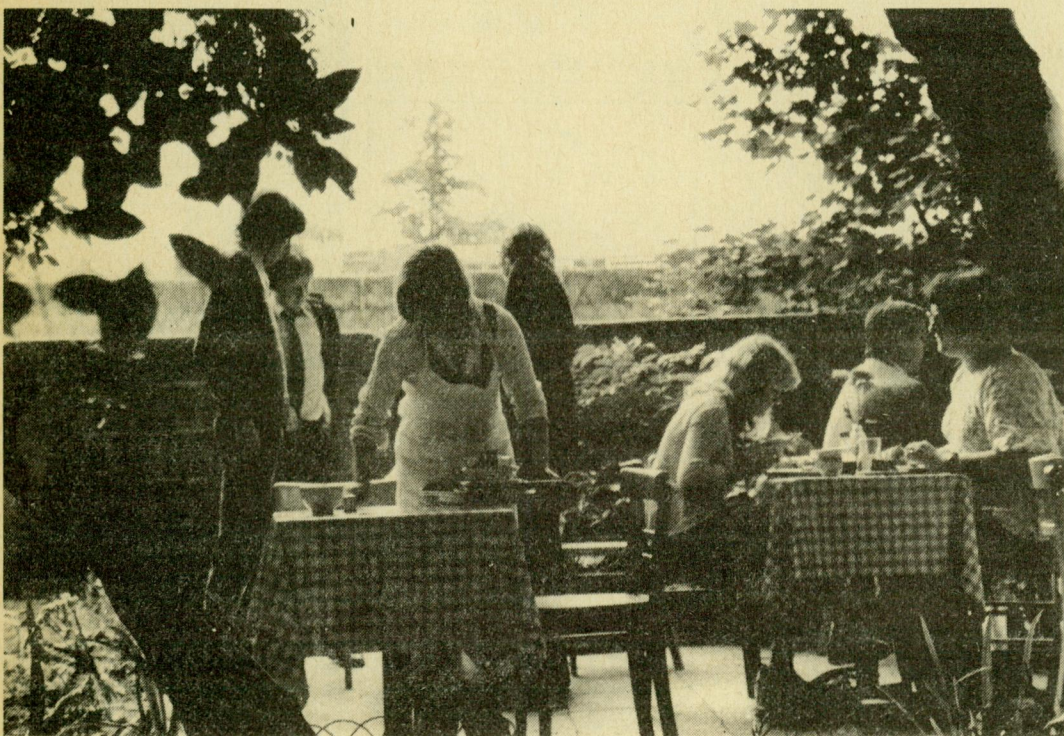
One aspect of the group dynamic was that men and women worked side by side, the women performing many of those tasks which are normally considered to be the exclusive domain of men. At the end of the day, everyone would go back to Aryatara for a meal and a class, or stay on at the building site (or in the cafe, once it was finished) to talk about the day's work. As the work progressed, people needed less and less 'pushing'; the energy became self-perpetuating.

The work, the success of the businesses when opened, the quality of the classes, was a constant source of inspiration, but the gravitational pull of the conditioned was also asserting itself. Some eyes were beginning to flash, the pub





The Saint Michaels Road shopfronts.



Serving lunch in The Garden Cafe.

was still an attraction. It was time for the more directly 'spiritual' aspect of the Centre to reassert itself. More weekend retreats were introduced to the programme, with excellent results. Work and spiritual practice seemed to leap-frog over one another – work contacting energy, meditation refining it. The notion of establishing a women's community was considered. The community at Aryatara, and the rudimentary community at Kalpadruma, were both for men. There had been single-sex study groups for some time now, and a natural consequence of these was that the people involved in them

would want to live together. Shortly after Nagabodhi's departure for Bethnal Green, the women found a house in Leatherhead, which is now known as Khadiravani. The three communities, the prosperity of the businesses, the increasing number of people coming along for the meditation and Yoga classes at the Centre (beginners' classes now cater for 70 people!) had given the Aryatara a new sense of self-confidence. As chairman, Padmaraja has taken things from strength to greater strength, and has added that element of perfectionism which is, perhaps, his trade-mark.

Having read this short history of Aryatara, you may find yourself wondering whether the achievements are more the result of a group spirit, rather than of individual spiritual commitment, and whether a visit to Aryatara might put you in touch with a healthy group, but not with a spiritual community. Certainly the outside observer may detect elements of group consciousness – in the way people pride themselves on the number of people attending the classes, or on the material achievements of the Co-operative – but this is a small and understandable peccadillo in a centre which a little

over two and half years ago was still in danger of being closed down. A great deal has been achieved; FWBO Surrey has sometimes been referred to as a 'model centre'. No doubt, as new communities, businesses, and centres become established in and around the Croydon area, the inevitable devolution of responsibility, and the emergence of new positive groups within the positive group will have a diluting effect on any overall feeling of 'group' spirit. Above all, the emergence of more and more clearly committed individuals from that group will have its own unique and galvanising effect. It is worth noting here that at the last ordination retreat at Padmaloka, three out of the four new Order members hailed from FWBO Surrey.

Padmaraja began by saying that although the Co-op is now successful on its own level, he really senses the danger of settling in, of falling into set ways of doing things in the shop, work-force and cafe, and allowing the situation to become cosy and formed. This is not a commune, but a spiritual community, which depends for its very life on our keeping a creative edge on all that we do, building up creative tension between individuals, and constantly challenging basic assumptions about how we operate.

Our work is above all spiritual practice; our need is always to look ahead, to change and develop, to break into new levels of awareness and being, whereas the tendency is to settle and accept the status quo. All persons, in whatever sphere of the Co-op must be extremely careful of this. We must build up the virya, the potency to carry everything forward – in our work situations, our communication, our application to classes, in the way we function at the Centre.

All this is only the barest of beginnings in terms of our development, and the development of the Movement as a whole. When we think of the needs arising, for instance from what is going on in India, we realise that we simply haven't started yet. Building a cosy niche for ourselves amounts to early retirement; we must look for a state of perpetual revolution.

Committee minutes: 26.4.79

Perhaps one could say that true Individuality can be approached from different routes. For some people a streak of individualism, given its head, in positive conditions, may give birth to Individuality, while, for others, nothing less than a complete surrender of subjective preferences and tendencies to the 'objective needs' of an inspiring situation will have the desired effect. If, at Aryatara, it is the latter route that seems to be most clearly favoured, one should not get the impression that the surren-

Nagabodhi

Siddhiratna

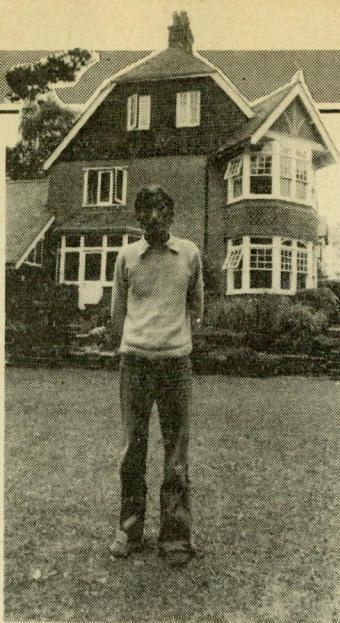


der of subjectivity implies a surrender of responsibility, or indeed, of the right to speak one's mind. There is no trace there of 'blind faith'. Heated arguments can and do occur; Padmaraja, with the respect of everyone, never hesitates to confront and sort out any resentments that may arise.

To go to Aryatara is to experience a vibrant and positive atmosphere. The mitras, who are very much in evidence, at the classes, in positions of responsibility in the Co-op, as well as the Order members, radiate openness, metta and energy. So much has been achieved in the past three years; who can guess what the next three will bring?

Looking at our achievements so far, our outlook on the future is one of optimism. Our objectives for the future are:

1. To continue to expand and improve the Co-operative.
2. To continue to expand our educational and cultural activities.
3. To acquire a new Centre in Croydon.
4. To see the ordination of more mitras, and continue to build up a home-grown Order.
5. In the longer term, to set up teams of Order members and mitras who can visit cities or towns at home or abroad, initially to hold classes, give talks and make contacts, but eventually to set up branches and Centres affiliated to Aryatara.



Padmaraja at Aryatara.

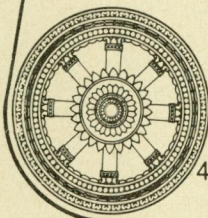
The fact that such teams will already have built firm bonds of Kalyana Mitrata in the training situation of Aryatara means that far more energy will be available to put into the task of establishing the Movement in a new area. Bhante envisages ultimately a kind of network of centres, with Aryatara as a home base, providing financial and moral support, and trained Order members and mitras. Among areas which we will be tentatively looking towards are Southampton, Bristol and, further afield, Darjeeling.

Chairman's Report: July 79.

Siddhiratna

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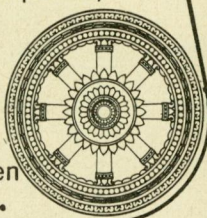
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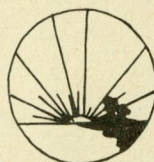
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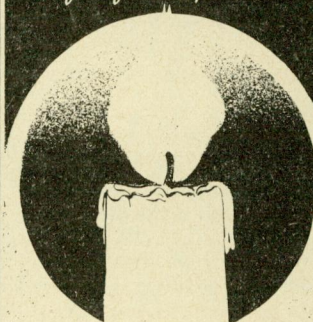
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I THINK...



THEREFORE I AM



I THINK?





# About the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order

None of us is complete; more or less by chance, we are tossed up by our conditioning — biological, psychological, social, and cultural — as partial beings. Our future lies in each one of us making something of him or herself: making of that miscellaneous bundle of conditionings a happy, free, clear-minded, and emotionally radiant individual.

The conscious growth of a truly human being is the ultimate heroic act left to us. If we so choose, we can develop within ourselves a vivid awareness of existence, a powerful positivity towards all that lives, and an inexhaustible dynamism. Ultimately, we can become 'Buddhas', enlightened or fully awakened individuals who have totally liberated themselves from the bondage of subjective conditioning and who have a direct and intuitive understanding of reality.

One who commits himself or herself to this ideal of individual growth is a Buddhist. So the Western Buddhist Order is a fellowship of men and women who have explicitly committed themselves, in a simple ceremony, to furthering their own and others' development.

The Order forms the nucleus of a new society or culture in which the values of human growth are paramount. As a result of Order members taking responsibility each for their own lives and attempting to communicate honestly and openly with others, that new society is becoming a living reality. In those areas where Order members have gathered together there are found three things: Communities, Co-operatives, and Centres.

In communities, Order members and Mitras (literally 'Friends': people who, after some initial contact with Order members, have decided they wish to deepen their communication) live together in numbers varying between four and thirty. In these, a new and radical way of life is being forged, which encourages and inspires community members to grow. They are usually either for men or for women so as to break down the habitual psychological and social patterns usually found in our relationships with members of the opposite sex which so much inhibit growth. Often, community members will pool all their earnings in a 'common purse' from which all expenses, communal and individual, will be met. The flavour of the communities is as varied as the people within them.

In the Co-operatives, groups of Order members, Mitras, and Friends (those who are in contact with the Movement and participate in any of its activities) work together in businesses which financially support the workers and which fund the further expansion of this New Society. Present businesses either running or being set up in the Movement include a printing press, wholefood shops, a silkscreen press, a hardware store, cafes, a second-hand shop, bookshop, editorial service, metalwork forge, and graphic-design, photographic and film studio. Members of the Co-operatives are hammering out a way of working which is 'Right Livelihood': team-based so that each person has the opportunity to take responsibility for the work, and ethically sound: exploiting neither other people nor the earth's resources. Work is done not for remuneration, but for its value as a means of development (in what other situation might your workmates suggest that you go for a walk or do some meditation when you seem run down?) and from a spirit of generosity. Each worker either works voluntarily or is given what he or she needs to live.

The most direct and effective means to the evolution of consciousness is the practice of meditation. At the Centres, members of the Order teach meditation and conduct courses, study groups, talks, and discussions on the principles and practice of Buddhism. There are also ceremonies, festivals, and arts activities. Yoga, massage, and other practices are taught as valuable, though less central, methods of development. Centres are places where you can make contact with Order members and others already in touch with this burgeoning New Society. Above all, through the Centres, a bridge is formed over which those who wish may cross to a new and total way of life based upon the growth and development of individuals.

The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order ('the Friends') is, then, a movement, always deepening and expanding, of people who wish to be authentic, integrated and dynamic. It was initiated in 1967 by the Ven. Maha Sthavira Sangharakshita, who spent 20 years in India as a Buddhist monk. He there studied, practised, or had contact with all the main traditional schools of Buddhism and returned to the West with a clear awareness that, though its essence remains the same, Buddhism always expresses itself anew in each new age and climate. The 'Friends' is the response of the Buddhist tradition of insight and experience to the circumstances of the modern West. It is an increasingly widespread movement with some twenty Centres and Branches throughout the world.



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